

# First Baptist Regina Weekly News

*For the Week of August 16th, 2020*



In late June, I suggested a few habits in order to visit our own neighbourhoods in a new way: through prayer walks, picture taking, and getting to know a few new people.

I worried when proposing this that I was loading burdens on your backs that I might fail to carry myself! For my own accountability and for your encouragement, I want to share a few stories without giving away too much information. I've come to know a few new people so far this summer:

- A very friendly neighbour has shared openly how God changed his life. He described his childhood, different places he's lived, and his struggles. He comes by most days to chat.
- Another neighbour depends upon contracts from around the world for work and the coronavirus has changed everything. This is her first summer in a long time in one place and she is enjoying it. She is part of the Unitarian church and is an engaging and thoughtful person.
- One neighbour is going through terrible grief. She and her family awoke to find one of her children had inexplicably passed away in their sleep. They continue to be in our prayers.
- I "met" another neighbour as she ran through the traffic on Victoria Avenue, screaming for help. We were able to get her onto the sidewalk and calm her down. She was delusional, most likely a casualty of using crystal meth. I've since met her again but she did not know me. She is a young woman with no fixed address and seems so vulnerable. A friend working in mental health told me recently that crystal meth is the most pressing issue in Regina, due to the demand it is placing on police and emergency rooms, and because of its long term mental health impacts. As a city, we have no plan in place to deal with this growing crisis.



I believe God is trying to get it through my head that we are ministers to our neighbours. I'm not sure what is next but as a start, these people and their stories are in my prayers.

I always give thanks that I am part of such a welcoming and caring congregation. May God help us each to be "a place to belong" in our neighbourhoods.

With love, Pastor Joel

## Disaster in Lebanon

Tuesday morning, August 4, word reached us of a massive explosion in Beirut's harbour. The friends we made last June were safe but the scenes were devastating and heartbreaking. At least 178 people were killed, more than 6000 injured, and 300,000 left homeless. The suffering and grief of the Lebanese people is unimaginable.

Our mission partners in Lebanon, Emad and Almess Botros and family have sent a newsletter sharing how they have been affected by the disaster and their involvement in helping out in the aftermath. It also includes updates on their ministry in Lebanon. That letter is enclosed.

Our CBM (Canadian Baptist Ministries) partners in Lebanon, the LSESD (Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development) and their relief organization, MERATH (Middle East Revive & Thrive), are reaching out to help the injured and homeless. The seminary conference centre has begun to welcome people left homeless.

More information may be found on CBM's website: <https://www.cbmin.org>. Interviews with Lebanon National Field staff member, Joe Bridi and head of LSESD, Nabil Costa, may be viewed at <https://www.cbmin.org/cbm-calling-archive/>.

This is the time to be God's light and hope to our Lebanese brothers and sisters. To donate to the LSESD's response to this disaster, you may call CBM at (905) 821-3533, mail a cheque to: CBM, 7185 Millcreek Drive, Mississauga ON L5N 5R4, or do so via the CBM website. (Please do not send cash in the mail.) We know this organization personally. We



*A damaged grain silo and a burnt boat can be seen a day after the blast. It is estimated that about 85 per cent of the country's grain was stored in these silos.*



have seen that their ministry is responsible, creative, and thorough. However, we encourage you to give to any agency as you feel led. As CBM is a member of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, which is part of the Humanitarian Coalition, funds given through CBM will be matched by the federal government program announced last week.

**Prayer:** The Botros family has especially asked for prayer support at this time. Please see the second page of their newsletter for their specific requests.

For more information, feel free to contact Marilyn P or Pastor Joel at (306) 359-1450.



## **Tithes and Offerings**

We want to thank everyone for their faithfulness in maintaining their giving during this pandemic. We know that many of you have gone out of your way to mail in your offerings or bring them to the church, and it is appreciated very much.

If you'd like to have your offering picked up, you can leave a message at the church at (306) 359-1450, send an email to [main\\_fbcregina@sasktel.net](mailto:main_fbcregina@sasktel.net), or contact one of the pastors or a board member."

