

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

*Jim Saudargas, Leadership Council*

This time last year, we were all so optimistic about Spirit of Joy and the many good things we would be doing in 2020. 2019 was a growing year for the Church and our service to the community. The Leadership Council was excited to harness that momentum and excitement to continue God's work.

Then the pandemic hit and the world was turned upside down and twisted sideways. We all know how that has affected us in our professional, personal, and spiritual lives. Even though this has meant that many of our hopes and aspirations were not fulfilled, there have been a number of things we were able to accomplish as a Church.

In no particular order, the following list highlights some of the positive outcomes for Spirit of Joy in 2020:

- Completed Phase 1 of the Capital Campaign raising \$25,000. With this money, we have been able to renovate, repair, and update much of the building.
- Created a high-quality streaming capability that allows us to stream our worship services (and original video content) to SOJ members and to the outside world.
- Hosted a back-to-school event giving away school supplies to the community. Over 200 children were reached.
- Organized a collection drive to support our homeless neighbors; 75 backpacks filled with sundry items were donated to the Samaritan Resource Center.
- Hosted a "Trunk or Treat" event for the community, which far exceeded everyone's expectations when over 500 people attended. Not only did we have a number of decorated cars giving away candy, but there were also crafts, live music, and free food. It was an awesome event held during a time when our community desperately needed to experience God's love.
- Completed Phase 2 of the Capital Campaign raising \$15,000 to purchase the basic tech equipment needed for our video streaming.

These successes are meaningful and I must commend everyone for their efforts in making these happen during such uncertain times.

On the flip side, we have suffered because of closing our doors for six months. While video streaming has been able to keep us connected, it is not the same as being in worship together. Fortunately, we are slowly working our way back. Once the vaccine is fully distributed, we should be able to welcome everyone back into the building.

This lack of community and togetherness has also resulted in a general decline in many of the things we do and support as a church. We have managed to stay afloat, defer a few mortgage payments, and avoid staff cuts. But I do need to point out that our temporary relief is ending soon and monthly giving has dropped significantly over the past year. This is understandable as many families are struggling. Even

still, we will be starting a stewardship drive in January 2021 asking SOJ members to commit to a monthly giving amount they can afford at this time so we can budget our expenses responsibly.

All in all, I believe that we have weathered this pandemic as well as we could. I look forward to the day when we can look back on this with a great sigh of relief.

Yours in Christ,

Jim Saudargas

## **PASTOR'S REPORT**

*Ryan Gerlach*

We had such high hopes for 2020. It was the year of vision - a year of hope for a better future - a clear road to where Spirit of Joy was headed. We didn't journey too far before the path ahead of us looked quite different. Phrases like "new normal," and "we're all in this together," and "social distancing," were added to our vocabulary. We had to flip the script on how SPIRIT OF JOY has always operated: We had to say things like, "don't come to church," and "don't hug or shake hands," and "don't talk or hangout after church," and "don't come up to the table for communion," and "share the peace from a distance," - at times, it seemed overly dire.

But through it all, we've come to find that God was still God. Church was still church. Love was still love.

Through it all, God's embrace never loosened - God's grace never wavered- Christ's tomb was still empty

In holy scripture we find that God is always with us in all things. These are the verses that guided our hearts and gave us strength in 2020:

*Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. — 2 Corinthians 4:16-18*

*The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. — Deuteronomy 31:8*

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience — Colossians 1:9-11

*The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; though he may stumble, he will not fall for the Lord upholds him with his hand. — Psalm 37:23-24*

*I wait patiently for God to save me; I depend on him alone. He alone protects and saves me; he is my defender, and I shall never be defeated. — Psalm 62:1-2*

*My mind and my body may grow weak, but God is my strength; he is all I ever need. — Psalm 73:26*

*When I lie down, I go to sleep in peace; you alone, O Lord, keep me perfectly safe. — Psalm 4:8*

*How awesome is God as he comes from his sanctuary— the God of Israel! He gives strength and power to his people. Praise God all people! Praise God! — Psalm 68:35*

Whatever 2021 holds in store for spirit of joy, we welcome it, full knowing God is with us and will continue to guide us and give us strength. A gigantic thanks be to God and to every single one of you who prayed, encouraged, and embodied Church during this last year. Continue to love God, welcome the stranger, and love your neighbor – all with a SPIRIT OF JOY!

