

# Editorial: Hope for the beginning of another year

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So, how would you rate 2016?



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Your answer might depend upon how you look at it.

From our family's perspective, last year was terrific. Our older daughter, Lindsay, and her husband, Aaron, adopted a long-anticipated baby boy, Abram, to join his big brother, Ezra. Our younger daughter, Molly, earned her Ph.D., and she and her husband, David, announced they will deliver another baby girl to join her big sister, Eleanor, in the spring. Joanna underwent apparently successful surgery for a disease that haunted her almost a quarter-century. Everybody's jobs went well. And we all still not only love each other; we even like each other.

We'd take years like 2016 over and over and over. I hope you and your family can say the same thing.

**Oh, yeah ...**

But then there was everything else.

Our nation endured a presidential election cycle unprecedented in sheer

nastiness and vulgarity. If anything, the contest for the White House skulked only a notch below the general behavior of Congress. We watched in horror as cell-phone cameras and cable TV teamed up to deliver police brutality and racial violence into our homes. We saw people die.

We witnessed America turning upon America. “The greater good” seemed like an outmoded concept from bygone generations. We experienced the birth of the post-truth era, when facts didn’t matter as long as people wanted to believe something. We even stood by as our longstanding enemy interfered in our presidential election.

And speaking of overseas, that’s where things weren’t much better. Western Europe fractured just as badly as the United States. ISIS continued to exert its will in the Middle East and export terror around the globe. Russia reminded us of the bad ol’ Soviet Union. Myriad nations systematically violated the rights of their own citizens. And a feckless North Korean dictator with the world’s worst haircut threatened nuclear annihilation.

Thank God, 2016 is over.

### **But next ...**

So now we stand in the first week of 2017. We have no idea if this new year will be better or worse than the one that preceded it. With so much melancholy, evil and hatred building up a full head of steam, we can imagine even darker days ahead.

And yet we get up and go to work. We kiss our loved ones and wave to our neighbors. We look forward to births and first steps and kindergarten and graduations and weddings and anniversaries. We learn new praise choruses and dance to new tunes. We laugh, even—maybe especially—at the politicians who infuriate us while they take themselves too seriously. We eat too many good meals and work out, but maybe not enough.

Still, we can't help but peer into 2017 with at least a smidge of dread. What's a faithful person to do?

## **Divine help**

The Apostle Paul offered excellent counsel: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:26-28).

You can't help but love two things about Paul's advice.

First, let God—through the Holy Spirit—do the heavy lifting.

Instinctively, we know we should pray, but we realize we don't even know how. We can let the Spirit help us pray—even pray for us. That awkward groan that catches in your throat and brings tears to your eyes? Amplified by the Spirit, it's the beautiful prayer of a passionate saint. We don't have to be eloquent; we only have to care and trust.

Second, we realize we're not in this alone, and the outcome is not ours alone.

In the midst of our sorrow and fear and uncertainty, God is with us. God is working to bring good out of even the worst situations. Current events extract very little imagination, because they're often worse than our nightmares. Yet God never leaves us. God is here, working to redeem grace out of horror, beauty out of devastation, love out of hate.

The Spirit harvests our tears and translates our groans into the ears of a loving, redeeming God who is greater than any dictator or storm or fire or

economic collapse or disease or sorrow. Of course, those are dreadful, and we live with their consequences. But Paul reminds us there is more to life than what we see on TV or read online or even hear across our kitchen table.

### **Walk in hope**

So, we walk in hope. And day by day, we follow faithful advice and lean into a promise: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7).

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