

The Epistle

“No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house” (Matt. 5:15)

Five Skills We Need for this New Year

The pandemic has taught us some important lessons about how to take care of ourselves and each other.

BY DR. LEIF HASS | JANUARY 25, 2021

I was feeling the weight of 2020 last week when I went to visit Ms. K, a patient who had a particularly rough year. “This is the year I lost my, and now I am losing this battle with lung cancer all on top of the COVID-19 stress,” she said.

**“I learned something in 2020:
We all need each other, and we
all need love.”**

“But I learned something this year, too. I learned we all need each other, and we all need love.” As she said this, her eyes brightened and the heaviness that pervaded the room lifted, and I felt a warmth in my chest.

“Yes, you are right, and I need to keep that in mind, Ms. K,” I said. “We have learned some important things this year.”

As a doctor at Summit Medical Center in Oakland, California, I understand why people are saying 2020 was a world turned upside down or a “dumpster fire.” The public health system seemed to have failed us, causing much suffering among our patients and staff; as a result of the pandemic, death tolls climbed and the economy tanked, while people sat home feeling isolated.

Taking my cue from Ms. K, however, I have been trying instead to see 2020 as a world revealed. A world where we have a newfound appreciation for relationships and community. A world much more fragile than we had understood it to be. A world that needs our tender attention.

Understanding this is a start, but with so much tough stuff still weighing us down, how do we begin to move forward? Leaning on the research in social and cognitive sciences, I try to remain optimistic. It is in our DNA to care about the people in front of us and our community. What we need now are concrete ways to first foster our own well-being and then our relationships with others.

Here are some ideas that people have embraced in 2020 that we can all try to hold on to moving forward in 2021.

1. Humility

We were humbled scientifically by the coronavirus and socially by our threatened institutions. The only honest response is to set our egos aside, drop our preconceptions, and see what led to this series of failures.

As it turns out, being humbled can be a good thing. There is a rich body of research to suggest that humility first makes us question our assumptions, which often leads to listening to other people's ideas and adopting "a more other-oriented and less self-oriented outlook." Gratitude and a greater sense of connection with others follow. Humility is also a good first step in self-compassion; when we have a modest view of ourselves, we see our flaws more easily and can judge ourselves less harshly. This can be very helpful in dealing with personal setbacks.

Research suggests that humility can be cultivated. But more than ever, many people seem unwilling to question their own beliefs and entertain other perspectives. For myself and my colleagues, as clinicians to whom people look for answers, humility typically is not something we spend time developing.

Given that we have all had a big slice of humble pie in 2020, now is a good time to truly work at incorporating humility into our way of being. And it starts with quieting our inner voices that want to be right and deeply listening. For a month now, I have been challenging my belief that I have the answers, both at work and in my personal life. With a humbler approach to my interactions with others, better conversations ensued with better outcomes for all involved. Give it a try!

2. Compassion

Across the world, COVID-19 wrought tremendous suffering, and people felt the pull of compassion, which is defined as sensing suffering and moving to address it. Witnessing images of compassion on social media moved us, whether this was people visiting isolated neighbors or cheering for health care workers. For those of us lucky enough to be providing health care, we were inspired by our colleagues moving toward danger to express their compassion.

In order to feel compassion, one must witness the suffering of another—but that witnessing can be stressful, so we are sometimes inclined to avoid it. However, a simple acknowledgement, like thinking, "This person is suffering," is a humanizing act. While it doesn't stop the suffering, it tempers our negative emotions as we lose the tightness that denial entails.

For health care providers like me, compassion is foundational in how we move through our world, and it should be our greatest source of inspiration and energy. But all too often, we rush to the diagnosis and the treatment and miss the crucial step of generating compassion. Instead, take a moment to open your heart and quiet your mind when you first see your patient; their story will inevitably provoke compassion that will enliven you in the moment and give you positive energy going forward.

3. Awe

Awe is the feeling we get in the presence of something vast or beautiful that challenges our understanding of the world. It is something we depend on to keep life fresh. In 2020, those vacations to “awesome” places like New York City or the Grand Canyon didn’t happen, and this contributed to the flat feeling many people experienced. Awe makes us feel more alive, but, importantly, it also makes us more humble, more generous, and less self-centered.

This year, a new study demonstrated that awe can be cultivated, and we don’t need to travel the world to find it. A group of seniors were invited to go either on a brisk exercise walk or a walk where they were told to move more slowly but look carefully at their surroundings for wonder and beauty – an “awe walk,” in other words. Those on the awe walk reported a greater increase in positive emotions and social connection than the exercise group.