### **MUTUAL MINISTRY TEAM, *Ron Timmermans***

The Mutual Ministry Team functions as SoJ's Human Resource Committee and advises the Leadership Council on HR actions; additionally the Mutual Ministry Team provides support and care for SoJ Staff/Volunteer Leaders and acts as a liaison between SoJ Congregation and the SoJ staff.

The MM Committee has been largely inactive during 2020 and is now in need of a new chairman.

Early in 2020, the SoJ President asked the MM Committee to begin a search for a part-time Director of Youth Ministry. They took action on the following items:

- Contacted the Florida-Bahamas Synod office and received sample position descriptions for similar positions established at other parishes.
- Reviewed the sample position descriptions and forwarded the best fit to selected members of the Leadership Council.
- No further direction received from the Leadership Council as the grip of the Coronavirus was realized throughout SoJ, so no further action was taken by the MM Committee.

Chairman of the MM Committee asked the SoJ President to identify a new leader to replace the current Chairman. No one has yet been identified to fill this leadership position. The current Chairman of MM Committee will gladly remain on the team, just not in a leadership role.

## **MEDIA AND MUSIC MINISTRY, *Jose Aenlle***

**SOJ Participants:** Ryan Gerlach, Laura Aenlle, Darryl B., Jack E., Hunter V., Armando E., Adam C., Easton C., Albert L., Jose M.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the digital media ministry is to broadcast our Sunday worship and special events, especially during this time of social isolation due to the pandemic. Another purpose is to provide content that helps support Sunday services and other special activities in the form of short films, interviews, readings, TV show style VBS, etc. This ministry also serves to document and advertise special events such as Trunk or Treats, VBS videos, and any event not related to Sunday services.

The music ministry's function is to lead the congregation in worship during services. This year has been different due to the current pandemic; the music ministry was forced to merge with the media ministry. Both groups have had to work in unison to integrate a meaningful worship experience for both a live congregation and those worshipping remotely.

**How many has your ministry served in 2020?** See below as these numbers can be reflected in different ways:

- Devices = 51,037
- Watch time in minutes = 373,209
- Subscribers gained = 276
- Viewers' geographies = United States, Canada, India, Australia, United Kingdom, and what YouTube describes as "Other".
- Audience average age = 35-45 years old; with 25-34 years old as a close second.

### **Highlights:**

1. When the pandemic hit, we were able to quickly adapt to broadcasting ONLY. This was a huge effort that involved the Worship Staff and volunteers that stepped up at a moment's notice in order to keep our church from going dark. I especially want to give a big thanks and shout out to Adam, Darryl, Armando, Jack and Hunter for being the ROCK of the team.
2. We were able to get younger SOJ members involved and EXCITED about the ministry.
3. We created a professional production of VBS which by itself has been viewed over 20,000 times. We had churches outside of our community reach out to see how they could donate to our efforts and many of them wanting to use these videos for the 2021 VBS season.
4. In the middle of the pandemic, we made one video EVERY DAY at 7:11pm for 68 days (68 videos) in an effort to connect with our congregation on a daily basis while the lockdowns were in place.
5. Apart from the daily 7:11 videos and Sunday broadcast, we produced 48 videos of additional content.

**Ministry Changes:** The biggest change has been how SOJ has invested and supported the Digital Media Ministry. I feel that God has been preparing us for a few years to broadcast completely online. We used the difficulties of COVID-19 to make our ministry stronger which in turn has greatly benefited our staff and congregants. In addition, investing in technologies like the NAS has allowed me to create content without sacrificing hard drive space on the editing machines. Continued investments in technologies that allow for professional workflows is an important part in keeping this ministry producing quality

content while getting others involved in the process, mainly with a focus on our youth so they can learn some tech skills that might help them in the future.

