

STEWARDSHIP – A SHOT IN THE ARM FOR BOL

*I am Dr. Joanne McLeod, a member of BOL church as well as Vice Chair on Council. Here to spend a few minutes talking about Stewardship as our vaccine or protection against the negative effects of COVID on our church body and family.

*After this many months I am certain most of us are aware of Dr. Shahab in his role as Chief Medical Health Officer to our province. Our head physician we could call him. The major role of a Medical Health Officer is more in Preventative Medicine. Not only to diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community as a whole, but primarily in the role of prevention - informing, educating, and empowering people about health issues that affect the general public. Taking necessary and directed action before an illness can affect many and overwhelm our system and society. I admire and respect Dr. Shahab and the other medical health officers and people that form the teams for preventative health in our province and country. Unfortunately, in this very stressful and difficult role one only knows how well they performed once the threat is over. I continue to offer my daily prayerful support to them all.

*So at this time I would like you to envision me as not just a physician, but as the Spiritual Medical Health Officer for BOL. I know that is a stretch but I want to use the similarities and overlap to draw attention to how our church body also risks being infected by these viruses. Call this talk my attempt at preventative medicine, or alerting before the negative effects becomes life-threatening, so to speak. I am going to reference our church body and our overall spiritual health in the time of pandemic – now over a year in duration, as we are all painfully aware. A year that has brought many changes for our world, our community and its many individuals, along with significant changes to BOL church and its community.

*First though, I must commend Pastor Stewart, Vicar Patti, Brent both as Council Chair as well as technology mastermind; all the devoted members of BOL church council; Cheryl diligently working in the office often in seclusion; Gail and the choir along with Josh for the soothing and healing music to accompany the services; and the many others behind the scenes who have worked so hard this past year to keep our church serving a necessary and vital presence in our community, and even now even beyond.

*Pastor Stewart, as well as us on Council, are very aware that every one of you out there are important to our caring church community. We feel for you and pray for all burdened, suffering, and grieving losses unique to each of you, and sadly in forced separation and at times, isolation. My hope is that you, like myself, have found some comfort, some form of togetherness and connection through this service and virtual connection provided by Facebook. Our prayers and service offered being guided by hope and for healing through Christ Jesus.

*How can I then inform and hopefully educate you as Spiritual Medical Officer for the day as pertains to the overall health and well-being of BOL? And now our community not only includes people who attended our church building pre-COVID but also many new faces, near and far, who we have yet to meet, hopefully even in person in the not-too-distant future. We welcome all who attend the services offered from BOL, and recognize this expanded and new outreach as one of the positives brought on by this pandemic. ALL ARE WELCOME HERE!!

*This pandemic has rightfully focused much initial thought, time, energy, and financial input to peoples' physical health and well-being in the threat of COVID. But as time has warped from weeks into months, and now into a year and beyond, there have arisen many other urgent needs in our broader society as well as in the smaller communities, like BOL, that form it. Urgent needs involving mental, emotional, social and even spiritual health and well-being. Now all these need some precedence and attention as they all affect continued overall well-being. We too, who form BOL, also need to direct our attention to broader and more urgent issues that affect us all.

*So how is our health and overall ability to fully function in service of others holding up over this past year? Like many individuals, although we are surviving and continued to function, we are now showing signs of the struggles and uncertainty. As a church body our well-being, health, and what might call our overall immunity to future insults and to the continued threat of this infection, are all wearing thin. As a metaphor we can compare BOL, as a part of the Body of Christ, to any other human body subjected to human frailties and illness if we don't maintain our healthy practices and enhance our immunity.

*So what exactly are the practices as a church body and as individual participants within that body or community that we need to do to maintain and even enhance our overall spiritual health and continued well-being through challenging times we find ourselves in? How can we restore and build up our 'spiritual immune system' during this pandemic and even in times to come?

