

Advent & Incarnation 2020

Our Dear Friends,

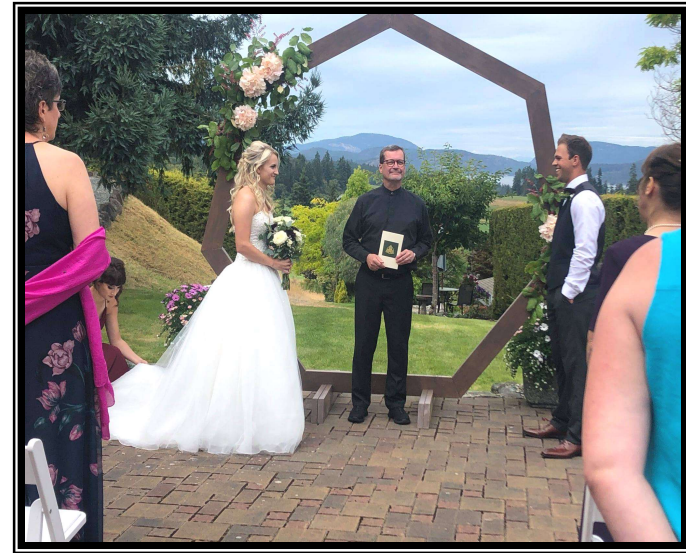
What an odd time in which we now live. Isn't it a kind of 'dark joke' that the year 2020 should coincide precisely with virtually every person on the planet being deprived of 20/20 vision—medically, vocationally, socially and financially?

Ah, we McDougalls write our Family Letter this year to ENCOURAGE you and to eagerly invite you to look forward to wondrously new horizons ahead. Yes, times are strange and yes, our individual and community ability to ever-adjust is a real stress BUT perhaps we can buoy up your spirit during the challenges.

Just this afternoon, we normally would have all four of us McDougalls gathered together to trim our Christmas tree (which Sandi and Morrigan cut down this past weekend) but Connally is house-bound in Vancouver while we're in Victoria. But even as I write this, I hear 'my girls' laughing together while Connally is streamed in via video call while Sandi and Morri decorate the tree.

Can you imagine the separation that immigrants and their kin experienced long before the coming of e-services which keep us at least virtually connected? Years ago, my own father commented that when he and his newly-transplanted family were serving in Ethiopia seventy years ago, they rarely received actual 'news' but only 'history'—the death of a family member, business transactions and national events—weeks, even months after their occurrence.

So just to encourage you, let me tell you about some unexpected blessings that have arisen during Covid-19 times—not just 'stumbings' but genuine strides forward during otherwise awkward times. Perhaps it will bolster your own steps forward in grace.



This past August, I was privileged to officiate at a wedding between two beloved friends. COVID safety protocol was firmly in place but it was a thoroughly delightful celebration.

Additionally, our communication with UVic's international and grad students (as well as faculty and staff) continues unabated. In fact, our horizons have actually expanded because we're no longer confined to UVic students who are currently 'living local' but also to those who are registered at UVic but now living (for COVID protocol reasons) literally around the globe. Of course, we've had to adjust our Zoom conference call times to accommodate folks from many different time-zones but our conversations have been encouragingly rich and absolutely vital for spiritual connection and mutual care.



Yes, during stretching times we have managed to nurture friendships, spiritual inquiry and plain ol' camaraderie. None of this is ideal BUT it has brought unexpected fruit and fruitfulness when we least expected it. I've often recalled over the past months that the Apostle Paul did some of his BEST work while in literal lock-down in prison. And by God's grace, we still benefit from Paul's lock-down letters to this day!

Some Family News . . .

- Our beloved older daughter Connally continues to excel at clothing design but she's recently added exotic houseplants to her repertoire. I consider myself an able gardener but Connally has the special knack of resurrecting ailing plants. Apparently, she has not only a 'green thumb' but a 'magic thumb' as well.
- Our dear younger Morrigan is proving herself to be an absolute whiz at both textile arts (weaving, spinning, etc) and people skills (noticing, caring, loving). Frankly, I've often thought that if we were in the Catholic tradition, Morri would make an excellent caring nun, because she's just so Godward and others-oriented.

- And we two—Daniel & Sandi? Sandi's doing stellar pastoral care among our student friends. But I (Daniel) have been enduring the ravages of vertigo since cataract lens replacements sixteen months ago, although Zoom call connections have remained without difficulty. Yup, it's strange, it's debilitating, discouraging and somewhat cognition-limiting (I'm finding that I HAVE to make lists, lest I forget normally easily-remembered items on my to-do list). PLEASE don't worry about me: I'm receiving good care from various professionals BUT in the meantime, I'm having to rely on my dear bride Sandi to make appointments and deal with plain ol' 'vertical challenges' that require step-stools or power tools. ☺



For your encouragement . . .

- Even though our present world seems 'on edge' as polarized politics, natural disasters and perennial unfairnesses rear their heads, our God is STILL at work. We are privileged to see this firsthand as students and scholars/professors/researchers from nations in conflict encounter a rescuing Jesus—the Prince of Peace—for themselves. And without any nudging at all from us, they themselves begin to observe former adversaries with new eyes—even friendship.

And for your prayers . . .

- Please pray for students experiencing a crisis of introduction ("who is this Jesus?") or a crisis of faith ("do I *really* believe the Good News?") or a crisis of commitment ("how will my family and colleagues react?"). Pray especially for students from cultures where saying 'yes' to Jesus entails the threat of real estrangement from loved ones and even physical danger.
- If what is happening through us among international students at UVic harnesses *your* passion for God's Kingdom, we would (of course) be delighted if you came alongside us in a practical way. If what God is doing through US captures YOUR heart, in Canada please contact me directly or International Student Ministries Canada at www.ismc.ca and in the U.S.A. www.isionline.org (a variety of donation mechanisms are available).

Dear, dear friends, in this season of Christ's Incarnation—he *really* came to be Emmanuel (God With Us) and by his Spirit he's still here! —be assured that we McDougalls are deeply encouraged by your prayers and support. And of course, we'd love to hear YOUR news! ☺

From our home to yours, blessings!

Daniel (for all four of us)

