

Stewardship Moment – Emerge from the Past

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Last week we learned about a beetle and how it emerges from 2 years in the soil into its desert environment. We also learned how it relates to us and our church.

Today, we are looking at those 2 years to see how we tackled the absence of in-person contact and communication, managed to cope, and moved forward. Surprisingly, the beginning of the quarantine was the catalyst of our emergence from our perceived adversity.

Our Stewardship Focus this year will include reviewing the past, where we are now, and our opportunities and goals for the future. Now, let's look at the past.

I don't know about you, but in general I thought that during this 2-year time, our church activities were stagnant. What I discovered while preparing for this talk and talking with others was how much we accomplished during these 2 years. It wasn't easy but we were forced to be creative. In the process, I learned that perceived adversity would transition into unexpected positive opportunities and accomplishments.

Now let's look at what we have done –

Communication – 20 people contacted everyone in our church family several times during our quarantine. We wanted everyone to know they were remembered and valued.

ZOOM – I believe in “God's little miracles,” and ZOOM became one of them. We may be tired of it now; however, during our last 2 years, it made possible our getting together.

Choir – When I think of a choir, the picture is of a group of people singing together – not so much during the quarantine. The singers sang their parts at home, recorded their parts of the songs, sent the recordings to the church, and several people combined the recordings, and digitized the separate pieces into the choir we heard on our church services.

Continued Activities – We continued many of the activities that we enjoyed previously when our lives were more “normal”:

- Social coffee hour Thursdays
- Sermons
- Feedback
- Adult Meetings
- Youth meetings

Newsletter – We continued to receive church news

Interim Pastor – We hired Pastor Steve Gentle as our Interim Pastor. He moved to the Tri Cities without knowing anyone except his wife, Miriam, and the Search Team members. The quarantine began almost immediately after he arrived. His challenge was to lead a congregation of people he couldn't meet in person. His first 2 years were a challenge; however, he provided the leadership we needed.

Stewardship – We shared with our congregation in 2020 and 2021. We delivered care packages in 2020 and loaves of bread in 2021 personally to every person listed in our Church Directory. We wanted everyone to feel remembered, cared for, and to emphasize their individual value to our church community.

So many believed in the mission of Shalom and so many generously supported it by sharing the funds needed to pay salaries, acquire and maintain leadership, and ensure that our church facility was maintained in good condition.

Church Administration – Our office administrator kept the office opened either in person or at home online.

Mission Social Action Committee –The following list highlights a few of the activities that continued during the quarantine:

- Tri Cities Immigrant Coalition - Mutual Aid Project, Covid Relief Fund, Afghan resettlement, vaccination outreach
- Racial Justice – Statement adopted by Shalom, antiracism class and speakers, Black Lives Matter Banner on front of church
- Faith Action Network- lobbying, rallies, regional meetings, New Year’s Eve interfaith online event
- Service and charities- New Horizons HS, New Directions, Health Care workers; promoted disaster relief
- UCC Pacific NW Conference and National Church representatives and support
- Earth month: Aid Africa and UCC tree campaigns, Joined CE Committee for earth care lesson and cleanup in a park.

Youth activities – We found creative ways to stay connected with our youth

- Storytime with Joyce Bean on ZOOM
- Materials for crafts/projects were dropped off at homes
 - Palm leaves to make crosses for Palm Sunday
 - Cranes to be added to a time capsule to be opened on the 100th anniversary of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki
 - Materials for making chocolate covered strawberries for Valentines
 - Tiles for the Maya Angleou picture were sent to different families and were picked up to be put together.
- Intergenerational Hike of Chamna Park
- The unforgettable intergenerational firepit and smores

So much of the support and activities were conducted in the background. Most of us knew about some of these but were unaware of everything going on. So many different people worked on multiple projects to keep Shalom a vital spiritual community.

Only some of our history has been presented; however, it provides a picture of the foundation for our church community’s future. It documents the firm footing on which to build our “here and now.” It demonstrates how we were able to mostly emerge from Covid restrictions. Our history proves that we, as a church family are resilient and cherish Shalom.

