

Cedar Ridge Plan: January-March 2021

December 2020

Introduction

Cedar Ridge has been unable to gather together as a whole for more than 8 months. Yet despite the restrictions on meeting, and the considerable emotional strain of the situation—in addition to economic hardship for some, and additional time demands for others—our community remains strong. Sunday online attendance is relatively high and consistent, and financial giving has until very recently remained close to 100 percent of the target. (See Metrics below for more detail on this.) We have found new ways to connect, and each week there are new stories about individuals and groups caring for one another and maintaining a sense of community throughout this difficult time. Our community is creatively finding new ways to be church.

Nevertheless, no one expected the pandemic to lead to such prolonged restrictions. Hopes for a return to in-person meeting have been repeatedly deferred. Current trends in infection rates are worsening, and we are continually reminded that it is incumbent upon all of us to exercise caution. As we head into winter, the weather is getting less conducive to outdoor meetings, further limiting our options.

The pandemic is continuing to reveal and exacerbate economic inequity in our society—inequality that disproportionately impacts people of color. Racial injustice may be less prominent on the daily news than it was earlier this year, but the many deep-rooted attitudes and systemic problems remain. In addition, the political situation continues to be tense and uncertain. In this current context, our annual goal to *work together for social justice, empowered by an ongoing experience of God's unconditional love* remains highly relevant. So, for this next quarter, we remain committed to this goal, and continue to look ahead with hope to a time when we can gather safely again.

Quarter 1 Progress

During the first three months of the year (September–November), progress was made towards achieving our quarter 1 objectives:

1. Renew and recalibrate our commitment to social justice
 - Concluded a successful farm year and promoted food justice through the harvest service
 - Continued to demonstrate our commitment to local schools through food and gift card support to 20 Greencastle families each month, and a fall drive resulting in very generous donations of winter clothes and art supplies to Greencastle and Galway Elementary schools
 - Held 2 Racial Justice Encounter group meetings and 2 safe space meetings for people of color; sent 1000 Get Out The Vote postcards and did phone-banking in partnership with the interfaith group Reclaim Our Vote; formed a group to address issues in police and criminal justice reform; and retooled the free little library as a resource for racial justice books
 - Purchased another round of food for 100 families in Ipala; and Guatemala team began discussions of how our justice principles can be better applied to our partnership there

2. Renew our spiritual lives and revitalize our capacity and energy for our work

- Held pre-recorded Sunday services live over Zoom, allowing real-time community interaction
- Produced online content for children each week, and held weekly in-person events for youth on the property
- Discipleship groups continued to meet remotely and outside on the property
- Held an in-person relaunch event, 2 Evening Prayer Practice events, and a Journey class
- Provided pastoral care, including COVID financial assistance to people facing economic hardship
- Hosted social events including 2 movie nights and 4 yoga and meditation classes

Goal and Objectives

Our goal for the year is to work together for social justice, empowered by an ongoing experience of God's unconditional love.

The second quarter (January-March) objectives are very similar to quarter 1 objectives, given their broad scope and the brevity of a single quarter:

1. Develop plans and practices to enact our commitment to social justice
2. Develop a sustainable rhythm of spiritual practice that enriches our lives and empowers us for this work

Metrics

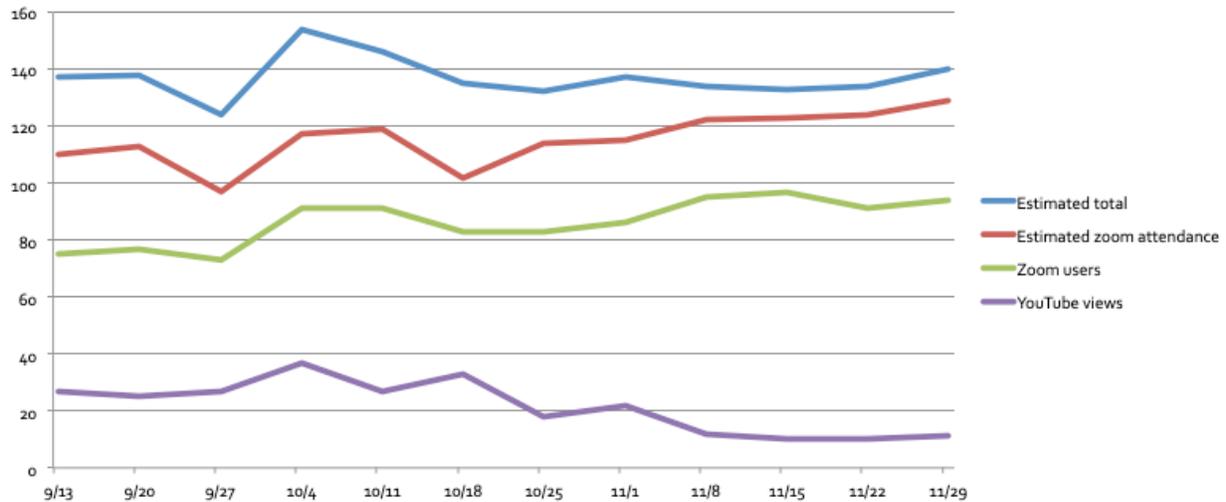
This year, we are tracking two quantitative measures of community engagement: (i) tithes and offerings, and (ii) viewership of the Sunday worship service. In addition, we are using an evaluative monitoring approach to assess progress towards our goal and objectives in each of our ministry areas.