## **Daily Bread Devotionals**

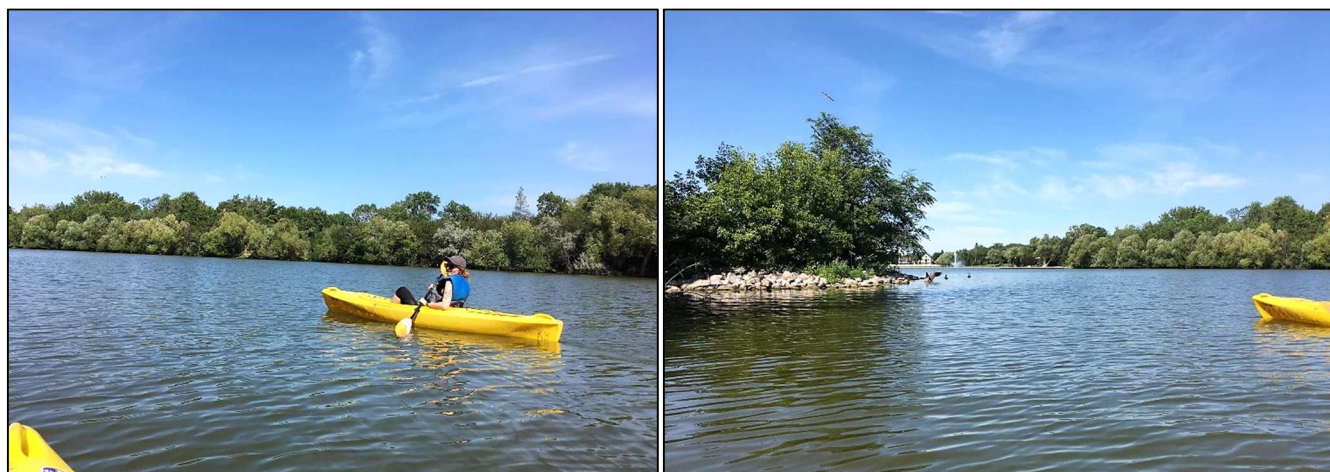
The Daily Bread devotionals for September, October, and November have been dropped off at the church. If anyone would like one, please contact the church by email at [main\\_fbcregina@sasktel.net](mailto:main_fbcregina@sasktel.net) or by leaving a message at (306) 359-1450. We can leave them in the church's mailbox or mail them to you.

## **New Small Group: Reading Through the Old Testament**

Beginning in September, Pastor Richard will be facilitating a new small group: "Reading Through the Old Testament." This group will meet online, using Zoom. A schedule will be provided with weekly readings. We will plan to connect once a week to discuss what we have read, share anything that has stood out to us, and ask any questions we may have. Please contact Pastor Richard at [richard.fbcregina@sasktel.net](mailto:richard.fbcregina@sasktel.net), or leave a message at (306) 359-1450, if you are interested in joining. Watch for updates!

## **Neighbourhood Photos**

Photos submitted by Heather H.



*Haley H Canoeing on Wascana Lake*

## Spiritual Disciplines Series: Solitude/Silence

Thomas à Kempis recommends you “plan to take some time off, and give some thought as to what you’d do with that time; hopefully you’ll spend part of the time reviewing God’s favors to you in the past. What else? Lock up ye olde curiosity shop. Devote more time to reading your spiritual books than your survival manuals. Withdraw from casual conversations and leisurely pursuits. Don’t contract for new ventures, and don’t gossip about old ones. All these having been done, you’ll find more than enough time to undertake a program of meditation. Most of the saints did just that, avoided collaborative projects whenever they could, choosing instead to spend some private time with God.”

In silence and solitude we are looking to spend some private time with God – time to reflect on what is going on in our own lives and what God may be doing in our midst. The experience of solitude varies widely from taking advantage of the little solitudes in our days to setting aside planned times of retreat to step out of our daily patterns in order to enter into the silence of God. Donald Whitney defines silence and solitude this way: “The discipline of silence is the voluntary and temporary abstention from speaking so that certain spiritual goals may be sought. . . Solitude is the spiritual discipline of voluntary and temporary withdrawing to privacy for spiritual purposes.” When we are too busy, too distracted by work and people, it is more difficult to sort out what is going on in our lives and what God would have us do. The answer to this dilemma is solitude and silence.

