

Galileo Church
February 3, 2017

Dearly beloved,

Grace and peace to you in the name of God our Parent and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm writing this longish letter to communicate some things I've been thinking about the life, health, work, and care of our church. I've consulted with the church's servant-leaders (the Missional Logistics Team and the Care and Feeding Team) for help with these thoughts, and I'm grateful for their discerning wisdom.

1. A pastoral observation

We observe that it's been a grueling social-political season these past few months. Our families, our work places, our schools, and just about every public space are buzzing with conflict, negativity, and alarm. There is an onslaught of news every day, much of it truly frightening. Basic protections and kindnesses we thought we could take for granted, for ourselves and our neighbors, are jeopardized.

Many of us have reported feeling increased anxiety tending toward terror. Many of us convert fear into anger tending toward rage. These feelings can fuel productive action, but they can also lead to spiritual exhaustion, both personal and communal. Spiritual exhaustion often takes the form of overwhelming hopelessness. Negative changes seem sudden; working for positive change seems discouragingly slow.

2. The church's dilemma

The church in every place and every season is called to be engaged with the world God loves, speaking out against injustice and working diligently to pull God's future into this present moment, especially on behalf of neighbors who have less voice and more to lose. Galileo Church is committed to having a public voice in the cultural conversation about who has value (every human being!) and how our government demonstrates human value through public policy decisions. We are an activist church, and our voice has gotten stronger over our few years together, with the Spirit's help.

At the exact same time, the church in every place and every season is called to provide sanctuary from the world's brokenness. God intends that our communal life would produce peace in our hearts, and strengthen us for our individual lives. We are meant to multiply hope and joy for and with each other – not fake optimism or false cheer, but the deep-down hope and joy that come from remembering that God is in charge, despite all appearances to the contrary, even when we are in distress. This is our work for each other, and we're pretty good at that, too, with the Spirit's help.

The dilemma is, sometimes our call to prophecy (justice! engagement! protest!) and our call to pastoral care (kindness, sanctuary, caregiving) are in conflict with each other. Pastoral care can tend toward a kind of slothful escape from reality – not really our tendency. Prophetic engagement can tend toward a kind of alarmist frenzy – oops.

3. Recommendations

Keeping in mind that dilemma, and our collective preference for activism tending toward alarmism, we make the following recommendations.

- a. **Be careful with yourself, for the sake of your mental and spiritual health.** Absorb news and social media judiciously. Curate your feeds in Facebook, Twitter, etc., so that you're not assaulted with content that scares or enrages you so often. Listen to or read enough news to stay current, but try not to obsess. Choose a reliable newspaper online and check those headlines, rather than letting social media curate all the news you receive. Try using the "Groups" app for Facebook to stay connected while avoiding the trigger stuff that steals your hope.
- b. **Employ your *personal* social media voice with confidence.** Use it to inform each other about things you've learned from good, reliable sources. Recommend good reading to your web of connection. Announce your own actions with clarity and pride: "Here's what I'm reading; here's the next action I'm taking; here's what I'm praying for; here's where I gave money." Reveal yourself as an engaged Christian who actively loves this world God loves – whatever form that love takes for you.
- c. **Let Galileo Church remain a haven from the chaotic urgency of every alarm.** We do not mean that we are squelching political conversation at Galileo; we just mean that there are better and worse ways to have that conversation.

Please don't:

- **Please don't post each new Trumpian assault in the Galileo Facebook group.** Not everybody agrees on everything all the time. (For example, in the case of the Uber CEO who was on the president's economic council – some of us wanted to boycott Uber, while some of us making our living driving for Uber. Another example: some people think all our energy should go toward getting one Cabinet appoint disapproved, while others are much more worried about a Supreme Court appointment. Priorities differ; positions differ; even as we find common ground in wanting to make the world a more just and generous place. Respect the difference.)
- Please don't post language that makes it sound like everyone should show their activism in the same way. Some people are energized by public protest; others are praying powerfully at home; others have money to share to shore up front-line justice work; others are powerfully engaged in social media activism. It's easy to say that "everybody" or "we all" should show up or write a letter or make a call or give money or retweet – but it's almost never true or helpful.
- Please don't commandeer our weekly G-group conversations with litanies of political/social bad news, to the neglect of other kinds of conversation. People are still seeking work, coming out, grieving loss, celebrating change, loving their kids and dogs and cats; and all these things still need to be shared. Our G-groups are a great place to practice loving the neighbor who is sitting right in front of you. Some of our groups really enjoy political conversation, we know; perhaps they can consider setting aside a designated amount of time for it, then letting it go? We will not run out of bad news to share, it seems. But we can be the boss of how much of it we need on any given day.

Please do:

- Please do continue diligently in the disciplines of prayer and communal study of the Bible. Our G-groups are a rare opportunity to consult with each other about God's beautiful vision of the world God wants. Use your time together to do the things churches do – Bible study and prayer, shared over food and drink, as a sign of God's generous provision to us. Consider also whether your group might benefit from reading books that help inform the Christian way of life in the worst of times. Your church leaders have suggestions, if you need some.
- Please do let your discipleship of Jesus call you into deeper engagement with the world God loves. Follow your passion into activism – protest, boycott, write letters, phone the reps, whatever works for you – and share your experiences through your *personal* social media, so your church friends can rejoice with you and pray for you.
- **Please do trust the missional priorities of Galileo to guide our communal action**, developed over several years together, through the Spirit; derived from our strengths and gifts; and flexible enough to shift with our growing life in Christ.
- Please do trust the theologian-in-residence (that's me!) to continue to connect Biblical theology to the world as it is, always. The teaching and preaching we share is meant to show us each how to be the light of Christ in and for the world.
- Please do trust the Missional Logistics Team to call us to communal action when the time is right. We are keeping alert concerning local, state, and national policy issues that connect with our missional priorities. We are seeking opportunities for Galileo Church to exercise its voice all together. If you have ideas about that, you can contact any of the MLT members: Aisling, Allison, Corina, Kaytee B, Malcolm, Nathan, or Susan.
- Please do trust the Care & Feeding Team to care for you in your distress and to strengthen you for good work in the world. You can call on any of our shepherds for help: Aaron, Francine, Harmony, Jenny, Kyle M, Missy, Ros, or Travis.

4. Confession and benediction:

Your church leaders don't know yet exactly what Galileo Church is called to do and be in this new season. Most of us have never lived through anything like this. So we are working on it, faithfully and prayerfully. Will you pray for us, as we pray for you?

Receive this blessing from the ancient church, still our promise and our hope:

May the God of peace, God's own self, sanctify you entirely. May your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls us is faithful. God will do this. (1 Thess. 5:23-24)

grace and peace,

Katie, in consultation with the Missional Logistics Team and the Care and Feeding Team