

Dear friends,

April 2020

These have been difficult weeks for our country (indeed, for the whole world) and, like you, our fervent prayers have covered a lot of territory. We are, for instance, praying that God stops the China coronavirus; that He eases the economic and social disaster that faces us; that He teaches our leaders how to better deal with such crises without trampling on individual freedoms; that the dastardly designs to exploit this crisis by the radical left are defeated; and, most important of all, that God moves many hearts to repent of sin and turn to Jesus Christ Who alone can grant forgiveness, power, happiness, and an eternity in heaven.

But what has been happening specifically for Vital Signs Ministries? Well, despite the “Great Hunkering Down” that we’re all enduring (many under much stricter directives than Nebraska), Claire and I have been quite busy. And, in this month’s letter, I’ll try and briefly note some of the things we’ve been up to.



First of all, we have been trying to keep social contacts going as much as possible – and in ways that are both winsome and provocative so as to best counter the loneliness, fear, and boredom that are

pressing in on so many during these days of quarantine. One example is the signs we put in the front yard (shown here). They were amateur, to be sure, but colorful and our neighbors really appreciated the action. I think they appreciated even more the chocolate chip cookies that Claire baked for 9 of the households in our neighborhood! We have also opened the “Hartford Cafe” for early Tuesday and Thursday morning so that the close friends I usually see on those mornings at coffee shops can still meet. And yes – all sanitary procedures are being followed and we’re staying well within the guidelines set by the powers that be.

As you would expect, all of our “When Swing Was King” shows were cancelled for March and April (and who knows how long besides). Still, we are trying to keep meaningful ministry going there too. Thus far, we have created for the residents of all the



senior facilities where we're connected 6 different "activity packets" featuring history and pop culture quizzes, points to ponder (including an inspiring list of Easter quotations and Scriptures), and personal notes and photos. We send those over to the activity directors who then print them off and hand them around to the residents. They have been *very* warmly received and we will therefore keep creating these packets until we can start personal visits again. And, because we have made available all these "activity pages" on Vital Signs Blog and the Vital Signs Ministries website, others have taken advantage of the quizzes and quotations too. We have earnestly encouraged that, particularly urging people to share them with seniors and baby boomers they know who could use a little break from the tedium and loneliness. *Why not consider this yourself?* Again, you can find all the "activity pages" collected together in one place on our website.

Other avenues of connection that we have pursued during these quarantine weeks have been **1)** our traditional correspondence using the tried and true methods of cards, letters, email, and social media, and **2)** a brand new technology (new to us, anyhow) that is Zoom video calls. In that first category, we are writing even more cards and letters than usual. We even hosted our quarterly PAL Party (our group letter-writing meeting) via the internet this time around. And our social media efforts have increased too, including my compilation posts on Vital Signs Blog (alerts also tagged on our Facebook pages) which provide wiser and more useful perspectives on the news than that which pours out from general media. Check them out. And that second area, the Zoom calls? Well, after getting through the learning curve, we have now used Zoom to connect with family, church friends, several calls with friends in England, and so on. It's really neat.

Let's see, what other connections have we been able to maintain in these "Great Hunkering Down" days? Well, we have continued our pro-life witness at the Planned Parenthood abortion business. (We are rarely in danger of having more than 10 people together there!). You know how this works. We hold our attractive baby signs and banners so they can be seen by those going inside and those driving by. We pray. And, whenever possible, we speak to clients and staff. On the Monday morning after Palm Sunday, I was able to explain the whole Easter story to one of the guards and invite him to receive the awesome gift of salvation – an offer he refused to even acknowledge. But our duty (not to mention, our eternal blessing) is simply to tell the truth in love, no matter what one's response might be. Still, you might say a prayer for this fellow and, of course, for Claire and I and all of the compassionate, courageous friends who stand there as advocates for life. They all deeply appreciate your prayers as well.

I was honored to preach a Palm Sunday sermon for Emmanuel Fellowship here in Omaha. The sermon was "live streamed" that morning and is available on their website as well. Of course, there were only a handful of people at the church when we did the service but afterward I was greeted in the parking lot by a family who had listened to the "live stream" in their car from a laptop computer as they "hitch into" the church's wi-fi connection. Cool. Anyhow, I drove over to say "hey" and to thank them for the complements about the sermon they had shouted across the lot. *And I'm so glad I did!* For not only was it fun to talk to them, but they had a friend with them who asked,

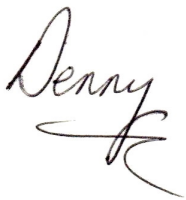
“Denny, do you remember me from Grace...from a course on 20th Century Christian literature that you taught there?” Oh my, I thought. That was quite a few years ago. “I loved that class,” Katie said with a winning smile. “You had us read G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis and a lot of others. And you had us read Randy Alcorn’s *Safely Home* which made me want to be a missionary to China. Well,” she continued, “that’s just what happened! I started with a short term and then a longer one and now I’m planning on going back this summer!” Wow! I had certainly been blessed already that morning with the honor of preaching at EF, but then talking to this young hero provided an extra and unforgettable blessing indeed. Thank You, Lord!

Another couple of significant things from recent weeks is Claire working with Hope Golden who is taking over the business details of Vital Signs Ministries. This may only mean 5 or 6 hours a month for a pro like Hope, but it will be a *huge* help for Claire. The second thing is that we have been working with a group out of Columbia, Missouri to entirely revamp the Vital Signs website. This is a long overdue project. With more people using their computers, tablets, and phones as THE means to get information, pass along information, and make connections, a new website is an important improvement for our ministry here...and around the whole English-speaking world.

There are also house and lawn projects to help us stay busy, a lot of reading, a return to our regular hiking regimen, and trying to keep our finances in the best shape we can. That last item is a daunting challenge because our “retirement fund” through The Timothy Plan has taken an enormous hit. However, we are deeply comforted and encouraged to know that not even a global economic meltdown can affect our “paradise portfolio;” that is, the heavenly inheritance which Jesus grants His children as they invest here on earth their faith and good deeds performed in the Spirit. As the Scripture describes it, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1: 3-5, NASB)

Okay, until next month, please know that you can connect with us at Vital Signs Blog, our Facebook pages, Zoom conversations, and before too long, our new Vital Signs Ministries website. Thanks for your prayers, encouragement and support.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Denny", followed by a stylized flourish.