Jesus practiced these disciplines and encouraged his disciples to do the same, as evidenced in the Gospels. Two examples would be:

- “At daybreak he departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowds were looking for him; and when they reached him, they wanted to prevent him from leaving them.” – Luke 4:42
- “He said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.’ For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.” – Mark 6:31

Emilie Griffen helps us understand the purpose of these practices in her book *Wilderness Time*. She writes: “There’s more to the discipline of solitude than just spending time by yourself. Wilderness time is your chance to detach from the opinions of others, to forgive some people who have made you angry, to come to grips with the way other people are getting in the way of your relationship with God. . . Time spent alone is a rare opportunity for the spirit. . . Solitude also helps us take the beam from our own eye in order to relieve the other person’s affliction.” Henri Nouwen sees these practices as essential, writing: “Solitude is the furnace of transformation. . . (It) is the place of the great struggle and the

great encounter – the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self.”

Some practical tips for practicing solitude and silence:

- Take advantage of moments in your day, when you are alone, to shut out the noise (radio, podcasts, music). This could be when driving in your car.
- Plan a time away from people regularly in order to spend time in solitude and silence. This can be as short as half a day even once a month. Work this into your schedule (otherwise it may not happen).
- Have a place away from distraction (this could be an office, cabin, or as simple as getting outdoors for a walk by yourself).
- When in a group of people, practice speaking only when needed; intentionally just listen to the conversation happening around you.

## **What’s happening at First?**

### **Morning Prayer**

Join us each morning, Monday to Friday at 7:15 am to begin your day with scripture and prayer, via Zoom. Visit our website at [firstbaptistregina.ca](http://firstbaptistregina.ca) for the link.

### **Children**

The children are having a short break from meeting at this time. Watch for updates.

### **Youth**

We will have fewer gatherings over the summer, but still plan to get together in smaller groups, or over Zoom, semi-regularly, so that we can stay connected and continue to build relationships.

### **Gospel of Mark Small Group**

In May a new small group got underway via Zoom with two different meeting times: The 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month at 7pm and the 2nd and 4th Friday of each month at 10am. We are reading through the Gospel of Mark at about a chapter a week and meeting to discuss what we’ve read twice a month. This is not an in-depth study of Mark, but more a slow reading of Mark with informal discussion. Our conversation, along with highlights from Mark’s Gospel, includes visiting to get to know each other better and praying together. We invite you to join us! Contact Pastor Richard ([richard.fbcregina@sasktel.net](mailto:richard.fbcregina@sasktel.net)) and he will get you connected.



The first time I got a universal remote control, I thought to myself, "This changes everything."

I told my friend 10 jokes to get him to laugh. Sadly, no pun in 10 did.

Q: How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Just one, but it takes nine visits.

Q: Why was the big cat disqualified from the race?

A: Because it was a cheetah.

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## Covid 19 Update

The provincial guidelines for places of worship were changed several weeks ago. However, the consensus among the board and pastors remains that we wait on re-opening our Sunday morning in-person worship services. For the time being, we will continue to meet online on Sundays. Learning for Life will continue all summer at 9:30 a.m. and the service start time will remain at 11 a.m.

A committee has been created to plan the restart of in-person Sunday worship services and they have looked at several options. The board will be meeting next week to make a decision on what path to take. Any in-person services will follow all the health guidelines. Please pray that God will direct the board in the decisions that need to be made. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak with one of the board members or pastors.

A valuable source of information about First Baptist is our website: [firstbaptistregina.ca](http://firstbaptistregina.ca). If you don't have a computer and/or internet access, the Regina Public Library has now re-opened, and you may access the website on one of their public computers. If you need assistance, one of the library staff members can help you.

## Obedience—Following Rules or Following God's Leading?

Pastor Joel's sermon from August 16, 2020

Numbers 13

Please join me in prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have revealed yourself to us, through Jesus Christ, as a merciful God, and that you send your Holy Spirit to live within us. You know what goes on in our hearts and minds. You know that it is not easy to discern your will for our lives and to follow you. And yet we are here, seeking to understand you, and seeking to understand your purposes for this world and for us, so that we might serve you better day after day, and bring you glory. We pray by your Holy Spirit that you would accomplish your purpose in the giving and receiving of your word. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

In the first five books of the Bible, often called the books of the law, law and story and genealogy are mixed together in order to teach us. Obedience means more than following rules or laws. Obedience means following God's leading.

