

# First Baptist Regina Weekly News

*For the Week of October 25th, 2020*



We go to the polls this week, and next. Imagine if there were changes made to who was allowed to vote or what issues we voted about.

What if school age people voted, as 25% of the population?

Would we see more money for amusement parks? Fewer hours in school? More holidays? A new nutrition guide with dessert as a food group?

What would happen if we could vote on weather?

Who would win the snow accumulation vote: skiers, snowmobilers, and snow fort builders, or sidewalk shovelers? Would farmers and gardeners ever see enough rain?

What if we could vote on wildlife? Would anyone vote to keep mosquitoes?

The fact is, we do vote every day, don't we? How we use our time, energy, and money are the biggest vote we have.

What are we voting for? The animals and plants that God called good? Longer work hours? Better TV options? Better neighbourhoods? A thriving church? More time for prayer? I suppose these are heavy handed, pointed questions.

If it's any consolation, I ask them to convict myself. It is hard work directing my time and energy where the Spirit is nudging or where Jesus commands. I like the idea of voting for someone who can then become the one I blame for everything!

For further consolation, we confess a better world is coming for sure, not because of our efforts, but thanks to Jesus. The chance to make good use of what we've been given is just grace.

May God have mercy and raise good leaders for our cities and province. May God help us to make good choices about how we use our time, energy, and money.

With love,

Pastor Joel

## **First Baptist Regina Re-Opening**

First Baptist Regina has re-opened its sanctuary for in-person worship services. If you are planning to attend this Sunday and it will be your first time back, please familiarize yourself with the [attendance guidelines](#), found on our website.

## **Achievers' Virtual Luncheon**

The October Achievers' Luncheon will take place Thursday, October 29th, at 12 noon, over Zoom. If you are 55+ years young, you are warmly invited to join us. Our guest speaker is Rev. Dr. Mark McKim, who will share on, "Where are They Now? My Life in Reflection." For further details about the luncheon, visit the [church website](#). For more information, please contact [Pastor John](#). To join this event, click here: [Achievers' Virtual Luncheon](#).

## **Great news from Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Lebanon!**

"We congratulate our Assistant Professor of Old Testament Emad Botros on achieving a Doctorate in Christian Theology of the Old Testament from McMaster Divinity College in Ontario! Focusing on the book of Jonah, Dr. Botros conducted a study on how the early Muslim community typologically read and applied the narrative of Jonah into their lives to develop a Biblical theology of Jonah in the context of Islam. We pray that the Lord continues to guide him as he works to serve the Kingdom in the Arab world."

Feel free to send Emad your personal congratulations at [emad.w.botros@gmail.com](mailto:emad.w.botros@gmail.com)

## **Mitts and Toques**

We have a number of individuals in our congregation who generously give of their time to knit or collect mitts and toques for children who need them. If you have mitts and/or toques to donate, please contact Winnie K, send an email to the church, or call (306) 359-1450. Winnie will deliver them to the schools.

## **November Business Meeting**

Our November business meeting will take place on November 22, 2020, following the Sunday morning worship service. Similarly to the worship service, we will participate both in person and on Zoom.

This is a very important meeting, so please make a point of attending, whether in person or over Zoom.

The proposed budget and other related materials will be available on our website by November 8th. Printed copies will also be available at the church.

## Finances

To the end of September, our revenue remains at 14% below our YTD budget. Our expenses are 11% below YTD budget. This results in a current deficit of \$9,000 (spending more than our income).

<b>Approved Operating Budget for 2020:</b>	<b>\$ 427.6K</b>
Operating Budget to the end of September 2020:	\$ 320.7K
Operating Revenue to end of September 2020:	\$ 277.0K
Operating Expenses to end of September 2020:	\$ 286.0K
Restricted Reserve Balance:	\$ 109.9K
(Benevolent, Building, Organ, and Legacy Funds)	
Organ Fund loan	\$ 198.5K
CEBA (CRA) Loan	\$ 40.0K

## Website

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our church events and schedules in every way. The church website ([firstbaptistregina.ca](http://firstbaptistregina.ca)) is a valuable source of information that can help keep you connected and up to date with the various programs that are available.

One easy way to keep on top of upcoming events is to click on the calendar icon at the bottom of each page on the website. Each entry on the calendar provides a link to information about various events, such as Learning for Life, small group studies, and prayer times.

Also on our website are links to our Facebook page and YouTube channel, where you will find video reflections, devotions, and studies by a number of our members and pastors.



John tells his shrink, “Last night I dreamt you were my mother.”

“How do you feel about that?” asks the psychiatrist.