*I believe the same essentials that can be applied to enhancing our individual bodily immune system, can be applied to our church's spiritual immune system. These essentials are, listed in no particular order of most importance:

(1)Diet – a healthy intake by joining together at Christ's table to receive the Body of Christ through communion, even if it is done virtually and not together as in the past. Also we are fortified and reserves are supplemented by sharing in the word of our Lord. This has been offered through the weekly sermons, special occasion services, and some Bible studies. We are always open to people's suggestions and ideas on how we can enrich the 'diet' offered at BOL.

(2)Vitamins – supplements such as prayer, both individually and in groups over the internet. Prayer has been equated with our vitamin C – the C of connection, compassion, and the conduit of Christ's love for each of us.

(3)Exercise - shown through our worship practices and church attendance, even from a safe and healthy distance. A protection from "isolation, introspection, and infection with the disease of self-centredness." (A quote I found online in a reading).

(4)Finding meaning and purpose through service towards others. We can use our spiritual gifts to serve others and in so doing promote spiritual well-being, both for ourselves as well as the ones we serve. The saying "Use them or lose them" very much pertains to our gifts of spirit.

(5) Relationships and connection which have been scientifically proven to maintain health and well-being. Why married people seem to live longer, or even those with a pet do better even when living on their own. The major feature of any church is to foster these connections and caring relationships. It has certainly become more difficult in these times of distancing and separation, but through our virtual connection and other means we have shown that it is still very possible to maintain and promote a compassionate community. This is an area where we as a council, believe more work can be done, but then again we need other people with ideas, and special gifts and skill-sets to step forward to provide for these persistent areas of need.

(6) Rest and sleep which requires the peace and comfort of spirit and facing fears with the strong foundation of faith. We as a church need to keep building on this foundation and offering strength and support to those in need. It is only in our ongoing and faithful commitment to our Lord and Christ that we can preserve our immunity, health, and ongoing strength.

*A vow to maintain these healthy practices involves not just a once weekly or Sunday involvement, but a daily commitment and motivation. And this is not just in action but also a financial stewardship. This will allow us to not only maintain what we currently have but to continue to strengthen and flourish in spite of the threats and the challenges we face in these times.

*For in my pretend role as Spiritual Medical Health Officer, along with other wise input, I am here to sound the early alarm; to give warning that our Church body is at imminent risk of being overcome by the effects of this virus and the challenges it has brought with it. Sadly, our defences are weakened and our resistance is lowered, much as we have been working hard to maintain not only our vitality as a church but also as a community. BUT THERE IS HOPE! IT IS NOT TOO LATE, BUT WE NEED TO ACT WITH A CERTAIN SENSE OF URGENCY AND COMMITMENT – EACH OF US! REMEMBER: TOGETHER IN CHRIST WE ARE STRONGER!

*I am not exaggerating this threat, and in the coming weeks we will publish some of the actual financials for BOL. These will show the very REAL threat to our continued vitality and existence as a church. It is vitally important to remember the church is not the building but each one of us connected together to share as part the life-giving body of Christ.

*What is the equivalent of our vaccine, that will supplement and enhance the healthy and natural spiritual immune builders already listed? This will come in the form of GIVING AND STEWARDSHIP – both financially, as much as we each are able and giving of our individual spiritual gifts of service.

*I want to finish with this quote I found attributed to a senior pastor, theologian, and writer, Mark Dever, in Washington, DC. And although I may not agree with all his theology, I do appreciate his definition of a church:

“The church is not a place. It’s not a building. It’s not a preaching point. It’s not a spiritual service provider. It’s a people – the new covenant, blood-bought people of God. That’s why Paul said, ‘Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her’ (Ephesians 5:25). He didn’t give himself up for a place, but for a people.”

*And so, in this time of gratitude and offering of service after Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection, what are we each willing to give up for the benefit of Christ’s people, and also then for ourselves as all valued and loved beings in God’s church?

~Amen~