In today's story, Israel found themselves with a choice to make. God had brought them out of slavery and Egypt. God had led them through the desert. God had provided water and food for them every step of the way, and now the people stood at the edge of the land that they had been called to. The land promised to them. A new land for them, new homes.

A surveying group had been sent out to explore the land—its agriculture, its cities its peoples, and they came back with their report. The people had to decide, would they go in? Would they go in and become established or would they wait, or go somewhere else even. Ten of the twelve spies reported, "The people who live in this land are strong. The towns are fortified. We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than us."

But two of the spies, young people, Joshua and Caleb, said, "Let us go up at once. We can do it. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us. And the Lord *is* with us."

You can hear the anxiety of the people increase as the story goes on. And, at one point, the terror becomes the madness of a mob. They look around and choose two scapegoats and they are threatening to stone Caleb and Joshua. What does this teach us?

Now to begin, I'd like us to take a step back and look at the bigger picture of these books. As I said, these stories are found in what is called the books of the law. And just to remind ourselves, the Jews divided the Old Testament into three sections. There was the law, and the prophets, and the writings, or sometimes called the psalms. The first section, the law, is made up of the first five books of our Old Testament. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Now I say the law, and that's what it's often called. But the Hebrew word for it, of course, is the Torah, which means and is better translated, “the teaching.” They are called the law, and they are indeed full of many rules and laws. But mixed in with all of these rules and laws, are lots of stories and sometimes long genealogies.

Do all of these things really fit together? Wouldn't it have made more sense if they had separated all of this, so that we had a book of genealogies that we could just skip over, and a book of stories, the history, and then a book of laws. Or maybe we think that somebody just threw it all together willy-nilly. That seems unlikely.

First of all, I think that law and story and genealogy are tied together in these books to teach us. That laws belong to a particular history. To a specific history. To a specific story. To a time and a place and to a specific people.

Now there are funny examples of this very idea in our own legal system. We have the funny law that's still on the books in Toronto, that on Sundays, you're not allowed to drag a dead horse down Yonge Street. Just keep that in mind next time you visit Toronto. Or that anybody in Canada who pretends to be practicing witchcraft, for the purpose of making money, can be charged. There are also still on our books, dueling laws—preventing them, of course.

We can also think, though, of news stories that are in our headlines these days. We have the case of Meng Wanzhou, the CFO of Huawei, who, as we know, is waiting an appeal for her extradition trial into the US.

Now there are two stories that are being judged. Is Meng being held because the US is trying to do anything it can to to undermine and defeat Chinese technology and Chinese companies? Or is this a story of a CFO and a company that tried to get around the American laws preventing banking exchanges with Iran? Which story is it? That's not just a case, then, of whether a law was broken, but there's a narrative, there's a story that the judge has to choose between.

If you read in the newspaper, whenever a judge's decision has been made in court cases, they often come down to the judge having to make a decision, a choice between competing stories. “Whose story am I going to believe?”

When we obey the ten commandments, we are not saying, “Now I'm a good person” or “These are the best laws.” When we obey the laws and the rules, we are saying we belong to the story of Israel. We belong to God's people. These stories are, in some way, our stories now. This genealogy is, in some way, our genealogy now.

First and foremost, though, we are saying that we belong to the story of God. Of God saving nations, of God saving all creation. By way of philosophical excursus, we might suggest that



any search going on these days for a set of universal rights and laws, in order for them to succeed, ought to be rooted in a story, in a particular people. And above all, they ought to be rooted in God's sovereignty. Otherwise, those efforts are doomed to fail.

But all of this leads to a second lesson that we are taught in this combination of story and law and genealogy. Obedience means more than just following laws and following rules. Obedience means following God's leading in our life.

Now some people propose that what would be best, is if we would just get rid of all the stories from the Bible and boil it down to a set of rules and laws for life. They treat human beings like a cookbook recipe. If we could just follow this step and this step and this step, we know we'll end up with a cake or pancakes or spaghetti. And they treat humanity that way as well. If we would just follow this list of rules, then you'll be a good person. Then you'll live a good life.