Go on a Walk Where You Move More Slowly and Look More Carefully for the Wonder and Beauty of Your Surroundings - Take an “Awe Walk”

So, if we are seeking awe, we can find it nearby if we take the time to look for it. People can be a great source of awe, too. With some purposeful attention, we can also find awe and inspiration in the beauty of the struggles people endure, and in the resiliency of the human spirit. So while we might not be making that “awesome” trip to Yosemite soon, we can all get filled with awe watching documentaries of inspiring moral or political leaders. I still get goosebumps every time I hear [Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s “I have a dream” speech!](#)

4. Purpose

A decade of research confirms that a meaningful life or a life well-lived has plenty of joy, but more importantly it involves a sense of purpose. While we are all a little joy-deficient now, 2020 certainly made up for that with opportunities to live with purpose.

Purpose is an abiding intention to achieve a long-term goal that is personally meaningful and makes a positive mark on the world. Wearing a mask, staying home in the spring and over the holidays, seeing patients despite the risks: This is living with purpose. Many of us have found purpose in teaching our kids or caring for neighbors or in political and social activism.

But living with purpose requires stating our purpose. When the purposeful work we do becomes routine, we can easily fail to appreciate it. I have become friends with a former patient and every week he texts me, “Have a beautiful day on purpose!” After each text, I feel energized and approach my work with a more open heart. We all need reminders of why we do what we do, and what larger values it serves. If the pandemic has given you a deeper sense of what’s important, now is a good time to think about how you can serve those interests moving forward.

5. Love

As we know now, one of the few bright sides of 2020 was the greater sense of shared humanity that we developed—and with that, a greater sense of concern for others and an awareness of our need for connection.

We shouldn’t miss the opportunity to build upon this. For the sake of everyone’s health, we must use our influence in our families, communities, and exam rooms to advocate for what people now intuit—that an open-hearted, connected world is a healthier one. We need to talk about love.

I am not talking about romantic love but love as defined by researcher Barbara Fredrickson: a moment-to-moment experience of warm, mutual caring that we feel with any person—even strangers

—in everyday interactions. What she also calls (more dryly) “shared positivity” creates a mutual sense of well-being. According to her research, our brains are wired to look for this love and if we have this mindset, we can see the world as a source of expanding connectedness and well-being. I encourage everyone to see all our interactions with people—from those at the market to those with our friends and colleagues—as a sacred opportunity to open our hearts and create a more loving world.

It is amazing how close you can feel with a person, seeing them for only a few minutes a day during a time of crisis. Each day I saw Ms. K in the hospital, we had amazing, pithy little conversations. When she was feeling stronger and ready to go home, she said, “Thank you, Dr. Hass, for all you have done, and I’m glad you are almost through your 2020.”

“Well, we have all suffered, but we have become a little wiser as a result,” I replied. Then I took her hand, gently rubbed her back, and looked into her eyes for a moment. We both teared up as I said, “Along with medical care, I will try to make sure everyone leaves our med center with a little love, too!” ■

Moving Forward

We know we are experiencing one of the craziest times of our lives. Meanwhile, we work to stay together, even during our need to remain apart. Do you have an idea for a shared activity we can do together? Something you want to do as a Bible Study? Something we can do as a community for Cedar Grove? Any suggestions at all for us? Please let Pastor Todd or any other Session member know and we will be happy to explore our options and make it happen!



Thank You from the Guarena Family

Our Christmas Adopt-a-Family

Despite the later-than-usual planning and mad dash to get everything together for the Guarena family, our Adopt A Family mission was a great success this year. We were able to get everything on their wish lists and more! They were so grateful for the gifts and generosity of our faith family here

at UPCCG. The thank you card they sent us is hanging up on church on the bulletin board for anyone who wants to stop in and read it. In the note, Fatima (the mom) mentioned that her son, Joshua, told her it was the best Christmas ever! Jamie Lynn Adams spoke with her a few times and reports back that Fatima and the whole family were so kind and grateful for everything. Thank you all and your kindness and generosity toward this family, and for your help in making their Christmas extra special this year!

UPCCG Annual Meeting

Here's Your Invitation to Attend our First Ever VIRTUAL Annual Meeting

Please join us for our annual meeting that will be held virtually this year. More than ever, we think it is important to have our



meeting for our members here at UPCCG. The meeting be held on Sunday, February 7, following our online worship gathering on Zoom. We know it's Super Bowl Sunday, and we'll be finished with plenty of time to get ready for the Big Game!