At the end of November, tithes and offerings totaled \$150K. This is under-budget by \$7K (5%) although an additional \$5K had been donated to Guatemala and the COVID Financial Assistance fund. In addition, generous in-kind contributions were made to the monthly Greencastle food deliveries and the fall drive for winter clothes and art supplies. The shortfall in tithes and offerings is being addressed through a year-end giving campaign.

Since the shift to live Zoom services on September 13, Sunday morning attendance has quite consistently remained in the 110-120 range, with an upward trend over the past month. In the graph below:

- YouTube views are the total number of views of the message since posting to date. No analysis has been done on the length of time the video was viewed, the number of unique viewers, or the entry point (e.g., search engine, website link). Anecdotal evidence suggests Sunday morning service attenders sometimes go back to a message later in the week to review some aspect.
- Zoom users refers to the total number of devices connected (minus one for hosting).
- Estimated zoom attendance refers to the total number of people counted in the service (i.e., the total number of family members seen online).

Sunday service viewership by type



Activities

As we head into the winter, we need to ensure an activity schedule that is realistic. Colder weather will limit outdoor gatherings, and the pandemic severely restricts opportunities for indoor gatherings. While technology offers the possibility to meet virtually, many people are expressing “Zoom fatigue” and are looking to reduce their screen time, and that of their children. We are therefore seeking to strike a balance between continuing to move forward with our vision and maintain a sense of community, while also not adding to our collective sense of being overwhelmed.

Activities contributing to Objective 1: Develop plans and practices to enact our commitment to social justice

- Relaunch advocacy for increased and equitable public school funding, and continue our support to local schools (especially Greencastle Elementary)
- Hold an online event to mark Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and provide attendees with action steps
- Develop a plan to address specific local issues in the criminal justice system
- Continue to provide online gatherings to support people of color
- Finalize the FY21 plan to integrate racial justice issues into Cedar Ridge Kids (CRK), and facilitate youth engagement in racial justice initiatives
- Continue to realign activities and methods to strengthen the justice focus of our work in Guatemala
- Continue to integrate social justice into Sunday services and discipleship group materials

Activities contributing to Objective 2: Develop a sustainable rhythm of spiritual practice that enriches our lives and empowers us for this work

- Continue to transmit pre-recorded services live over Zoom on Sunday mornings to allow real-time community interaction
- Continue to innovate with CRK (such as unstructured Zoom calls or book readings) and to promote the use of resources

- Hold weekly Zoom gatherings for youth during the winter months, including mental health check ins
- Hold monthly evening prayer practices online through the cold winter months
- Continue to expand in-house song recordings and explore other possible worship elements
- Develop and hold an online Ash Wednesday service, as well as Lenten challenges for individual/group use
- Continue to use the COVID Financial Assistance fund to support community members in need

Upcoming Series

The series descriptions below are tentative and will be influenced by a number of factors, including current events, cultural pressures, and community responses to previous series.

New Year series

Following on from our Advent series “A Christmas Carol,” we will introduce the overlapping themes of transformation and hope in our New Year service.

This will be followed by a 3-week mini-series “Stories of Transformation,” which will explore the challenge, nature, and possibility of change. The series will include stories and interviews with people from our community, and will highlight our objectives of social justice and self-care.

Beginning January 31, we will launch a second 3-week mini-series, titled “Hope Changes Everything,” based on 1 Thessalonians. In this brief and tender letter, Paul writes to encourage troubled followers to stay true to the way of Jesus: to labor for the sake of love, to live pure and blameless lives, and to be steadfast in their hope for the future.

Lent series

During the 7-week Lenten period, we will explore Jesus’ 7 “I am…” statements recorded in John’s gospel. Through this series, we will seek to engage with the mystery and esoteric nature of Jesus statements, as well as grounding each of them in real life practicality. The series will culminate in the Easter-themed pronouncement: “I am the resurrection and the life.”

Draft Calendar

Date	Event	Notes
Sun Jan 3	New Year service	First Sunday
Sun Jan 10	Stories of Transformation 1	
Wed Jan 13	Evening Prayer Practices	
Sun Jan 17	Stories of Transformation 2	
Mon Jan 18	MLK Day event	
Sun Jan 24	Stories of Transformation 3	
Sun Jan 31	Hope Changes Everything 1	
Sun Feb 7	Hope Changes Everything 2	First Sunday
Wed Feb 10	Evening Prayer Practices	
Sun Feb 14	Hope Changes Everything 3	
Wed Feb 17	Ash Wednesday service	

Sun Feb 21	Lenten series 1	
Sun Feb 28	Lenten series 2	
Sun Mar 7	Lenten series 3	First Sunday
Sun Mar 14	Lenten series 4	
Sun Mar 21	Lenten series 5	
Sun Mar 28	Lenten series 6	
Fri Apr 2	Good Friday service	
Sun Apr 4	Easter	All ages