“I haven’t had time to think about it,” says John. “I overslept this morning. Then I remembered that I had an appointment with you, so I gobbled down a cola and a cookie.”

“A cola and a cookie?” the doc replies. “You call that breakfast?!”

## 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](#) for the link.

### Children

Our Sunday morning in-person kids' classes, *Godly Play*, and *Oasis* have resumed. We are following health guidelines. For more information, please contact [Pastor Kayely](#).

### Youth

Pastor Chris: The youth are invited to a Bible study at the church on Friday this week. Please note that the time will be shorter than usual, and will run from 7:00 to 8:30 pm. Single use snacks will be provided. Hope to see you there! For more information, contact [Pastor Chris](#).

### Adults

**Learning for Life:** Annabel R. is facilitating an online series on the book of Romans. The class will explore how Paul's epistle to the Romans focuses on his message to the followers in Rome, who are under the shadow of Caesar. Paul states that God's plan for the world has been revealed through Jesus, and his message demonstrates that God has been faithful to his covenant with Israel. For more information, please contact Annabel, send an email to [the church](#), or call (306) 359-1450.

**Voice** is a small group for women who like to read and enjoy lively conversation. Voice meets every second Wednesday from 7 to 9 pm, using Zoom. At present, the group is reading *Jesus Among Other Gods* by Ravi Zacharias. For more information, visit [our website](#), send an email to [the church](#), or call (306) 359-1450.

**Reading through the Old Testament:** In this online reading group, participants will read through the Old Testament chronologically. The group will be meeting weekly, via Zoom, at two different times: Sundays at 4 pm and Thursdays at 11 am. If you are interested in joining this group, please contact [Pastor Richard](#), and he will provide you with the reading schedule and Zoom link.

**Gospel of John small group study:** Pastor Richard is leading a small group online that is looking at the Gospel of John. This group is meeting, via Zoom, on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month at 7 pm, and the 2nd and 4th Friday of each month at 10 am. If you are interested in joining this group, please contact [Pastor Richard](#).

**Renovaré Canada** has a couple of online programs running this fall. There is an [Online Renewal Group](#) as well as a course (taught by Pastor Richard) entitled, [Wendell Berry: A Spirituality of Sustenance](#). For more information on either of these opportunities, please contact [Pastor Richard](#), or leave a message at (306) 359-1450.

## No Longer a Slave – a Beloved Brother

Pastor Joel's sermon from October 25, 2020  
Philemon

The letter we are going to read today is Paul's letter to Philemon, a slave owner. The letter is about one of Philemon's slaves.

We have been reading Paul's letter to the Colossians and it includes this command in Colossians 3:22: "Slaves, obey your human masters in all things, not only when they are watching you because you want to gain their approval; but do it with a sincere heart because of your reverence for the Lord."

Did Paul endorse slavery?

Listen as Philemon is read. What is Paul asking Philemon to do?

But first, let's look at a few background notes on slavery in the Roman Empire.

Slavery was widespread. Few useful records exist that counted slaves. It is estimated that between 10% to 30% of population was made up of slaves, which added up to more than a million slaves. Slavery was essential within the economy of the Roman Empire.

Slaves could attempt to run away, but if they were caught and returned, the consequences could be severe. With so many slaves around, there was great pressure on slave owners to keep slaves in submission.

Owners were responsible to decide what to do if their slave broke the law, such as by running away. The response could be anything from taking away any saved-up money, to torture, to crucifixion. While the extremes did happen, culturally, they were seen as inappropriate.

It is important to note that slavery in the Roman Empire was different from the conditions of slavery we might be more familiar with in the Americas in recent centuries. In the Roman Empire, slaves could be paid, and could buy their freedom, or be given freedom for their service. Some became highly educated as part of their work. Some former slaves managed to become wealthy and powerful in the empire.

There was no concept of "race" back in the empire. Certainly, language and culture set people apart, but slavery was not specific to one group. People became slaves through war, kidnapping by pirates, by being born to slave parents.

However, in today's scripture lesson, one other major source of slaves should be noted. Some argue that the main source of slaves was abandoned children and infants.

Parents would leave children where they might be seen, or in the wilderness, either to die, or be taken for adoption, slavery, or prostitution. This practice was common and widespread. As appalling as it might be to us, we have evidence from personal letters, biographies, Roman law, and religious and philosophical discussions, that families were often “managed” in this way. Reasons for throwing a baby or child away might be famine, family hunger, poverty, inheritance plans, or the child being a girl.

