

Word Tabernacle Church  
821 Word Plaza  
Rocky Mount, NC 27804  
(252) 442-2925  
Office of the Senior Pastor  
James D. Gailliard  
State of the Church Report

Dear Word-ites,

Grace and peace be multiplied to you and to your families. Let me begin with a simple, THANK YOU. Our church members have proven great resilience in this unprecedented time. As you have heard, we have received new members, continued the core disciplines of discipleship, and continued our financial and mission partnerships. We have adapted and not acquiesced in this season; God is pleased. For fifteen years, you heard me make statements like, *"the text can never mean today anything different than what it was meant to mean when it was written."* That's a statement around the context. I approach every text addressing the issue of context. What are the historical questions (setting and geography)? What are the tactical questions, particularly from the lens of syntax, genre, and grammar? As we learn more about God, man, sin, faith, etc., what theological questions are being addressed? What is the cultural question that helps us understand what the listener is going through because we all filter everything based on our experiences, exposures, and errors? I think this process is equally helpful for us today. I'd like to begin contextualizing or exegeting our world as we know it today from the lens of three aging men that I'd like to introduce to you. Their names are Public Health, Public Education, and Economy.

As we began the year of our fifteenth church anniversary, none of us could have known that a virus a thousand times smaller than a dust mote would bring our society to a halt. Almost overnight, we were forced to acknowledge what we always knew, but secretly hoped would never be tested, which is leadership matters. Our national response has swayed between inattention, inaction, and incompetence. The result of this is, although the United States is just 4 percent of the world population, we are almost 25 percent of COVID-19 cases and deaths. So, our Church and many others, public schools, and many businesses have not re-opened because of a virus, but because of a void in national leadership. This leadership vacuum has a direct impact on me, personally. But, more importantly, on my family and our Church and community's families that God has called me to lead and feed. I feel so strongly about this predictable and preventable problem that I agreed to be featured in a national commercial filmed at our Church addressing our country's leadership crisis.

To be honest, I never thought of it in these terms. But since the United States has the highest number of fatalities in the world from coronavirus, we can easily conclude that the wrong leadership kills.

Meanwhile, many of our college students and most of our K-12 students are in virtual classrooms. Although many of them can access the internet, and for those who can't, we have made systems available at our Church to help. We also recognize that students and parents need necessary technology skills and strong social networks for help and guidance. What we know is that virtual classrooms can be just as unequal as real ones. Here in North Carolina, more than twenty years ago, five school districts in the state filed a lawsuit, Leandro v. the State of North Carolina. In 1997, The Supreme Court of North Carolina unanimously affirmed that the state has a constitutional responsibility to provide every student – including those at risk, or from rural or underserved communities – with an equal opportunity for a sound, basic education. Yet, over 20 years later, the state has not met its obligation to provide education that meets this constitutional standard. Many of these students are Word-ites, live in our community, or are just a voiceless vulnerable population that God calls us to be a voice for.

Public Health and Public Education have a third brother, his name is Economy. There are three main groups of workers in the COVID-19 economy: those who have lost their jobs and face economic insecurity, those who are classified as essential workers and face health insecurity as a result, and those who can continue working from the safety of their homes. Unfortunately, black workers are less likely to be found in the last group. African Americans are disproportionately likely to be in occupations that are considered essential in nature, like the food industry and health services. Of course, the upside is they still have their jobs, but the downside is choosing between physical health and economic health. Minority small businesses were less likely to get support from the CARES Acts that were passed by Congress.

Public Health, Public Education, and Economy were all born and raised in an environment of structural inequity. This harmed their efforts for advancement, beginning in the 1700s when citizenship was denied to them. It continued during the 1800s when participation in the Homestead Act was denied, and separate but equal was affirmed as a public policy in 1896. Their efforts continued into the 1900s thru Jim Crow, Freedom Rides, the G.I. Bill, the desegregation of public education, and even into the 21st century with the historic Emanuel AME Church massacre and deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Akai Gurley, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and many others. Together these three boys (Public Health, Public Education, and Economy) have become wounded and weary from generations of explicit and implicit bias in housing, the privatization of wealth in the guise of philanthropy, public symbols of

confederacy, environmental injustice, unjust policies on immigration and naturalization, lack of livable wages, and a growing wealth gap.

There is a silver lining in this cloud. Public Health, Public Education, and Economy have an older sister, and her name is Church. She has been with them all along, offering hope, and has been their primary leadership and advocacy source.

We don't often connect the dots, but inasmuch as God is ultimately concerned with our eternity, He also cares about our earth. It is this intersection that solidified my decision to run for public office. The Bible gives us a book by book confrontation with a Messiah who does not ignore body, soul, or spirit.

