

On Recovering Sanctuary **(i.e. Safety in the Big Red Barn in an Unsafe Season)**

Galileo Church • 2023.10.13

Dearly Beloved,

I hope this letter finds you resting peacefully in the steadfast love of God our Parent, and feeling strong in the Spirit of our Lord Jesus. However, this is an anxious season in the life of the world. I'm (very!) aware that peace and strength are hard to come by. Still, this is my prayer for each of you and for myself.

I'm writing to report that the Missional Logistics Team met this week with the Safety Team they commissioned at our last regular meeting in September. Together we are ready to announce a three-phase plan for recovering the sanctuary of our Big Red Barn.

This letter is long. If you want to skip to the details of the three-phase plan, you'll find them on page 2 under "Three-Phase Plan."

The Violation of Sanctuary

It is exactly our *sanctuary* – our sense of safety in a space where we regularly seek God's presence and power – that has been violated of late. Our subversive plan to help families of trans kids get health care that is now illegal in Texas, by the establishment of the North Texas TRANSPORTATION Network, has stirred a hornets' nest of antipathy. Hate speech has flowed our way through social media, email, and phone calls. Protesters came to the barn last Sunday, and may not be finished with us yet. While we would not curtail anyone's right to free speech, we worry that this kind of negative attention could provoke someone destabilized by hatred to plot violence against our church.

For most in our church, last Sunday was a big nothing-burger. Many people decided wisely, for the sake of their emotional and spiritual safety, to worship from home via Inside Out. Those who came to the Big Red Barn noticed that there weren't many protesters; and we had many more friends who showed solidarity by joining us for worship. The violence we feared did not erupt. Thanks be to God.

But it is important to acknowledge that a small handful of #churchfriends and pastoral staff members carried a heavy burden of real fear and responsibility throughout last weekend (and for some weeks before that). Even the flood of supportive strangers on Sunday evening, while most welcome, complicated our ability to assess danger. The protesters' brittle lawfulness, and their flirtation with violence by verbal provocation, were managed and maintained by the presence and active intervention of several police officers onsite for the entire evening.

By the time worship ended and the barn and its parking lot cleared out, our church's small handful of volunteer guardians was emotionally and physically depleted. There was no spiritual sustenance for those vigilant souls in worship that night.

Three Facts We Face

In sum, here are three facts we are facing:

1. The degradation of civility in U.S. American culture is not going to reverse any time soon. Christian nationalism is funding countless expressions of bigotry, including homophobia and transphobia. The potential for public violence seems higher than ever.
2. Galileo Church will continue to be a focus of hate groups fixated on gender and sexuality because God has called us to do justice for LGBTQ+ people and support the people who love them. Our justice efforts will continue to be conducted in the public square. The North Texas TRANSPORTATION Network is the right ministry for the right time, and is likely to become more well known as time goes on. Galileo Church's sponsorship of NTTN is one of the best things we've ever done, and it will continue to make small-minded people angry.
3. We must not depend on volunteers and pastoral staff members to protect our church in this season of heightened alarm. It's unfair to ask untrained people to sacrifice their own sense of wellbeing to protect everybody else's, Sunday after Sunday and all the days in between. We don't know how long this "season" will last, so we need long-term plans to restore our sense of sanctuary in our sanctuary, if you catch my drift.

Three-Phase Plan

Toward that end – restoring our sanctuary – the Safety Team has recommended, and the Missional Logistics Team has accepted, a three-phase plan.

Phase One: Immediate Term

In the absence of a specific threat or announced protest, we will employ two trained, unarmed security professionals for each Sunday. One will patrol the parking lot; the other will be in the Big Red Barn to assist in case of emergency. We anticipate having these guards onsite for about five Sundays.

In the case of a specific threat or announced protest, we will again call on the Kennedale Police Department for help.

We understand that for some this measure will be too much, and for others, not enough. Please know that we have heard and considered a wide range of opinions and arguments, and have carefully discerned that this is an acceptable plan for most.

Phase Two: Short Term

Over the next several weeks, look for these changes at the Big Red Barn:

-- A 10-camera system providing 360° coverage of the BRB perimeter, monitored by a security volunteer in the Big Red Barn. The system includes a panic button that sounds

an alarm both inside and outside the BRB, should the security volunteer notice a threat approaching. After sounding the alarm, the security volunteer will call 9-1-1 while designated leaders help the church respond appropriately to the threat.

-- *Steel doors with crash bars for all exits leading outside.* "Crash bars" give easy egress even when doors are locked to prevent entrance into the building. Soon you'll find new doors in the main entrance, the annex, the Spare Oom, the Quiet Room, and Finn's Place. Additionally, we're working on getting a second doorway installed in Finn's Place on the I-20 side so that the BRB will have exits on all four sides.

-- *Plans to maximize the use of these new furnishings* will be announced soon, including evacuation and "shelter indoors" strategies.

Phase Three: Medium-to-Long Term

The Safety Team will continue to solidify recommendations for shoring up a space in the Big Red Barn for sheltering-in-place. They will return to the Missional Logistics Team with more details for later consideration.

Finishing Up

Please know that this is a pastoral letter I never wanted to write. Galileo Church has had brushes with bigotry directed our way since its birth, resulting in evictions from rented spaces, hateful comments on the socials, and the occasional snub at public events where we show our true colors. We have always responded with de-escalating equanimity, maintaining a commitment to non-violence and "going high when they go low." And of course, we've relied on the obscure location of the Big Red Barn to keep bigots at bay. Who wants to protest to the metal galvanizing plant and the vacant lot?

But it feels different now, and so with heavy hearts your church leaders are venturing into territory that calls for a new kind of courage. I hope you will join me in praying for the people who are making and executing decisions for all our sakes. "Grant us courage / grant us wisdom / for the facing of these days." Pray especially that their own "spirits and souls and bodies may be kept sound" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). They are absorbing a great deal of systemic anxiety so that the whole church is not swallowed up by it. It is a selfless gift they are giving to Galileo Church.

I am praying for each of you, as well: that your own sense of God's purpose, and your trust in God's steadfast love, will overwhelm your worry and give you peace. I am available for conversation around these matters (and any other) should you want that.

If you have specific questions or concerns about the details of the plan put forth in this letter, you can email Cait H here: security@galileochurch.org. (You could also send a quick email to say "thanks," which she can pass along to the Safety Team.) Please be aware that Cait cannot respond immediately to every inquiry, and cannot reprise the deliberations of the Safety Team for each of us.

If you have read this far – and I bet most of you will! – *thank you* for engaging a discussion that ironically has to raise anxiety temporarily in the interest of lowering anxiety in the long term. Your wellbeing is so important to me, and to the leaders who care for our church. More importantly, your wellbeing is God’s purview and God’s daily concern. You are so loved.

*Your name, O LORD, endures forever,
your renown, O LORD, throughout all ages.
For the LORD will vindicate God’s people
and have compassion on God’s servants.*

Psalm 135:13-14

Grace and peace,

Katie, on behalf of the Missional Logistics Team, the Safety Team, and the pastoral staff