

Covenant Call

January 2021 Newsletter

A REBIRTH OF HOPE By Pastor Dan Milford

I've long found the New Year to be an odd celebration—an emphasis on one day as making a difference, a single point in time at which one chapter can be closed and a new one begun. Nothing changes that day that couldn't have changed a day earlier or a day later—or any other point in time, for that matter.

After 2020, though, it makes a bit more sense to me. This has been a hard year, as we've dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic, among other things. I'll be happy to bid it adieu and walk into a new year, even as I understand that the first month or two of 2021 may be worse on the COVID-19 front than what we've faced in 2020.

One of the many hard parts of adjusting to the pandemic in 2020 has been the constant re-adjusting of our expectations. It has felt like our hope has suffered repeated blows and died multiple deaths. That has significantly been related to our inability to absorb and comprehend the projections from epidemiologists at the beginning of the pandemic. We had to see their dire warnings come to fruition before we could believe them and adjust our expectations and actions. Even now, we struggle to comprehend and respond appropriately.

We have had to let our hope in a rapid return to normalcy die in order to discover a more reasonable and grounded hope. This was not a simple one-time change; it has been a process that we no sooner complete at one level than we have to begin it all over again. It can be a demoralizing and depressing thing to repeatedly adjust our expectations downward. I'm looking forward to saying goodbye to all of that! Sayonara 2020!!

As we enter a new year, we must stay on the watchout against false hopes even as we are also drawn

into allowing our hopefulness to grow. Vaccines have been approved and are being distributed. Americans seem more ready to take them when they become available for them than polls showed six months ago. It seems increasingly likely that COVID-19 will be mostly behind us before the end of 2021. In the dark of winter, we dare dream of the spring and summer again.

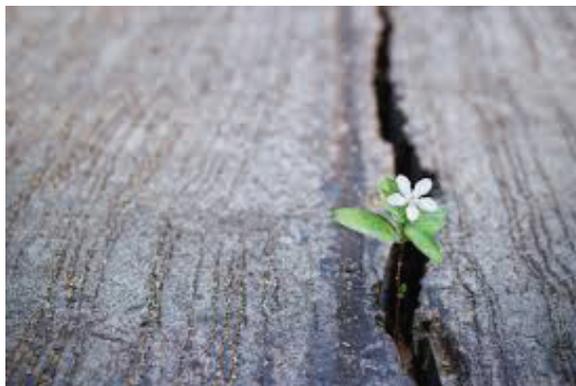
The beginning of the new year will also mark a new class of elders joining the session at Covenant.

This transition will mark the largest turnover at Covenant in more than a decade, with seven elders beginning partial or complete terms on the session. They join at the very time we are turning our focus again to the Vital Congregations Initiative. This effort, conceived long before the beginning of the pandemic, invites us to evaluate our faithfulness and fruitfulness

along seven “marks” of healthy congregations and then re-envision how we might serve the congregation and the community where we find ourselves in the years to come. The pandemic has further exposed some areas in need of improvement in our life as a congregation and invited us into becoming more adaptable.

The session retreat will provide a time for the incoming and outgoing elders to evaluate, learn, grow together, and plan for our life as a community as we emerge from the long, hard winter of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please keep our elders in your thoughts and prayers in this important month as they prepare to lead us into the future that Christ has for us.

Grace & Peace, Dan



Covenant Annual Meeting

We will have our Annual Congregational Meeting on Sunday, January 24, at 11:30 a.m. following our worship service that day. The annual meeting will provide a time for the congregation to:

1. receive the Annual Reports from the session, sharing ministry accomplishments over the last year, and
2. receive the Operating Budget for 2021 with explanations to help clarify aspects of it and an opportunity for the congregation to ask any questions related to it.

The Annual Reports are expected to be made available via email and on our website by January 20.



Growing in Grace & Gratitude

Sundays @ 9:00am

Our Children's Sunday School class features the curriculum, "Growing in Grace & Gratitude", which helps transform the lives of children and those who love them, shaped by grace and gratitude. Each session shares a Bible story that reveals God's grace for us. Through fun, age-appropriate activities, and prayer, children will celebrate the meaning of this grace in their lives as they encounter a living God.

Living as God's people isn't always easy, but we have stories in the Bible of people who have tried their best to follow God's ways. As God's people, we can also look to these stories as examples, learn from them, and try our best to be faithful children of God. We'll look at the stories of Noah; Abram & Sarai; Jacob & Esau; Moses; Miriam; Ruth, Naomi & Boaz; David; Abigail, Elisha; and Micah & Isaiah.

