

PARISH HOUSE

Newmarket Church of Christ



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FAST-RUNNERS

Nathan Pickard

It was a story told in our weekly Bible study by a pharmacist . The story did something to me; it got inside me; it's been eating at me; the story has been on my mind ever since it was told. But first, some background.

In our mid-week Bible study we were reading the texts associated with the third week of Advent. One of these texts was 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24. The apostle Paul, having written to the Thessalonian church ends his letter with a "call to action." Effectively Paul is saying, "In light of what I have written, this is how you are to live."

continue reading, pg. 3

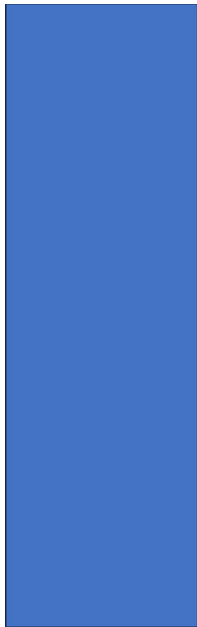
Parish House Financial Update

After years of planning and having COVID slow the speed of implementing the Parish House vision, we are very excited to announce that we have received pledges that match our fundraising goal. We are very grateful for the variety of churches and individuals who believe in this vision and the work we are doing. We are extremely grateful for your trust and commitment to this work.

All Canadian donors will receive a tax receipt. We are currently working towards seeking a partnership so that all individual American donors will also receive a tax receipt.

If you know of congregations that are looking to financially support mission work, please let us know. We will either travel to meet with the respective congregations, or, if desirable, invite respective congregations to visit with us and to see the mission work we are doing. For all interested individual, congregational or foundations, we are able to set up a zoom meeting to discuss.

In January, we're going to start sending out the job description and begin the process of discerning who God might be sending to live in the neighbourhood. We're looking forward to this next chapter!



By end of November 2023, we met our fundraising goal. Thank you!

50% of our fundraising goal was raised by June 2023.

We started 2023 with having met 12% of our fundraising goal

The Neighbourhood

Continuing what we started in volume 5.1, we'll paint a picture of the neighbourhood that the Parish House will focus on. The neighbourhood covers 500+ homes and 8 high rise condominiums and apartment buildings in roughly a three square mile radius.



Located directly west of the church sits four high rise apartments & condominiums. We have discovered “people of peace” (Luke 10:1-12) live in 212 Davis Dr. We are waiting and wondering who will be moving into the other three buildings and will they be “people of peace.” And what then does this mean for us as a community of faith?

Fast-Runners, Cont'd

By joyful. Pray always. Give thanks. Do not put out the Spirit's fire. Test everything. Avoid evil. Paul then leaves his readers with a blessing, *"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it."*

Now the (paraphrased) story the pharmacist told.

The doctors prescribe various medicines for various ailments. Our job is to dispense the drugs that have been prescribed. We see all sorts of drugs prescribed for a variety of ailments and diseases: heart issues, cold and flu, infections, rashes. There are no shortage of sick bodies. As we dispense the appropriate drugs, over time, we notice common drugs that often are prescribed. We call these drugs "fast-runners." Because these drugs are so commonly prescribed, we have the fast-runners on the shelves right in front of our work stations. Fast-runners can change on a monthly basis, for example, during flu season or in the spring when allergies are on the rise. Though various "seasons" can change the fast-runners, roughly ten years or so ago, the most common drugs we saw prescribed were associated with high blood pressure or other heart issues. Though we see people continuing to struggle with high blood pressure and other heart issues, a larger number of people seem to be suffering from anxiety and depression. Medicine and drugs to help people deal with anxiety and depression have become the new fast-runners. What makes me pause, is not the large amount of people struggling with anxiety and depression, it's the age. It seems to me that more and more young people are suffering from anxiety and depression.

There was a pause. No one said anything. We were living in the tension of Paul's words to "be joyful" and to "give thanks" when so many people are struggling with anxiety and depression. As silence filled the space between us, I started to wonder about the redemptive activity of God. In what ways will we see God at work in lives that are struggling with depression and anxiety? What might God at work look like in this situation?

Waiting for God

In Acts 1, the disciples are "filled with fear." Even though the disciples have spent forty days with Jesus after his resurrection, they are still filled with fear. Being fear-filled people, the disciples are not told to "pick themselves up," or "to get busy doing something," Instead the disciples are to wait for God. And what are they waiting for? They are waiting for God to act.

Read further into the story of Acts and what do we see as the church waits for God to act? We see God acting in this world (sends the Spirit, calls Saul into discipleship, sends the church out, heals, protects, gives visions, and much more). What else do we see as we read through the book of Acts: not just a church waiting for God to act but also a church participating in the work of God, just as we see communities participating in God's on-going redemptive work today.

In a world of violence and retribution, there are communities of forgiveness and reconciliation. In a neighbourhood marked by the scars of hunger, there is a community that shares its food with one another. In a cultural context where "one's self" is what matters, there are communities that give its life away for the sake of the neighbor.

Authors Andrew Root & Blair Bertrand write the following,

The church is essential, but only as it realizes and confesses that it is not the star of its own story. The church can be faithful only when its focus is *not* on its own actions but on the acts of God. The story the church is living is not primarily about the church at all! The church lives for a bigger story. The church is called to rehearse and remember, again and again, the stories of God's acts and Jesus's continued life in the very places, the very cities--whether Galatia, Ephesus, Milwaukee, or Toronto--where the church is waiting right now (*When Church Stops Working*, pg. 75).

I can't stop thinking about the story the pharmacist told. I have a few questions I want to ask: Why does it seem more and more young people are suffering with depression and anxiety? What does it mean on a societal level for young people to have depression and anxiety? What are the causes of anxiety and depression? Until we grapple with these questions, we'll probably continue to see the "fast-runner" drugs designed for anxiety and depression remain in high demand.

I'm also asking: can the church be depressed? Can the church have anxiety? And if so, what medicine do we need to take? My hunch is that Root and Bertrand are on to something . . . the medicine for the church is not more programs, more people, more money, more initiatives. The medicine for the church is to simply wait for God to act in this world. And while waiting for God to act, we keep rehearsing the stories of God's redemptive work in the world. In rehearsing these stories, maybe, just maybe, we'll be training ourselves to recognize the ways in which God is at work in our midst.

In recognizing the variety of ways God is at work in our midst, I suspect that we'll be able to do what Paul is asking us to do in the letter to the Thessalonians: be joyful and to give thanks.



picture of food prep class held at the church twice each month



picture of winter jackets being set out for our annual Christmas shopping day

"To be most effective in bringing about change in a community or a neighborhood, it helps if you live there."

Larry James, *The Wealth of the poor*

**NEWMARKET
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God through friendship
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