

Welcome JF Believers to 2017!

NOTE: *generally these directions and plans are discussed throughout the year only with Covenant Members here at JFB. While I want to thank everyone for their participation in 2016 here at JFB, I especially want to thank those of you who are Covenant Members. For it is you who are saying we can count on you financially, spiritually, and physically to be the body of JF Believers Church. You are those who have moved from "customer" to "co-laborer." From "consumer" to "producer."*

This is the one time of the year where we attempt to share the greater vision and plan with **all** of you, even if you are not a member here. For it is important that even if you do not functionally participate in all of these plans and actions over the next year personally, that you have available to you the directions and the priorities of this fellowship. Such primacy can and should have a profound effect upon your future participation here, your financial support, as well as other decisions concerning this church and community as well as the one you will eventually settle into and call your own. However, I need to mention that some details and/or the reasons behind them may today be left out either inadvertently...*having previously detailed them in some past Covenant meeting* or because they are reserved for the participation of Covenant Members only. **That being said, let's take a look:**

One of the largest changes in 2016 here at JFB, (as well as seemingly all recent years!) is some fairly dramatic changes in how and what we're doing in our missional endeavors. We have always been a church that looked out the windows to a lost and dying world more than looking inside the church for comfort and amenities. I believe because of such, we have always been blessed and cared for. Because of some profound changes in the framework of our overseas missions, we have been given new opportunities and thus are poised to in turn make great modifications to how we conduct all our outreach works...both internationally as well as more importantly, ***in our back-yard.***

With the necessary closing of our mountain ministry location in the Philippines and the school that was located there, and the subsequent opening of our Cebu City office, we are set to make great strides in new ministry directions there. These changes have already made extreme differences in JFB staff time investments, and over-



all church financial investments. The affects at home and it changes abroad have been dramatic and quite freeing to allow staff time and financial outlay to be shifted to more 'fruit bearing' undertakings, many of which are much nearer to home. Such changes will be even more embraced in 2017, as we attempt to make a greater splash in our own back-yard here in Dunn county.

I need to mention at this point, that the decisions that were made and the directions that were taken in the Philippines, were not decided upon through mere external forces or happenstance, but rather through careful considerations of our ministry strengths, histories, and evident callings. Certainly 'open' and 'closed' doors have had much to say in these matters, but we are not out there just 'blowing in the wind.' We are being very proactive and in all matters attempting to *act* and not merely *react*. The moves that have been made in 2016 have come through a great deal of prayer, planning, and discussion. They are really not a surprise as they in fact are the culmination of years of strategic planning, with considerations of missionary staffing and strengths, as well as finances and successful ministry/missional 'fruit' and/or the lack there of.

One large aspect of change has been our ability this year to place two full time missionaries in the Philippines to serve within Shofar Missions structure. Brittany Menor and Laura Hartung, two current JFB ministry students and members of the JFB Ministry Community, arrived to help open our new offices approximately October 1st, after several months of intensive preparatory service by Jesse and Chelsea Moss... students and members of the Duluth fellowship. Now both Brittany and Laura have been added to the list of JFB community staff, and have each committed to a long term of service there, in a manner and to a degree of which we have not experienced in this fellowship before.

While we have some broadly designed missional directions for our Philippines work, the specifics of that work are at this time wide open, and completely in the hands of Christ to direct and to provide. Our hopes there are to begin the establishment of inter-church Christian campus organizations on Philippines university campuses, and to establish both local community bible studies as well as in-depth discipleship and ministerial training classes for those who desire more. Doing so provides for us an opportunity to raise up a new generation of servants for the kingdom of God, and in an age group that is most receptive to this kind of training. We are seeking young lives that are hungry to change the world and still willing to make changes in themselves and their plans and directions to be a part of our future there. We are planning secondarily...as time and muscle is provided, to continue to minister through our yearly youth camp and other teen oriented outreaches, children's programming, poverty assistance, short term missions teams and coming alongside already established missionary NGO's that exist in the Philippines.