**Looking Ahead:** In 2021, we will continue to provide unique online experiences in order to help the church reach those that are staying home, at-risk, and those outside our community. We will continue to get more of our youth involved and trained on the tech equipment. Finally, we will begin streaming on other social platforms (Facebook, Instagram) in order to reach a wider audience.

## **CHILDREN'S MINISTRY, *Laura Aenlle and Melissa Casebolt***

The number of children that joined us for Sunday School each weekend averaged between 16-20 student from January through mid-March. This included the Nursery, PreK - 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and 3rd - 5th grade. We had a rotation of Sunday School teachers and everything was going well. But COVID changed all of this for us at the end of March, and so we adapted. Thankfully, we were able to still do First Communion (4 students) and VBS FunShop in the beginning of the year. The remainder of the year required virtual participation for our children's ministry; we offered a virtual scavenger hunts at Easter and began offering online activities and worksheets for kids to engage with at-home during the worship service. We also decided to offer a weekly children's message during service once again, which was definitely a welcomed blessing to prepare.

The highlights of our ministry are always Vacation Bible School and the Christmas Musical. These had to be adapted this year, yet still they were very successful with the help of amazing selfless volunteers.

- **Funshop:** Our church was chosen once again to host a FunShop by Group VBS. As compensation, we received \$300 worth of decorations, a \$100 Walmart gift card, an \$800 credit to specific VBS materials and we got to keep all the crafts created during the event. Thankfully, this took place just two weeks before the shutdown. With all these resources, we were very motivated and well prepared to create an alternative online experience for VBS.
- **VBS:** We partnered with St. Stephen Lutheran Church to make Rocky Railway Virtual VBS a reality. We had more than enough resources from our Media Team, FunShop, Thrivent Grants and generous donations from both churches. This allowed us to do the event completely free of cost to both congregations. We had 20+ amazing volunteers lead in different areas, and we had 250+ children from Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Puerto Rico participate in our daily livestream. They all received a "Stay on Track Student Pack" that provided them with all the important supplies to follow along with the livestream. Following the week of VBS, Rocky Railway continued reaching people all over the country and the world. Over the months that followed, we received countless emails from churches requesting permission to use our VBS for their children's ministry. It was incredible to see how God turned a negative situation into the best VBS we have ever had at Spirit of Joy. Our videos continue to reach and gain views beyond anything we could have ever anticipated. Over 20,000 combined views to date!
- **The Christmas Musical, Jingle Bell Beach,** came as a welcomed break from the isolation our children had experienced all summer. We had to adhere to a lot of safety measures during rehearsals and the performance. But none of this hindered the experience one bit. This musical built on the children's faith formation in such a fun way! We had a part for all that wanted to participate, even those friends who couldn't be present had a part in our Nativity Scene video. It was incredibly beautiful to see new and established families come together and become more involved. The children's self-esteem soared, and meaningful connections were made with all who participated. The Children's Ministry Party at the Casebolt's home that always takes place the

weekend after the musical was so special! New families joined us and beyond all odds, our ministry grew. All of this was God's hand at work!

### **INFINITY YOUTH, *Shana Hales***

Infinity Youth had many things planned this year but we had to change direction due to the Covid-19 virus. The first part of the pandemic, the kids met virtually with Pastor Ryan on a weekly basis, just to connect and have fellowship with each other. During the summer, the kids safely gathered together at Second Harvest Food bank, where they packed food boxes to be distributed throughout Orange County. The kids also helped with our Back to School supply drive; the youth gathered to help sort and pack the bags of school supplies and the high-schoolers passed out the bags during the drive-through event. Additionally, the youth were able to help with church landscaping and other cleanup projects for a "Give Back Saturday" event. In the fall we cautiously started meeting for Youth Group and Confirmation class again on the first and third Sundays. We are praying for greater growth in 2021, and hope to resume our regular activities like the Luther Rock trip over the summer.