**Proverbs 31:8-9** - Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

**Isaiah 1:17** - Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

**Isaiah 58:6-7**- "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

**Micah 6:8** - He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

**Mark 16:15**- He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

**1 Corinthians 7:17** -Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.

**1 Peter 2:9-10** -But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**1 Peter 4:10-11**-Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

This Biblical, cultural, and historical context requires our methods to continue to adapt. At the same time, we remain faithful to our God-given vision as *"a place of relevant ministry where relationships are built,*

*needs are met, purpose is fulfilled, and God is enjoyed.*" Fifteen years ago, we stated the necessity to be relevant, and it is still a necessity today. So, how will we do this?

1. We will replace footprints with fingerprints meaning there will be more personalized communication coming from our staff and leaders.
2. We will continue investing in and improving our broadcast and programming schedules with offerings from every ministry center.
3. Beginning October 2020, we will allow 30 members to attend the 8:00am Sunday Worship or the 12:00pm, Tuesday Bible Study, on a reservation basis, once per month. This will allow families to worship together and allow up to 250 individuals to have a "live in the room" experience each month while interacting with our staff. This will continue through the remainder of 2020.
4. We will train ministers and leaders in general and to facilitate Church at Study and Thrive Groups. The goal is to have 50% of our membership in a small group.
5. We will invite members to be onsite in small group settings both inside and outside the building. Groups will have a maximum size of 10 and require physical distance, temperature checks, and masks.
6. We will create opportunities for members to serve either at the Church or through one of our community partners.
7. We will implement a community outreach strategy to enable us to take the WTC experience to people in outdoor settings.
8. We will be releasing an updated church calendar using our big rock (weekly and ongoing), little rock (monthly or quarterly), and sand (annual) concept, which will increase the frequency of some activities and decrease the activities of others. This will include releasing a schedule of "Intensives" which are 1-2-hour seminars on a range of subjects.
9. We will increase our print media to be either mailed or picked up by our members who are less active on social media.
10. We will continue updating our membership database and ensuring all members have some social media or telephonic connection to the Church.
11. We will continue building construction because when we return, we are going to need the space.
12. We will begin airing commercials on social media and promoting online church membership nationally.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but I hope it gives clarity grounded in context for where we are headed and why.

In closing, I do want to address my personal life. As you know, I have used our Business Meeting as the platform and not the pulpit. As most of you should know, Angela and I were married on Saturday, August 22, 2020. COVID would not allow a large wedding. Literally, we scheduled and organized a small ceremony in less than a week. I recognize that although this is a profoundly personal decision, I am both a pastor and a public figure, and I don't live my life without public scrutiny or accountability. In no situation should marriage be taken lightly, and it was also not taken lightly for us. I would simply ask your prayerful support for our decision. There are a few things I would remind all of us of, and this list will serve all our married and single members:

1. We are all our own person, so don't see people as an appendage to their spouse.
2. When we criticize someone's spouse, we also harm the other person.
3. It's hard living with unrealistic expectations from others.
4. We are all hurt by gossip.
5. Everyone has a past.
6. Everyone has a God-given calling and purpose from God.

I would end by briefly addressing item 6. Angela has served as our Chief Operations Officer for over 11 years. This role included managing the finances of the Church. Upon her arrival, the first process she put in place was ensuring we had an external independent annual audit of the church finances. We now have had 11 consecutive audits resulting in the highest possible rating. There is no plausible reason she should not continue serving the Church in the most gifted area by God. Angela's background includes a bachelor's degree in Biomedical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, and a Master's in Business Administration (Management and Finance concentration) all from Duke University. She is an alumnus of Leadership N.C., the most comprehensive training program of private and public sector leaders in our state. She sits on several foundation boards and has evolved as a competent and respected nonprofit executive. I hope that our track record of integrity, transparency, and accountability will remove any concerns regarding Angela's role in our ministry as she continues to serve as Chief Financial Officer.

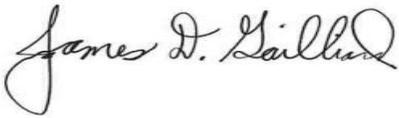
I recognize there is always a small minority of people who craft convenient reasons not to give and not to support. When those few voices surface, here are a few points to share on why they should indeed give:

1. The Church is organized for the moral and material well-being of people.
2. The Church is one of the most trusted repositories for congregational and community wealth.

3. The Church has the most robust and most consistent record of returning wealth to the community.
4. The Church is the largest socio-economic institution in the community.
5. The Church has political influence over public policy, which can change the economics of any community.
6. When we give to the Church, we are also investing in our own best interest.

Please know I am deeply grateful for each of you. I am excited about what God is doing and where God is taking all of us.

Still Thriving,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James D. Gailliard". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Pastor James D. Gailliard