We hope the hard decisions we have made there in the Philippines in 2016 will increase the manifest fruit of both our physical endeavors as well as our financial investments. Short term missions teams for 2017 have already been chosen and are currently being trained. One of those teams is a youth team, only the second we have ever taken to the Philippines. They will play a large part in our annual youth camp as well as conducting a VBS at a ministry that we already participate in...a ministry which engages and assists children suffering from cancer as well as supporting their families. Also this year through the participation of Sharon Dodson as a nurse and Doctor Matt Hansmeier from the Duluth fellowship, we are planning to begin medical educational outreaches. Our hopes are to begin establishing small local barangay (like our villages or townships)"first responder" programs that have the potential to medically and spiritually assist small poverty stricken communities year round in a non-denominational outreach.

For a number of years, our missional infrastructure in the Philippines has been so time consuming and intensive, that it ultimately began to actually work against us, preventing us from engaging in 'hands on' ministry and

discipling endeavors. Such also played a profound aspect in our inability to minister in the country of India as we have done in past years. Having been involved in the financing of five church constructions in India and Nepal in past years, we have naturally committed a great deal of our hearts and prayers to that part of the world. We now hope, beginning in 2017, to return to that priority. Initial discussions have already begun with Arjuna, for a team to visit India in the fall of this year.

The recent changes we have made in the Philippines have also allowed us the ability to look forward to the year 2017 in great hope that we can move on more missional work and outreach efforts here in the United States and moreover especially in our own back-yard. We are trying to shed the idea that missionary effort is work that you do only overseas. We are adopting a perspective that holds a much wider view of missions endeavors. A view that even encompasses local outreaches that are affectively 'kingdom directed' rather than 'church directed.' Meaning, endeavors that are primarily geared towards building up the kingdom of God, rather than placing bodies in our church pews.

From its inception, this church has always carried a priority of ministry toward the university. We are once again confirming that priority in 2017, and intend on only increasing our presence on the Stout campus. In this endeavor, we have made some substantial changes in how we have operated the Church House in 2016, bringing it back to a strongly university clientele and a university centered mandate. Those changes, like all changes, were not easy to make and potentially risky financially, but change is never easy! Yet if we fail to make those changes within the ministry and ministries over which God has given us charge, then all that we have accomplished and all the blessings we had seen, will no doubt effectively come to an end.

If we desire to continue to minister... continue to be used by God... and continue to see His miraculous hand of grace, then we must choose to be both bold and obedient. Thus 2016, has seen a large increase in primary ministry endeavors operated out of the church house specifically. Ben and Sasha Morrison, overseers of the street level ministries, are, as of this year, living on site in the lower level of the church house. Weekly Street Level dinners and gatherings occur there, as well as this year's block party, outdoor backyard concerts, and numerous fellowship gatherings "in the garden."

With that being said, such does not mean that if you are an older adult, you are off the hook when it comes to evangelism and service here at jfb, nor are you a 'secondary citizen.' Your work is not yet complete on this planet nor are you done growing! The book of Titus reminds us that the older women are to be reverent in their behavior and are to "teach the younger women" through their words and their deeds. The older men are to do the same with the younger men, lending instruction by the way we live and by what comes out of our mouths. This is an area where growth must occur as this church ages. No longer can all of the teaching be on the shoulders of the pastors and Elders. We all are part of the body, and must take our part in it! We must all find our place herein, and moreover in greater example not just verbal affirmation!

Sadly, many of us today, having attended church and walked with Christ perhaps for years, are still wholly lost when it comes to what their place is in this special kingdom. Many struggle still, not grasping the corporate call upon the life of a Christian, nor the individual call upon *their* life in particular! Many of those who *have* verbalized a calling have little if any idea how they are to pursue such, or what criteria to use to even confirm that such belief is a true calling or merely a fleshly dream. This is no doubt an issue of the indwelling Holy Spirit, or in truth, *the lack of*. As a church I believe we have been very good at *teaching* discipleship, but we still have far to go as to *living* discipleship! Again, such is an issue of the Holy Spirit in the lives and the leading of this church!