### **SPLASH ZONE PRESCHOOL, *Laura Aenlle***

Our little preschool has always been a non-profit outreach ministry of Spirit of Joy since its inauguration. Our mission is to provide a Christ-centered learning environment where children ages one through four-years-old are educated and nurtured to ensure an overall positive academic and spiritual journey. We take pride in our safe and welcoming environment where children feel loved, where they grow in their knowledge of the Bible, and where they develop physically, mentally, socially, spiritually and emotionally.

Our school year starts in August and ends in May. Usually, we get to see the tail end of the previous year's students graduate, and a new group of families join our roster in August. However, it was quite different this year. We went on spring break and didn't come back due to COVID-19. We could not do our usual end of the year events, and our very active calendar came to a halt.

**Virtual Activities During Shutdown:** We were closed from mid-March through the end of June. During this time, we continued engaging with our student body doing weekly online chapel livestreams, sending out student homework packets and recording video of teachers reading a book for virtual story time. Every Wednesday morning, we would gather online and have a blast learning about God and doing praise and worship together. Priceless moments.

**Soft Opening in the Summer:** At the end of June, we did a soft opening with fewer than 10 students and only Mrs. Laura teaching three days a week. This was instrumental in getting the ball rolling once again. The teachers and Preschool Committee came together to make some big changes inside of the preschool. This helped create a safe and sanitary environment for our students. We had to change our pickup and drop off procedures with health and safety measures in place. With the help of our Media Team, we were able to create informational videos for our families which clearly communicated new policies. So far, we have not had any students sick with Covid-19 at all.

**Fall Registration Numbers:** Once August came along, we were ready to kick off the school year. We were only able to open two classrooms with limited staff. The drop in registration was consistent with what

other preschools in the area were experiencing at the time. We were breaking even financially, but recognized the immediate need to increase student enrollment quickly. We worked with the Leadership Council to enhance our promotional strategy and visibility in the community. We also used the Trunk or Treat event as an opportunity to advertise the preschool. Our efforts paid off and student enrollment increased steadily from October through December. We plan to revamp the preschool website in 2021 to give our digital presence a much needed facelift.

**Lutheran Counseling Partnership:** A new partnership emerged in 2020 between Lutheran Counseling Services and SplashZone Preschool. LCS received a grant to provide free counseling services to preschool children and their families; they chose SplashZone as the recipient of these services. The counseling sessions are provided free to the preschool and its families, which is a huge blessing since this year has been so difficult.

Finally, the Preschool Committee led by Karen Saudargas continues to be a strong supporter and invaluable resource for SplashZone. We are infinitely grateful for their support and love to this ministry.

### **CONVERGE, *Katherine Smith***

**SOJ Participants:** Chuck Call, John Rendle, Ellen, Rendle, and Shana Hales, with guest appearances from the SOJ Youth Group, Melissa Casebolt, Pam Hoepner and Pam Rousseau.

**Purpose of Ministry:** To provide a distribution venue between food collection teams and area food pantries in East Orange County.

CONVERGE Food Ministries serves the homeless, unemployed and/or underemployed individuals and families in East Orange County. Despite interruptions in service due to COVID-19 from March through October, CONVERGE served over 200 individuals each month in 2020. One of our food pantries, Woodbury Presbyterian Church, shut down their efforts, but we were able to replace them with Lawton Chiles Elementary. CONVERGE collected a record monthly 1,873 pounds of food in November 2020, only to be topped by collecting 2,022 pounds in December 2020. From 2019 to 2020, we successfully involved the SOJ Youth Ministry to create a multi-generational volunteer effort. In 2021, CONVERGE Food Ministries plans to continue the momentum garnered in late 2020 to continue to collect and sort food to be distributed to our community. We will seek SOJ initiatives for gathering food donations from SOJ parishioners and seek nearby food pantries for distribution.

### **SERVE TEAM, *Pete Westlake and Amy Nation***

Report to be collected by Pete Westlake.

### **DRAMA TEAM, *Sandy Gaston***

The Drama Team, led by Doug and Sandy Gaston, consists of creative volunteer brainstormers, writers, clowns, actors, and directors. The purpose of the Drama Team is to enhance worship by introducing the theme of Sunday's sermons as well as partner with other ministries in marketing endeavors.