For centuries, when Roman law addressed this practice, it focused on the impact it would have on inheritance rights or citizenship when abandoned children discovered their family of origin. The church, however, taught that it was murder, and prohibited it. At the same time, they also tried to address the underlying factors that drove people to this choice, by helping those in poverty, those who were hungry, or by working on family dynamics.

In the empire, abandoning children was largely stopped under the first Christian emperors.

When these fatherless, nameless children became slaves, they were often given name like helpful, benefit, or useful. In Greek those are names such as “Chraystus” or “Onesimus.”

One 1st century slave wrote, “From the first day, it is the prayer of every slave to be free.”

We have been reading from Paul and Timothy’s letter to the Colossians. It is possible that Philemon was part of the church in Colossae. If you compare Philemon and Colossians, the list of people Paul greets and the list of people who are with Paul are nearly identical in both letters. As well, Paul wrote both letters from prison.

And in both letters we hear the name Onesimus.

It appears that a runaway slave named Onesimus somehow met Paul and became a Christian. Paul was in chains, somewhere, perhaps in Rome, under house arrest.

Paul also knew Onesimus’ master, the slave owner, Philemon. Now Onesimus is returning to Philemon with a letter from Paul.

Philemon’s church met in a home.

The letter we will hear was most likely read aloud to Philemon in front of the entire congregation. Imagine being asked to do something in front of the entire congregation, it might be hard to say, “no”!

If this story were imagined as a drama, the scene would look something like this:

Paul, in chains, perhaps in Rome. Alongside him, Timothy, and others. He is writing to Philemon.

In another city, perhaps Colossae, Philemon stands before the congregation, looking at his returned slave Onesimus and wondering what was going on. What might he have been thinking as he listened?

What does Paul say ought to be done?

The letter carrier opens Paul's letter and begins to read. *(Please note, all of Paul's words are taken from the book of Philemon.)*

Paul: I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon: To me? Hm. I wonder how many people get a personal letter from Paul? This must have something to do with my slave Onesimus. I haven't seen him since he ran away with some of my belongings.

But there he is. Where was he? What on earth made him decide to come back? I remember when slave dealers returned a slave to my pagan neighbour Lucius. Lucius had him whipped and beaten in public. What should I do about Onesimus?

Did Jesus teach us anything about this?

I wonder if Paul will tell me what he thinks.

Paul: Philemon, When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus.

I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ.

I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

Philemon: Thank you Paul. You didn't need to say all of that. You are very gracious.

Paul: For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty...

Philemon: Yes, my duty. What is it?

Paul: ...yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—

Philemon: Paul does love us, doesn't he. He has given so much of his life for us.

Paul: ...and I, Paul, write this as an old man,

Philemon: I guess he must be getting pretty old now.

Paul: and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

Philemon: How long has he been chained? And how many times!

Now, what is he after?

Paul: I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment.

Philemon: Your child! Paul, a father?

Or did you introduce him to Jesus, as you did for me years ago.

This slave was a nameless child without parents when I bought him years ago. The slave dealers told me they found him like much of their merchandise, abandoned by his mother on a garbage heap outside the city, with no family token to identify him.

I named him "useful". Onesimus.

Paul: Formerly he was "useless" to you, but now he is indeed "useful" both to you—and to me.

I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel;

Philemon: Keep stolen property! Paul what are you talking about!

Paul: but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced.

Philemon: What voluntary good deed is Paul expecting of me? He wanted to keep Onesimus - is he asking me not just to forgive Onesimus but to send him back?

Paul: Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Philemon: No longer as a slave... a beloved brother...

Onesimus? My brother in Jesus? And in the flesh?



Paul: So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it.

Philemon: Hm. Well, Paul has legally signed me an IOU. At least there is that.

Paul: I won't mention that you owe me your very life.

Philemon: Oh brother. Really?

Paul: Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ.

Philemon: Refresh your heart? Paul, what am I supposed to do? You know the law! There are consequences, like it or not, when laws are broken. And what will happen if word gets around that I forgave Onesimus without any punishment or receiving any repayment for my losses? What will my other slaves begin to think? What will people think of our church?

But are you asking me to do more than just forgive him...

Paul: Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

Philemon: Even more than you say...

Word could get around that as a result of running away, Onesimus was set free...

No longer a slave... my brother... hm.

Well... at least Paul is far away... and in prison... maybe I have time to think about—

Paul: One thing more—prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you.

Philemon: Ha. Certainly you will be in my thoughts, Paul.

Paul: Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Philemon: And with your Spirit. Amen.

Paul skillfully wrote a gracious letter.

He managed to convey what he wanted Philemon to do without actually ever saying it. Paul hints at what he wants done but never spells it out.

