



New Life
Church
CALABASH

February 3, 2021

Friends at New Life Church,

It feels a bit too fitting that I send this update to you on the day after *Groundhog Day*. Apparently Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow, predicting six more weeks of winter, but since some have contested whether he really did see his shadow, and since others attest that the groundhog's prediction success is only around 50% anyway, we don't really know any more today than we did yesterday about the weather prospects. If you're like me, it's more likely that *Groundhog Day* (thanks to the movie of the same name) makes you think about being stuck in the same place, living the same day over and over again, a situation that sounds all too similar to our experience this past year.

In-person worship services continue to be suspended at New Life Church, and our capacity to forecast when we'll be able to gather in one place again feels about as reliable as the groundhog's capacity to forecast the weather. The variables at play, such as vaccine distribution and virus variants, make predictions difficult. As we've affirmed since the pandemic began just under a year ago, given the particulars of our community and our church — namely, that our composition is predominantly people 65 and over, many with additional compromising health conditions — we are sacrificing our right to meet and following the guidelines of public health officials in making our decisions on gatherings. At present, the NCDHHS Health Secretary's recent directive remains in place, advising individuals in all counties to "stay at home (especially if you are over 65 or at high risk), limit public interactions to essential activities, and avoid gathering with others from outside their household." While I know it feels like *Groundhog Day* all over again, we will continue to suspend our in-person services indefinitely until NCDHHS guidelines and directives encourage us to gather again.

One of the gatherings that our suspension impacts is our annual church business meeting, which would normally take place at this time of year, a meeting at which we would present the annual budget and elect new officers. Due to our inability to gather in-person, the NLC Session (the pastor, Terry Maner, and elected elders of the church, Buff Andresen & John Stark) determined that it is best to postpone that meeting until a few weeks after we resume gathering in one place again. In the meantime, since our church governing structure and constitution charges the Session with the task and responsibility "to approve, adopt, and implement the budget," the Session has, with the assistance of Rod Hughes, a deacon overseeing finances at NLC, approved a budget for 2021. A copy of that budget with accompanying comments will be sent out soon.

Along with continuing to post worship and messages online on Sundays while in-person services remain suspended, we'll soon be offering you the opportunity to participate in Zoom groups for fellowship with others in our church family, aimed at promoting

connection with one another while we're scattered. More information concerning those groups and how you may get involved is forthcoming.

Like you, I know how wearisome the monotony and isolation of the past year can become, and how frustrating it is to lack clarity about when things will change. We can take a cue from the redeeming qualities of the weatherman Phil Connor in the movie *Groundhog Day* and seize the opportunity of each day to pursue beauty, charity, and relationship, to be attentive to the opportunities afforded by each day to bless others instead of focusing on the sameness, tedium, or confinement of it all. What's more, Christians have an even greater basis for considering each day to be a new opportunity to discover beauty amidst the mundane, since even in the midst of lament over the exile, at a time when people of faith described themselves as having "forgotten what happiness is," we find this declaration:

*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

Lamentation 3:22-23

May the newness of God's mercy and the greatness of His faithfulness refresh you every morning during these days and always,

Terry Maner, Pastor
New Life Church