In 2020, we had a robust Easter season plan that included Wednesday evening performances focused on families and children as well as a large cast Reader's Theatre piece for Good Friday. Much of it was discontinued due to COVID-19 restrictions.

We did execute on successful video projects that included:

- A Lenten service promo and two episodes with child puppeteers voicing characters talking to adult actors
- Momma B appearances included:
  - Social Distancing
  - Easter 2020 Fashion Show
  - The Angel Tree Promo

We offer praise and thanksgiving for the success of the Phase 2 Capital Campaign to upgrade the equipment necessary to continue building a web-based congregation at Spirit of Joy. And, as we look forward to 2021, we will factor in the visual experience of a *video* audience as well as the *live* audience in our project offerings.

Anyone interested in participating in this ministry is asked to contact Sandy Gaston at 407-235-5153 and/or send an email to [drama@spiritofjoy.org](mailto:drama@spiritofjoy.org).

## **PARISH NURSE/HEALTH MINISTRY**

*Holly Jezek, RN, CNOR, Parish Nurse*

Mebers: Lisa Stuckey Fowler, RN; Mary Rose Metzler, RN

Our ministry is dedicated to the health of our church: mind, body and spirit.

This year was not what we had plan for the parish nurse ministry. It is said we plan, and God laughs. Not sure it was laughter, but maybe a reminder to stop, listen and reflect on what is important to us.

For the parish nurse ministry, the planned year was a washout, as far as programs and fundraisers. But one highlight was our February Heart Health posters and fun questions with, of course, candy. Covid put a stop to our programs at church and other places. But we continued to work, and care for those in our respective areas.

We plan to reset in 2021. We will have some zoom meetings, and perhaps some outdoor meetings to determine our steps for the next year. We will plan for some zoom type programs for our members to attend/interact with. If there is any topic you would like our ministry to address, please let us know. For now, our budget and goals will be reset the same as last year, hoping to bring information and care to our church and members. God's blessings for the new year

## **BICYCLE MINISTRY, Ken Raue**

SOJ Participants: Rick Hoepner, Brent Daum



Purpose: To recycle bicycles to those in need of basic transportation.

Our clients are the homeless, the unemployed, the underemployed, and those who are financially and mechanically challenged.

The COVID-19 pandemic eliminated our primary sources of bikes. Prior to the Pandemic Shutdown, the Bike Ministry Shop was open on five Saturdays from January to March. Since the shutdown, the shop has only opened twice. This resulted in 31 people receiving bikes and only a couple of bikes being repaired.

Looking at the projected obstacles for 2021, the Bike Ministry will be closing its operations prior to April 2021. Projected obstacles include uncertainty about bike resources, the limitation on number of people allowed in the repair shop space, fire code restriction of storing tires, tubes, and lubricants inside building, limitation of volunteers, and my desire to step away from the ministry as coordinator.

### **BACK TO SCHOOL DRIVE-THRU EVENT, *Mary Ellen Beatty***

In 2019, our school supply collection drive was held in conjunction with a large-scale community event, National Night Out. That was a pivotal outreach event for Spirit of Joy because it reinvigorated our mission to serve and showed us what we were capable of with God's help. In the summer of 2020, it wasn't yet safe to host a large-scale event in the community. But that didn't stop us from providing help to families who were stressed and worried about returning their children to school in an uncertain environment.

We adapted the event to be a "drive-thru" model and safely distributed 212 care packages of school supplies the week before the start of school in Orange County. The Infinity Youth Group was an integral part of this event, helping to pack the bags ahead of time and distribute them at the drive-thru. Karen Saudargas and Mary Emery also deserve special thanks for helping to organize.

### **TRUNK OR TREAT EVENT, *Laura Aenlle and Mary Ellen Beatty***

By October 2020, schools and churches were back in session and the community was starting to resume outdoor events. We decided to plan a socially distant Trunk or Treat event in the parking lot of the church to give children and families something to look forward to around the Halloween holiday. It was also a great way to get our congregation back integrated into SOJ life after worshipping virtually from home most of the summer.