Paul also managed to convey his authority without openly using it.

I think Paul was asking Philemon to set Onesimus free so that Onesimus could enter into ministry.

We don't know what happened. But would the letter have been kept if it had failed? If Philemon kept Onesimus, or punished or even executed him, wouldn't this letter have been worthless?

We do know that a number of years later, the Bishop of the nearby city of Ephesus was named Onesimus. The name was not uncommon but it is intriguing. Could it be the same person?

Paul infamously did not use any argument that slavery itself was wrong. He appears to have encouraged an escaped slave to return to his master. This seems so wrong to us today.

Does it matter what these old letters and books in the Bible say about slavery?

First, slavery does continue in our world. The anti-slavery organization, "Walk Free Foundation", estimates that as many as 40 million people are trapped in one form or another of slavery around the world today. We should all be able to agree that this is wrong. It seems that scripture ought to be our ally in this effort.

In that case, we need to answer critics who point to this story and other passages and argue that Scripture endorses slavery. They argue that the church and scripture continue to be tools used by the powerful to oppress the vulnerable and keep people in their place.

Onesimus was free. He could have gone anywhere, but Paul asked him to go back to being a slave.

But Paul also asked Philemon to accept Onesimus back with grace and love, *at least* to forgive him, but, arguably, to actually set him free.

Paul was encouraging a reciprocal relationship with mutual forgiveness and care.

Why?

When our culture argues against slavery, we begin with universal human rights.

When Paul addressed the conflict between the slave and slave owner, he began with Jesus' Lordship and the exhortation in verse 6: "may you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ."

We tend to think about the world in terms of who has power. Then we attempt to create change by influencing or attacking those in power.

Paul began with relationship and love. In verse 7, he wrote, “I have received joy and encouragement from your love; the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.”

In verse 9, he continues, “I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love.”

Our culture argues that there are self-evident, universal truths for ethics, that everyone knows, deep down, the same rules for right and wrong.

Paul’s ethics involve a change that must take place in us and in our identity. We are baptized, we share the same table, and we are made into one family. Paul’s ethics are family ethics.

In verse 16, Paul implores Philemon to take Onesimus back, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a beloved brother.

Paul’s main concern is how we treat each other, first of all, within a church. We are to work at being a family, work through our conflict, share our struggles, and know and love each other. No, Paul does not argue directly against slavery. But it is hard to imagine how slavery could endure in a church living in such close, loving relationships.

I propose that whenever local churches were composed of groups that were in conflict in the larger society, but worked at loving, listening, forgiving, and sharing, all in the name and power of Jesus, those churches pointed other churches, and the world, in the right direction. Often this led to their own demise. But sometimes, the rest of the church, or their city or nation, caught their vision and the world was changed.

Paul asked Onesimus, and then Philemon, to each do something extremely costly: it was culturally strange, socially unpopular, and economically and legally dangerous.

I don’t think we have anything as challenging to work through as Philemon and Onesimus did. Look at what they had to forgive each other for.

By comparison, do we have any excuse not to forgive each other ever in this church family?

Look at the risk Paul asked them both to take with no guarantee that things would go well. Churches unleashed chaos when they began treating slaves and masters as equals.

Philemon and Onesimus challenge us: What we are willing to do for one another in this church? How far are we willing to go for one another?

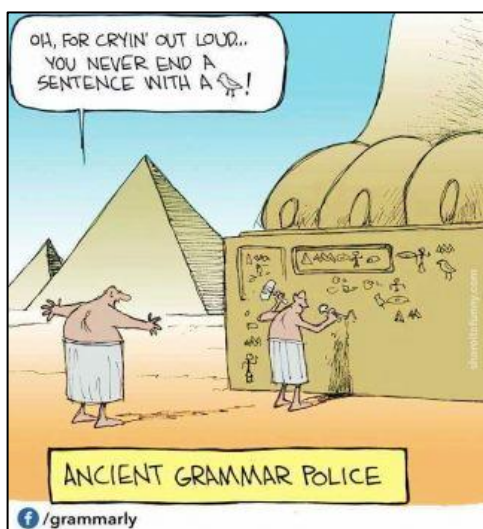
## Tithing during the pandemic

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: 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](mailto: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.



*You know you've been drinking too much coffee when...*

...People get dizzy just watching you

...You've built a miniature city out of little plastic stirrers

...You can outlast the Energizer bunny

...You go to AA meetings just for the free coffee

...Your eyes stay open when you sneeze

...Instant coffee takes too long

...You think CPR stands for "Coffee Provides Resuscitation"