Thus we will spend a great part of 2017 attempting to clarify corporately, what it means to 'be called' to the Christian life. We will as well seek to find, manifest and live all of our individual callings, the knowing and answering of the Holy Spirit in our personal lives...especially those within the covenant community here. Because without having that understanding, a person will always be susceptible to erratic living, tumultuous home life, personal and individual depression, and spiritual unrest. That is not how God wants us to live! The book of Hebrews tells us all about that!

The things of God, and our living in Christ, need to be organic in nature. Not a strain, and not a duty. Our living in community must be natural in its manifest. Not a learned behavior or a religious social pressure but rather an overflow of a new life as a new creature. That 'old man' must truly die for each of us! Not simply 'put away' in a closet somewhere to be taken out again on a rainy day. If we fail to put down the old man for good, we are doomed to eventually repeat past behavior, and to ultimately fall to the very thing that brought us to our knees before Christ back in the beginning of this journey! This is nothing less than a love issue between us and Christ.

Certainly 2016 had its share of those kind of disasters, as have years gone by. People we loved, that experienced 2016 as the year in which they finally fell to the very baggage that they came into this fellowship with. Ultimately such took them out in the end. It didn't matter whether it was drugs, alcohol, sex issues, or something as nebulous as rebellion and pride. The end result was the same as when they came in, and the affect just as toxic. Every year at this time, I think since this church began, I have openly stated that some who were with us, would not be with us at that time the next year. And never have I failed to call it correctly! Every year we get to the end and we remember those that are gone. We mourn the loss of those who have fallen and those who have abandoned their call, and those who have recanted upon their promises.

There is no doubt that the world around us is changing, and changing quickly. Never can it be "church as usual." To rest in that aspect is to surrender to the world. While we must never move away from the fundamental aspects of scripture, we also must continue to grow in our methods, our cultural sensitivity, our cultural relativity, and our social interaction with the community around us. In this, we must never rest! We have made great strides in these areas over the past year, and never before have I seen such social interaction with our neighbors, our workmates, and our community at large. In this area I am very proud and you all, and look forward to even more in 2017.

Changes in 2017.

One change that must and will occur this next years is in how we, as your leadership and especially pastors, interact with you as flock. Recently I addressed the issue of Pastoral accountability and care concerning private conversations and potential "he-said-she-said" accusations. I spoke to you about how changes in our culture and because of sad developments in our society at large, past changes had to be made as to how we held discussions and personal meetings in the church to avoid lies and accusations that are so very prevalent in our culture today...even within the church world. In considerations of these matters, other changes are needed still.

2 or 3 times in the past couple of weeks, things that have been said by church attendees here have left me greatly unsettled. In more than one occasion, while an individual was lamenting about a personal and individual life issue, the statement was made "...I don't think I can keep going to this church", and "...I didn't think the church would treat me that way." In all of the situations that were being dealt with, the 'church' had absolutely nothing to do with the issue whatsoever. Literally not a part of the problem at all, either good or bad or indifferent. But instead of seeing honestly and clearly what and to whom the issue was pertaining, the church

became the 'catch all' basket for people's woa's and complaints, even if the church had nothing to do with the issue whatsoever.

So over this next year, a couple of things will be priority: One, we will continue to teach and guide concerning the Holy Spirit, which is in evidence as an ongoing problem. Secondly, we intend to walk ...step by step, through the process of finding individual place and calling. And thirdly, we will be changing how we as leadership interact with you, the flock. You will still be able to reach us, and see us personally if you would like. However, the process to make that happen will change. I believe the most of us are quite use to being able to reach out and call, text, or email the personal mobile phones of the pastors and community group leaders. Seldom is there any consideration as to what the pastor or leader might be doing or what is on his plate at that moment, and generally there is an assumption that the pastor/leader understands exactly what you mean by your text...hear the tone in your voice...understand the immediacy of the issue, and the history behind the problem. Because of that, there still is ...and has been, a lot of private conversations happening that can be later twisted for personal gain, and individually revised for situational benefit.