Over 500 people showed up with their kids in costume. We served free hotdogs for dinner, organized crafts, featured live music from our worship team, and incorporated some of the groups who rent space in the SOJ building (Karate group, ASM Studios, LCS, etc.). Additionally, we successfully featured the SplashZone Preschool at this event, which resulted in increased interest and enrollment in the following weeks. Special thanks to Laura Aenlle for her vision and follow-through to make this event safe and successful.

## ANGEL TREE MINISTRY, *Maria Belk*

SOJ Participants: Maria Belk, Diane Belk, Pam Hoepner, Brent Baum

Purpose of Ministry: To provide Christmas gifts (valued at around \$25) to mostly homeless children in two neighboring elementary schools near SOJ. In 2020 we also provided nonperishable food to one of the schools upon their requests because their food pantry was running very low.

Who does your ministry serve?

- Homeless Kids/families in Lawton Chiles Elementary School and Union Park Elementary School

How many people has your ministry served in 2020?

- 52 kids with Christmas gifts (from both schools) and needy families of Lawton Chiles with pantry food

What are 2-3 highlights or success stories?

- 52 homeless kids received Christmas presents this year
- SOJ donated more than 200lb of food for food pantry to help families of those kids
- This is the email we received from Bonita Kelly at Union Park Elementary School on December 14, 2020

"I wanted to thank you and the church for thinking of Union Park Elementary and the generous donation of gifts you made to our students and families. During this time of the pandemic and loss of income for many families, your donations were so much appreciated and has helped many of the students receive Christmas gifts this holiday season. We are so very blessed to have The Spirit of Joy Church supporting us this year and the many years past. Thank you again for all you do.'

How did your ministry change or develop from 2019 to 2020? Or how did COVID-19 impact your ministry operations?

- During 2020 we were able to adapt and start accepting donations in new ways (online via tithe.ly app/website) as well as traditional methods with checks/cash. One person from the Angel Tree team then did the shopping online to minimize Covid-19 exposure risk and the Angel Tree Team worked together to get all the tasks and logistics accomplished in order to provide gifts to children in need.

Tell us what 2021 will bring for your ministry? What will you do differently to maintain relevance and impact during this global pandemic?

- 2020 Taught us that donations can come in any form, and not necessarily from people attending SOJ in person, so that is very hopeful and reassuring. We will do what it takes to maintain relevance and adapt as necessary. Where there is a will, there is a way! It's all for the children.

### **Scouts Report, *Chuck Call***

Covid had its expected results on our scout units' activities. The Cub Scout pack did not recharter for next year due to limited kids available for the coming year. The Boy Scout Troop, however, remains active. Two boys have passed their Eagle Scout Boards of Review. I sat on both boards and was pleasantly surprised with the boys' mature and thoughtful responses to the questions posed by the board members. These young men have learned well the ideals sponsored by the Boy Scouts of America.

### **WOMEN'S BOOK CLUB, *Diane Belk***

The Women's Morning Book Club began the year by reading the biography of Tara Westover, "Educated," and followed it with "The Tattooist of Auschwitz." In March, we suspended our meetings because of Covid. We hope to resume our discussions when it is safe to do so.

### **SOJ MAMA'S BOOK CLUB, *Mary Emery***

SOJ Mamas book club got off to a good start for 2020, Jennifer Schimit and I planned all 12 books for the year, thank goodness! Although we did not meet face to face this year, we did do some virtual meeting through our facebook group page. We are hoping to get back to meeting in person in 2021!

### **ADULT LITERACY LEAGUE *Mitz Oates***

The Adult Literacy League provides free training to anyone who would like to help change a life through literacy and education. SOJ provides a meeting space for SOJ tutors to empower adults to become self-sufficient in all aspects of life. There is only one student and one tutor at this time. Please contact Mitz Oates if you know someone who could benefit from this service or who would like to help tutor.