We hope your child will join us on Sunday mornings this fall as we explore people from the Old Testament, our ancestors in the faith, as they exhibit characteristics of faithful living.

For the Zoom link and password, please contact: chad@covenantcares.org

Missions Matters

Where did the money go in 2020? Who did it help?

Covenant Presbyterian believes our purpose as a church is to spread the "Good News of Jesus Christ" and to "Feed His Sheep." We are to serve Christ by serving others.

Each year the congregation fills out a mission pledge card to give undesignated funds to Covenant for our mission team to distribute as God leads to a hurting world. Many in our congregation give directly to missions that God has led them to support. Beyond monetary contributions, many have also given goods, services and time in support of these efforts. For January 1 through December 31, 2020, listed below are the projects and programs that received financial support from congregational giving through the mission team.

2020 Mission Funds Distribution

Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary	\$ 300.00
CAM	\$ 600.00
Christian Senior Services -Meals on Wheels	\$ 1,050.00
Compassion Kits	\$ 10.00
Covenant-Community Garden	\$ 39.70
Food Pantry	\$ 992.30
Habitat for Humanity SA	\$ 2,600.00
Haven for Hope	\$ 100.00
I Care San Antonio	\$ 300.00
James Payne SAMM Christmas	\$ 6,734.89
John Knox Ranch	\$ 400.00
Joy Offering (retired ministers' aid)	\$ 500.00
Kairos Prison Ministry	\$ 1,040.00
LEI (Literacy & Evangelism International)	\$ 300.00
One Great Hour of Sharing	\$ 2,884.00
Outreach Foundation – Stu Ross, E Africa	\$ 1,750.00
Pastor's Discretionary supplement	\$ 250.00
PDA- Clean up buckets	\$ 150.06
PDA- Disaster Funds	\$ 5,000.00
Prayer Garden	\$ 41.05
Presbyterian Children's Home & Services	\$ 500.00
Presbyterian Pan American School	\$ 300.00
SAMM	\$ 2,450.00
San Antonio Food Bank	\$ 6,490.00
<u>San Antonio Rescue Mission</u>	<u>\$ 300.00</u>
 Total 2020 monetary distributions	 \$35,082.00

Thank you for ALL of your contributions to these efforts! Even in this difficult past year for all of us, our combined mission giving was almost equal to the prior year. It is heartening to know that we were still able to respond in a time of greater need.

To learn more about the agencies and programs above, refer to your copy or request a copy from the church office of Covenant's "Mission Partner's Opportunity Book." We look forward to another year of service and support to our community and beyond. Your participation in any way is welcome and encouraged.

Sincerely,
Covenant Mission Team



What is this Beautiful Minds Coalition I keep hearing about?

Covenant's Beautiful Minds Coalition (BMC) was started in 2016 with the goal of breaking the stigma around mental illness.

The first members, as well as those who have joined since, had a special interest in this topic stemming from a personal connection to someone who has experienced the struggles that affect 1 in 5 minds.

The key to stigma-busting is information. A lack of knowledge or understanding about what mental illness is, how it affects a person, and what help is available often contributes to needless suffering and devastating outcomes. BMC began stigma-busting by raising awareness in observance of May as Mental Health Month. Each month we have an article in the Covenant newsletter which touches on some aspect of mental health and present a monthly Mental Health Moment during worship. BMC facilitates one or two sets of Sunday School classes each year and offers longer classes on such topics as Adverse Childhood Experiences and Mental Health First Aid for youth and adults.

BMC is involved with groups outside of Covenant, such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), including their annual Pathways to Hope conference, their annual fundraising walk, and their monthly lunch meeting held at Covenant. Our mental health ministry has led to connections within Mission Presbytery, to Dan's participation in the development of a Presbyterian Mental Health Network and further to a mental health ministry program that was approved and funded by the General Assembly. These outside connections are an important part of stigma-busting and increasing understanding in the broader community.

For more information on BMC you can read our annual report which is part of Covenant's Annual Congregational Report.

BMC at Covenant is our core work. Our attention to mental health issues has also opened the door for being able to talk about mental health struggles that affect our friends and families. We will continue with educational material, classes, and providing information about community resources. If you would like to join our ministry you can talk to one of our members (below) or email the new BMC email address: BMC@covenantcares.org . We would love to have you!