All of such communication attempts are most often aimed at getting immediate personal gratification, and to use the leadership here as personal counselors. What that has done is make for a lot of very immature believers because they don't grow up and they fail to learn to follow biblical problem solving directives and fail to see the importance and necessity of personal obedience, discipline, and indwelling Holy Spirit. And the way that that eventually ends, is that people never fail to blame the church and its leaders for entrenched life problems and personal strife, because "we aren't fixing them." But it is not our job to fix you. That is God's job and the purpose of the Holy Spirit and we are not your Holy Spirit.

This all reflects a clear misunderstanding of what the church is, and what our roll as leaders in your life is supposed to look like. So some changes are in the works. We will be seeking...in many of these situations, to have more communiq   via the church phone and less through the personal cell phones of the leadership. The church just is too busy and too big to not make this change. So don't be insulted if you do not get an answer via email or text, or are in fact directed to communicate your need via the main church number and office. It does not mean we are unsympathetic or that we do not love you. But it reflects our real capabilities and *incapability's*, and our desire to see you grow up in Jesus, and to keep 'weapon's of innuendo and insinuation' out of your hands. We will continue to help as we can, but we may direct you to someone else or to *something* else other than that which will offer you the most immediate in gratification.

On Wednesday, in our small groups, a question was essentially asked concerning whether we as a fellowship generally suffer more often from service burnout, or service apathy. Some small groups heard the historical byline that "we do too much here at JFB, or too much was expected from people." Yet the real truth of the matter is we are in fact quite the opposite! While there are here at JFB a lot more opportunities and openings to serve and get involved than in most churches, the fact remains that we are *much slower* than any church I have known in my lifetime to even *allow* you to serve. As per scriptural directive, we require a balanced and healthy vocational and family life in order to serve...(and we watch!), and then watch carefully that people do not get too involved in too many ministry endeavors and have many times told people 'no' as to their participation in some matter, or to 'go home' when they appeared to take on more than they could chew. So the *facts* are and the *reality* is, that such statements of overworking you are flat-out lies and propaganda against this fellowship geared to smear our reputation and to make others look good, when generally such comes from the lips of individuals that want to justify their sinful lifestyle and live lives that give nothing to Christ and they want to ease their conscious.

A service position here is **2 hours a week. 2 hours!** Let us ask ourselves...what DOES God own in our life sphere, what *should* He get from us, and what is a righteous sacrifice amount? Is not the answer “everything?” Then why do we simply verbalize that in spiritual circles and then constantly fight God to renegotiate our contract and blame the church as if we are ruining your life by keeping you so busy you have no time to do your laundry or take a shower? Let me make this abundantly clear: You do not have to do ANYTHING to attend church here! You do not have to GIVE anything here. To think otherwise is pure fiction and neurosis. NO one makes you serve...NO one makes you give!

The only time that such is expected of you is when you move...again, on your own desire and accord, to be a Covenant Member here. And what organization do you attend anywhere where you join and seek to receive benefits of, and nothing is expected of you? But you can attend this church and participate in most activities and endeavors while never being a member...that is YOUR choice! Covenant membership asks 2 hours...that is slightly over 1% of your week. How much time does TV get? Does sleep get? Does chatting with friends? ***Does God own it all or not?*** So please do not put this on us here at the church. It just is not the truth, and defies the facts, and is an offense to me. But I would guess that is why the rumor is perpetuated to begin with.

In the world of the stock exchange, there is ‘bull markets’ and there are “bear markets.” A bull market is an upswing...when an investor buys, and the bear market is a sellers market. I wonder how we as a church and further how we as individuals will look upon 2017? Will we invest in the ministry and see the opportunities that lay ahead, or will we...*out of fear and self-preservation*, hunker down and protect ourselves and our individual worlds? We will live out a BULL market or a BEAR market?

The greatest thing we can do as servants of the king and participants in this body of believers is to remain thankful. It is when we fail to see and acknowledge how blessed we are today, that we begin to complain against God and church and forget about what we have in this fellowship and in the gracious arms of Christ. When we fail to see what we actually have, we will surely begin to be unthankful and begin to complain and be bitter, instead of seeing what a blessing we have in each other...and the joy of a life we have in the company of this body.

May we live dynamically in 2017! May God always find this church as the first into battle and the last to leave. Thank you for letting me be a part of your lives...I'm the richer for it!