So we could create a checklist for each day. I've prayed – check. I've read the Bible – check. I've been patient with someone – check. I've given to someone – check. Ah, all done. Piece of cake.” And certainly, some Christians treat life this way. If I do this list of things, then I'll be okay. I've done everything I need to do.

This is not the story. We know that's not enough. We know that following God requires more than this. Following God, of course, means following the clear instructions that God gives us. But it means more than that. It means following God's leading in our daily life. It means following God's leading as a congregation. That is the story.

There was no rule or law that the Israelites broke when they refused to go into the land. But right here, Caleb and Joshua call the refusal to enter the land, “rebellion.” Well, it's a debate in this story. But if we carry on, the verdict of scripture is clear. When the Israelites reflected back on this moment, they agreed—they had failed. They had disobeyed God. In Deuteronomy, Moses comes to the same conclusion: “You were unwilling to go up. You rebelled against the command of the Lord your God.” The Psalms echoed this judgment: “How often our people rebelled against God in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert.” And the New Testament repeats this judgment as well: “Our ancestors were unwilling to obey Moses and God. Instead, they pushed Moses aside and, in their hearts, turned back to Egypt.”

But if there was no rule about having to go into the land, how could it be disobedience? Because God was telling them to enter. It was God's leading that they refused to obey.

This mix of story and law teaches us that following God means tough decisions, where the right answer isn't necessarily clear. And there may be a cost. Prudent and wise people

may be raising plausible reasons why we should choose otherwise, and that what we feel, what we sense, and what we hear other people saying is what God is leading us to do.

On the one hand, the decision wasn't clear. The leadership itself was divided. The people were being called to do something that was dangerous, risky. Some people were going to lose their life if they followed this choice and entered the land. And they would have to kill other people.

We might be tempted to say, though, if it was clear that it's God's leading, how could they doubt God at this point? The people of Israel, at this point in their journey, had seen the Red Sea divided and the Egyptian army wiped out by God. They had seen a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day, leading them step by step through the journey to this point. They had heard God's voice thundering from a mountain. They had seen water come out of a rock so that they could drink. They had seen food come down from the sky so they could eat. How could they come to this point and be afraid of any obstacle? How could they believe that maybe God wouldn't be there for them when they had seen such incredible things?

But when we think of our own lives, of course, we know how hard it is to discern what God is asking us to do. And even when we're pretty sure we know what we're supposed to do, even then it's hard.

What are some of the choices before us right now? I know some of us are looking for work. What is God leading us to? As a church, we're grappling with how do we respond to the spread of the coronavirus? What is God asking us to do? Some of us are preparing to go to university or wondering what's next after high school. What is God asking us to do? Some of us are looking at retirement. What is God asking us to do?

What about the bigger questions affecting everyone? We are being asked to consider caring for the environment. We are being called to choose whether we think that there is a concern. Do we have to change our way of life, or is there a hidden agenda in that cause? What about Covid-19? What choices do we have to make? Is this being blown out of proportion? Or is there an opportunity, is there a need for the church to respond in a specific way?

What about our economy? Our buying and spending habits? Are we consuming too much? Do we need to change—or is that an overblown agenda as well? What about the rights of minorities and the needs of specific groups within society? Are some being asked to change how they live and how they talk about themselves? Should non-indigenous people adopt the language of calling ourselves settlers? Should we redress some of these problems, some of the evil that's been done? Or is it indeed evil?

These are the questions that are put before us, and we have a split leadership. Our leadership within the larger church is divided on many of these issues, in the US and in Canada. So it seems to me that we ought to be sympathetic when we go back to these stories of the exodus, and look at the indecision and fear that they felt, the uncertainty that they felt. They were terrified! God was asking something that seemed impossible and likely, very costly.

Isn't that what Jesus asks of us as well? "Take up your cross," he said, "and follow me." When we obey Jesus' rules, we are not saying these are the best rules— although they may be. We are saying, "I belong to Jesus. I belong to the story of Jesus. Jesus is my Lord, and he is in charge of my life."

When we obey Jesus' rules, we are not saying everything is going to work out, as long as I follow these rules. There may well be a cost. It is a cross we have to pick up, if we will follow Jesus. Every generation comes to these choices, whether it's in their own life, or whether it's these bigger questions facing society.