BMC members: Shelly Bosse, Laura Glueck, Michael McMains, Kathy Simmons, Louise Ward

Annual Holiday Grocery Shopping Event for SAMM TLLC

Many, many thanks to our Covenant Family for your generous donations for this year's annual Holiday Grocery Shopping event for the families at SAMM Transitional Living and Learning Center. This year has been particularly challenging for so many families who struggle with food insecurity. But through your generous donations, 40 families received over \$6,600 in groceries and HEB gift cards! This is such a tremendous blessing to the families who need a helping hand as they transition out of homelessness.

Although we had to modify our shopping and order our groceries online instead, we were able to purchase the makings for a ham holiday meal along with sides and a pie, items for additional meals such

as spaghetti and tacos, plus other basic grocery staples like bread, milk, eggs, cereal, toilet paper, etc. In addition to the groceries, we had enough funds to also give each family a \$50 HEB gift card for any additional items needed for their families. We also want to thank our volunteer drivers who came to HEB Curbside to pick up orders of groceries and deliver them to the TLLC shelter, and a special thank you to Beverly Burris and Jayme Pressly for providing cosmetic bags filled with goodies for all the moms in the families!

~Missions Ministry Team~





Habitat for Humanity 2021 Build

The 2021 Build will be starting soon!!! When the Presbyterian Cluster for Habitat for Humanity met last month, we were told how this Covid season has affected H4H. Yes, there are less volunteers and donations, but “We Will Rise”. I saw this message on a lawn-sign and it just lifted my spirits that the adjustments we have had to make will not stop our ministry work!

Contributions were less for this Build, so H4H has partnered us with the Peorner Foundation, and Al Poerner will be our House Leader. We will share the financial, volunteer and lunch responsibilities.

Sign up Genius offers these related files : Adult and minor waiver forms, Typical Construction Day, Driving directions to RanchoCarlota and Covid 19 precautions -

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/4090c49a8ab29a5f94-presbyterian3>

2021 Build FYI

- Build Days – January 30, Feb. 6, 13, 20, 27, March 6, 13, and the 20th is a Make-up Day.
- Landscape Day is after Easter on April 10th.
- Workday is from 7:45 – 3:00.
- 15 volunteers max per day
- Please use the Sign up Genius app to volunteer.
- Bring your own mask and work gloves.
- This will be a Friday - Saturday build with our responsibility being Saturday, but you may sign-up for Friday as well.
- The GPS address to use is 13801 Watson Rd., Van Ormy, Texas 78703.

The H4H Presbyterian Cluster has met its responsibility for the 2021 Build, so we are now saving for the 2022 build. Checks should be made payable to – Presbyterian Cluster Habitat. For more information please contact Martha Flores - 210.621.7074.

Have a great holiday season, rest a while and then “Let’s Us Be Building”!



Storing of the Greens

“Many hands make for light work”, this is something so simple and so true. This is a task that does need to get done, but it is also an opportunity to make memories. The Storing of the Greens will be done on Saturday, January 16th at 8:30 a.m.

We will continue to be Social Distancing responsible and need to keep the number of helpers to five please, and we should be done well before noon. If you are available to help please contact Martha Flores via text 210.621.7074 or email at office@covenantcares.org .

Covenant's Cub Scout Pack 537 News

It's a great month for Pack 537. They received confirmation of the Baden Powell Award. This is the top award for high-performing units across several different areas (e.g., recruitment & retention, accomplishment of program, leadership and achievement). In our Alamo Area Council there are 400 units and 20 received the Baden Powell Award. Pack 537 was one of the 20 to receive the award. Awesome job Pack 537! The Pack has also been busy setting up our new aluminum cans recycling bin across from the Community Garden. **Save your aluminum cans and help support our scouts.** In December, Pack 537 invited Santa to come visit the scouts in a socially distanced way by having a Drive Thru Santa event at the church's portico. Kids had a blast. We appreciate the leadership at Pack 537, their great parents, and the fantastic kids who show up and give their all to the pack. We look forward to seeing what happens in 2021. So stay tuned for more pack news!



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GET CONNECTED

- **Church News by Email** – We send an email several times a month to inform members and friends on church news and events. Email office@covenantcares.org to have your email added to the list.
- **NEW Website:** www.covenantcares.org - See recorded sermon videos, weekly devotionals, access to event calendar, and many cool features.
- **Watch Live Worship Services on Facebook**
<https://www.facebook.com/covenant.satx/>
- **Prayer Chain** – send an email to covenantprayerchain211@gmail.com