We're asking all members to please participate and help us make sure we are ready for the new year. Since we cannot be together in person, it is crucial to be together via Zoom or phone so we can discuss the past year and what lies ahead. Please keep an eye out for the meeting materials that will be sent to you a day or two ahead of time. A couple of copies will also be made available at church in the Narthex for anyone who would like to drop in and view it. For those members who do not have email, their materials will be dropped off in person, if they are local.

If you have any questions, please let Jamie Lynn know. Despite the changing times, we are optimistic about the future and look forward to the year ahead.

See you on February 7th!

Human Needs Food Pantry

As you well know, we at UPCCG partner with the Human Needs Food Pantry of Montclair every chance we get. 2020 brought on one of the toughest years ever and their need increased dramatically for those families who lost jobs and fell on hard times because of the pandemic. In addition to anything we give monetarily through offerings, we hope we can continue to support them by helping out with the goods they need. If you find yourself out shopping with a little extra to spend, please consider picking up even one item and donating it to those in need. Here is a list of items they are always in need of:

Canned goods and non-perishable food items (no glass jars please)

Baby formula, diapers, and wipes

Fresh produce and baked goods (only if it can be delivered ASAP)

Feminine products

Soap, napkins, cleaners, personal hygiene goods

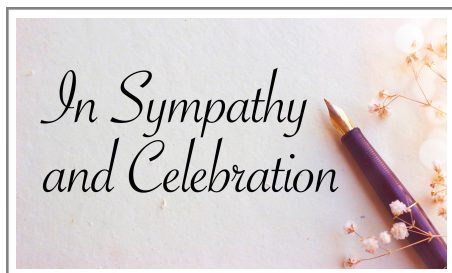
New sheets (Queen is most requested) and towels

Dog and cat food (wet or dry) and litter

They also have a wish list on Amazon that is updated regularly with their most needed items and it can be sent directly to them at any time. [You can find it online, by clicking here.](#)



Prayers of Deepest Sympathy



It is with a heavy heart we share the news of the passing of two beloved charter members of our church, BJ Middleswarth and Betty Stano. For many years, these two wonderful women, together with their families, were a part of the founding and building of the church family we love today. We appreciate the love, time, and talents they gave to us and wish our condolences to their families and friends. BJ and Betty, we are truly thankful for your legacies and wish you peace in your eternal life to come.

Let us pray – God of all our days, we thank you for the gift of life and for the promise of eternal life through your son, Jesus. While we give you thanks that your promises have become reality for Bf and Betty, their passing leaves a void in this life. Hear our prayers for their families and loved ones. We pray that you would surround them with peace and comfort this day, and in the days to come. In the name of our Savior Jesus we pray. Amen.



Gathering for Worship Online

Community and Communion on Zoom

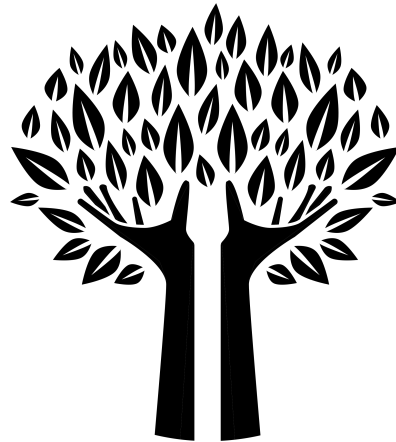
As our community life is transformed in many ways, we are so grateful that we are able to worship each week via Zoom networking.

As you know, Session has suspend “in-person worship” until further notice. We will hold worship services online each Sunday at our usual gathering time of 10:00am. Invitations with the details for attending both the worship services and the weekly check-ins are sent out each week. Further information about our online worship gatherings, and recordings of previous gatherings, can be found on the [church website](#).

Our zoom gatherings allow folks to participate via desktop computer, laptop, smartphone with audio and video. A dial-in number is also available if you prefer to participate by telephone. I invite you to follow the [United Presbyterian Church of Cedar Grove Facebook page](#) and tune in each week.



*The Epistle is a monthly publication of
The United Presbyterian Church of Cedar Grove*



The United Presbyterian Church
155 Commerce Road
Cedar Grove, NJ 07009
An Inclusive Community of Christians
Rooted and Grounded in Christ Since 1959
UPCCG.COM

