

"North Tuscaloosa Church of Christ: Year Five"

As a historian by both training and profession, I am well aware that human experience, constant in so many ways, is constantly changing in others. As soon as an account of something is set down in writing, it becomes, if not necessarily obsolete, at least incomplete, and the same is true of the brief history I composed for our congregation's fourth "birthday" at this time last year. At that point, we had recently met with other local congregations for the second annual area-wide service, youth minister Harrison Gibbs had just been added to the staff, and we looked forward to a full calendar for the 2019-2020 school year.

Since then, a great deal of good has taken place in the life of NTCOC. The congregation hosted its first annual Friday night singing on November 22, 2019, and followed it up with a New Year's Eve singing a little more than a month later. Several recurring features were also added to the calendar for 2020, including special service-oriented gatherings the fourth Sunday night of each month, as well as a slate of guest speakers in lieu of a traditional gospel meeting. The first two of these speakers, Freed-Hardeman M.Div. student Jayse Pruitt and tech guru Chad Landman, have been with us already. Michael Whitworth's Teaching Rocket seminar, Jacksonville Church of Christ pulpit minister Allen Webster, and Eric Lyons of Apologetics Press are all still on deck. (*Clark note: Teaching Rocket postponed to be rescheduled*)

Of course, no discussion of 2020 would be complete without reference to the (at the time of writing, still ongoing) COVID-19 pandemic, which has radically reshaped life as we know it over the last few weeks and months. The outbreak has forced North Tuscaloosa, like all other churches, to find new ways of being faithful to the old imperative of meeting together. Sunday, March 15, served as a transition point in this regard, with the congregation observing numerous extra precautions, such as using individual communion packs and opting for elbow bumps in place of handshakes, for its morning worship service. The following Sunday, March 22, NTCOC moved to an all-digital format, with a handful of leaders conducting a live-streamed service that members and online "visitors" could participate in from the safety of their homes. Each of our ministers has also regularly taught classes and recorded other forms of helpful content on various social media platforms, and a ladies' devotional group meets online each Tuesday night as well.

Though a number of key events have been cancelled or postponed, such as the area-wide service, the congregational fish fry, and the Lads to Leaders convention (notwithstanding the tremendous effort put into events by students and parents alike!) North Tuscaloosa has been able to host two online singing nights which, like its worship services, have been streamed via Facebook to homes worldwide.

Despite the very real challenges posed by COVID-19, North Tuscaloosa Church of Christ is, in many ways, stronger and healthier than it has ever been, with the outbreak encouraging the congregation to prioritize online outreach and inspiring its members to find new ways of staying connected. While we continue to pray for relief from the pandemic as we enter our sixth year together, we also pray that we will show gratitude for the ongoing blessings of life and of community, and that the growth we have experienced as a body over the last year will stay with us forever.

John Young