We need young people who will choose to make the story of their life all about following Jesus. We need young people who will ask God, "What do you want me to do in this situation?" "What is your will for my life?" It could be a choice that requires not just knowledge of rules and laws, but a choice that requires character—like the character that the young people showed in this story, the courage of Joshua and Caleb. Their faith in God. Their hope that God had a better purpose in mind for the nation of Israel and for all of creation. And for those of us who are older, this is the story that we want to live out in our own lives, as examples to the young people. To daily read our Bible. To daily be in prayer. To daily talk with one another. And through all of that, to be asking, "What is God asking me to do?" "What is God's will in this situation?" Obedience means more than following rules and laws. Obedience means following God's leading in our life.

Benediction:

As you go, I pray that the way before you might be clear. That God's light might shine before you, so you can see the way to go, and that your way might lead to peace and safety. But if there is hardship, if there is pain, I pray that you might find, in God, the comfort, and the care, and the love, and the strength, to carry on, as we journey towards the kingdom of God.

And as you go, go with the blessing of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all forever. Amen.

## Tithing during the pandemic

With the COVID-19 crisis limiting contact with others and restricting meetings of groups, please do not neglect the financial needs of our church.

We have several ways to provide your regular tithes and donations to the church:

1. Mail your gifts to the church or call and leave a message at (306) 359-1450 to arrange for an in-person pick-up. Please place your cheque in your regular offering envelope (or any envelope marked "Offering"), and seal that inside another envelope addressed to the church:

First Baptist Church  
2241 Victoria Ave  
Regina SK S4P 0S4

2. Establish a **Pre-authorized Remittance (PAR) Plan**. This will automatically transfer funds from your account into the FBC Regina account on a regular basis. Please email the church or contact the Treasurer if you would like to set up PAR, or change your commitment.
3. Make an online donation:
  - Use **Interac e-Transfer** to donate from your phone or computer to FBCRegina@gmail.com *(no fee or cost to the church)*
  - Use a credit card with a PayPal account via the **PayPal Giving Fund** *(no fee or cost to the church... 100% of your donation reaches us and contributes to our mission)*
  - Use a credit card or PayPal via **CanadaHelps** *(a fee of 4% is deducted from the donation)*
  - Use a credit or debit card via **FBC ChurchTrac** *(the church is charged a fee of approximately 3% for each donation)*

**PLEASE** refer to our website at [firstbaptistregina.ca](http://firstbaptistregina.ca) for more specific information on these contribution methods. You may also contact the treasurer at (306) 775-1497 or email the church at [main\\_fbcregina@sasktel.net](mailto:main_fbcregina@sasktel.net) for further details.

## The Benefits of Online Giving (especially during the pandemic)

1. No mailing, dropping off, or picking up of tithes is required.
2. The church receives e-Transfers immediately...no waiting for the tellers to physically count and deposit the cash and cheques.
3. It is actually SAFER! Did you know that every cheque you write has ALL your bank account information on it (those computer-like numbers at the bottom)? As well as your name and address. Also, cash and cheques can be misplaced or lost in the mail.
4. Signing up for PAR means you don't have to remember to provide a weekly or monthly offering, and ensures the church has a steady source of revenue to cover expenses. Only the treasurer and the bank would initially see your banking information for registration.
5. Interac e-Transfers are easy to use and secure. Your money doesn't actually travel by email or text message – just the notifications and deposit instructions. The receiving and sending banks transfer the funds to each other using established and secure banking procedures with encryption and authentication. No one sees your banking information.

NOTE: Giving via CanadaHelps and PayPal Giving Fund are less attractive as they do not distribute the funds to us immediately. Depending on when the donation was made, we may wait until the following month to receive it. As well, CanadaHelps deducts a fee for every donation. However, the donor receives a tax receipt immediately, so the church does not have to issue one.

That being said, we will definitely accept your tithes and offerings by any method you choose. Please let the church know if we can assist in any possible way. THANK YOU!

How LONG is this social distancing thing supposed to last? My husband keeps trying to come into the house.

On his first visit to the zoo, a little boy stared at the caged stork for a long time and asked his dad, "Why doesn't the stork recognize me?"

Q: How does NASA organize a party?

A: They planet.

Q: What do Alexander the Great and Winnie the Pooh have in common?

A: Same middle name.