

The Gordon Christmas Letter 2020

Pull up a chair and sit in on our happenings this year, written by Jay with some ideas from Liz.

Aren't we all glad that 2020 is almost over? When I googled "2020 memes", this was a favorite (right). It shows that the only two things left to hit us this year are a huge meteor and aliens. At least they are being courteous about who goes first! Let's forget about that and look to the right for a relaxing Christmas photo!



Where were you when you knew this year would be different?

For me, it was at church on a Wednesday night and hearing the NBA season had been canceled. "What? Really? Wow!" What is there to say. It was an interesting year to say the least. We hope you fared well, but we regret that many did not.

The Travel That Didn't Happen and Some That Did – Much of Liz's life is centered on mission trips to South America. Numerous trips were canceled. More on that later. I had plans to finish the final three ballpark on my bucket-list quest to see a game in all 30 major league cities. Andy was going to join me for a trip to Minneapolis in May, and we had already bought plane tickets. Also, the family was talking about going to San Francisco and/or Seattle to join me for my 30th and final city. Obviously, that didn't happen either. // Just before COVID, Liz and I made a trip to Arkansas to visit some friends from the church I served prior to Brook Hills. We stayed with Doc and Doretta Allen and swung by Charlotte's on the way out of town for one of their famous pies (Chocolate). // Other travel that did happen was visiting Andy & Siena in Charleston (pictured), where we had Shrimp Corn Dogs for the first time. Once is enough. // During the fall, we went to the beach with Kenneth & Teresa Shaw for a few days shortly after a hurricane had hit Gulf Shores & Orange Beach. Okay, looking back, we did get a few trips in during 2020. We also enjoyed a few day trips to Tom and Glenda Smitherman's new "farm" in Jemison. They have a lake, so we just left our canoe and kayak there.



Leading Small Groups – Liz and I lead one group and co-lead another, one on campus and one that usually meets in our home on Sunday nights.

One week in October, we really enjoyed meeting around the fire on a cool night at the Slager's. Yes, s'mores followed the meeting. I still lead the Small Group Ministry at The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham. In 2020 I lost a great ministry assistant, Carlye Stringfellow, and transitioned the position to two part-time assistants, Sarah Blackmon and Teresa Shaw. They both do a great job, and strangely enough, both have connections to Westwood Baptist Church in Alabaster, where I served almost 17 years, from 1994 to 2011.



Liz and Job Transitions – Before Covid, Liz actually had two part-time jobs with e3 Partners Ministry. One of those jobs is a support-raising position leading mission teams overseas to help plant churches. The other position was an hourly position of about twenty hours working in the e3 Medical Office in Birmingham to coordinate medical mission trips. With budget reductions when COVID hit, that position was eliminated. We know many have faced such trials, and we're all doing the best we can. When international travel is allowed again, she'll be back to the first of those e3 positions of leading mission teams. In the meantime, she is doing what she can and has even been involved in virtual mission trips.

Planters By Liz – With the search for income underway, I encouraged Liz to do something she really loves. She has a green thumb, and everything she touches comes to life. I joke with people by saying before she leaves the country each time, she places her hands on my cheeks, but instead of "I love you, and I'll miss you," she says, "Don't over-water my plants." There's plenty of exaggeration there, but a grain of truth. Back to the point--she started a business you can see at PlantersByLiz.com. She focuses on front porch type planters and will even contract to do them seasonally. With Emily being an Operations Manager at a house plant store and good at social media, they both worked on the business plan.



Emily & Plants – As mentioned above, Emily works at Botanica, a houseplant store. This year they opened up a new location in Huntsville that is also doing very well. With people spending more time at home, it was a perfect time to kick off the business. All businesses involving anything about the home had a good year.

Small Group Leaders – Andy and Siena became Small Group Leaders at their church, Seacoast Church, over the summer. That may not be big news, but since that's my world, I couldn't bypass mentioning that.

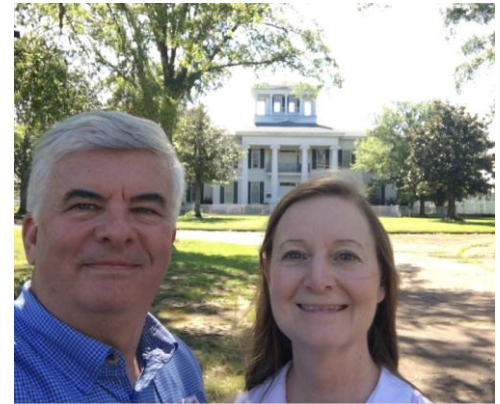
More on the back!

Andy's Future – Andy discovered in October that his plant in Charleston would close at the end of 2021. His options looked like going to another SKF plant in Sumpter, SC, or one in the Atlanta area (which sounded good to us), or there is the possibility of going to Italy for three years. Siena seems to be on board with the international gig. We're praying God's best for them. Andy will finish his MBA at Villanova in May, which will allow him to investigate other opportunities. He's also working to launch Gordon Group Consulting. There's another Gordon family .com for you to check out!



Great Groups Podcast – Three or four years ago, I fell in love with podcasts, particularly those about small groups and discipleship. For a year or two, I considered doing my own. Feeling the need to have more opportunities to train and encourage leaders, and finding Chris Amaro, a potential co-host, we launched The Great Groups Podcast back in April. Chris does the audio engineering for the podcast. Although it's geared toward Brook Hills leaders, we keep it generic enough for leaders from any church to enjoy; therefore we say it's for leaders "at Brook Hills and beyond." Yep, that sounds like Buzz Lightyear. We admit it. One surprise is that we've had listeners from places like New York City, Yakima, Washington, and Paris, France. Check out yet another website, GreatGroups.org.

Prison Camp – Embarrassing but true—we celebrated our 35th Anniversary at a prison camp. Seriously, we love finding historical treasures in Alabama. Just west of Tuscaloosa, there was a WW2 Prisoner of War Camp. The adventure was far short of our 20th Anniversary trip to Europe but still fun. The POW Camp Museum is in Aliceville, Alabama. It seemed fitting, having been locked up for COVID at home. :) The picture to the right is at Tom Beville Visitor Center & Lock & Dam. // We also did a Father's Day Hike to King's Chair at Oak Mountain State Park. The view was great and we could see all the way back home to our neighborhood.



Go Braves! We didn't get to see any games in person due to COVID, but it was exciting to see the Braves win a couple of post-season series and almost make the World Series! // At this point, Alabama Football is #1, but I think Clemson is pretty good as well. We'll see how it comes out. With limited capacity, it's highly unlikely Andy and I will make this championship trip this year.

Church Construction – Prior to COVID, we had already begun construction on a two-story education space for adults and children, as well as an expanded lobby and conference space. We "moved in" on November 15, but there are still plenty of people not returning yet, so we have more building than people now. The lobby looks really huge, and some have described it as having an airport look.



Emily and Daniel live near us in Chelsea, so we get to see them often for dinner, board games, etc. Daniel is still working as a claims adjuster for Allstate Insurance. He sometimes travels and sometimes works from home. They keep collecting dogs. The latest, #3, is seen here, Sage.



You Have Blessed Our Lives! - Sending Christmas cards & letters is one of our favorite Christmas traditions. You are among the friends who mean so much to us. Even though we might not get to spend time with you throughout the year, we value your friendship!

We'd love to hear from you as well, so please stay in touch as we pray for one another through good times and bad!

May the joy of knowing Christ be yours this Christmas season!

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:9-10