

# Forward To The Future

*The State Of The Church*

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**E**xplosive growth. The early Church new what this phrase meant because when God moved, He moved in a fashion that, I'm sure, stunned everyone. As a former baseball player who constantly studied stats, especially those of our opponents, I can't help but look at the stats of the Church from the book of Acts.

After Christ's ascension, the disciples, along with a small group of other believers, walked from the Mount of Olives over to THE upper room, where they had taken that final communion with Jesus, and did what any group of believers should do at a critical ministry time: they prayed and they planned. Note how the two go together. They just didn't sit and meditate, but they prayed and also got to work choosing the next disciple to replace Judas (Acts 1:16-26). At the time, Dr. Luke tells us there were 120 ardent followers of Jesus gathered together in that small, little room.

After the descent of the Spirit of God on the Church at Pentecost, and after Peter's powerful preaching, Dr. Luke informs us that 3,000 souls were added to the church (Acts 2:41). Don't you ever think preaching is an outmoded method of reaching the masses for Jesus Christ. There is nothing more powerful than a man whose soul and speech is on fire with the Word of God, and whose heart and mind is consumed with the fire of the gospel. Peter was such a man, and look at the results. Satan's kingdom couldn't help but be de-populated in the face of such passionate preaching.

After Peter's second sermon, this time in the portico of Solomon located on the east side of the Temple, facing the Kidron Valley and the Mount of Olives,<sup>1</sup> five thousand Jews left Judaism and chose to embrace Jesus as the Savior and the resurrected Messiah (Acts 4:4). Talk about church growth. You take not just one preacher, but a growing group of believers who are gripped by the gospel message, and empower them with prayer and strategic planning, coupled with compassion and courage, and you have a movement of God.

Such is what is going on around here on a smaller scale. From humble beginnings in the late 1970s to the present, through many ups and downs, through ministry triumphs and tragedies, through several moves back and forth between this building and Lake Braddock High School to work on building needs, God has, over the last several years, been moving up and out in this local body of believers in a fast fashion. And we, as leaders, have sought to follow the New Testament example of riding the wave of church growth by giving ourselves and guiding this body of believers, more than ever before, to prayer and planning. Why prayer? We need prayer because we need so much from the Lord. We need wisdom and insight for everything from how to care for a church of this size, to how to maintain community and closeness among the saints so relationships grow and flourish. We need to know the mind of God with so many issues and opportunities before us, which, of course, logically flows into the need for finely tuned strategic planning for the short and long-term.

Prior to Christmas, we gave ourselves to 90 days of specialized prayer regarding our future, and now, I'm here to tell you in this State of the Church address how the Lord is speaking and guiding your leadership. And, as typically happens when you seek the face and mind of God, His ways are not our ways all the times, nor is His thinking always our thinking (Isaiah 55: <sup>8</sup> "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts). Put differently, in some ways His guidance is as we expected, but in other ways, He has absolutely surprised and moved us in directions we had not anticipated. Isn't that just like Him?

So, we, like the early Church, are praying and planning and moving out, and from what we can tell, 2014, our future, is going to be completely pivotal not just for 2014, but for the long-term future of this ministry. Stated another way, what God is doing among us, how God is guiding us, what He is challenging us to do corporately will impact not only our times, but the times of saints who will follow us after God calls us home. Exciting, isn't it? Exciting to be part of a movement of God which will outlast our lifetimes and will make a profound impact on countless future souls.

To see what that bright future holds for BCC, I invite you to step into the time machine, the divine DeLorean and take a good look at one key question:

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<sup>1</sup> Milne, Mary K. "Solomon's Portico." Edited by Mark Allan Powell. *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)*. New York: HarperCollins, 2011. **Solomon's Portico**, a colonnade thought to have been situated along the east side of the temple enclosure built by Herod the Great as part of his restoration of the temple of Jerusalem. If so, the portico would have been directly above the Kidron Valley, facing the Mount of Olives. With the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, nothing from this colonnade remained standing, and there have been no excavations along the east side of the Temple Mount. Jesus was familiar with this porch (John 10:23), and, in the early days of the Christian movement in Jerusalem, the apostles gathered here with the people (Acts 3:11; 5:12). *See also* temple, the.

## What Does The Future Hold?

From the way God has answered our prayers for guidance over the last few months, we, as your pastors and elders, sense and see the Spirit of God moving us to be the agents of change in three central areas.

### Change From One Road To Another Road

First, let's consider our stats, which is, according to the book of Acts, not a bad thing to do. God does, at times, look at numbers to showcase what He's up to and to help leadership know how to shape a given ministry to be effective in carrying out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). And as take a short look at our figures, realize that ultimately each of these numbers represent a life, a distinct life which has been, and is being, touched by our living Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Second, from 2008 to 2013, the number of just adults in worship has skyrocketed from an average of 604 to 1348. Additionally, the high for worship attendance in 2008 averaged 678 in March, while in March of 2013 it was 1461, in fact, we've had three months in 2013 where our worship average peaked above this figure, really, closing in on 1500. Let us not forget, either, what has occurred in our worship stats is also reflected in our children's, youth, college, and singles ministries. God has not just moved to touch lives in one particular are, but He has worked in lives across all the age brackets. Believe me; I have never seen this in happen in my life. Being raised in the church, I've watched God work, at times, in select groups of the church, but never have I seen Him move so powerfully and definitively over such a large swath of the local church. These stats are, indeed, a reflection of His hand upon all facets of this particular church. Give Him the praise.

Now, I give you these statistics to say this: We have all worked hard and creatively to accommodate all the God-given growth. We have hired new staff. We have been through two building programs in the last five years. We have acquired many new servants to oversee the burgeoning areas of ministry. We have, collectively, given of our tithes and offerings to support the work and to make sure we are moving quickly toward being debt free. Giving last year was, at this point in our bookkeeping, an amazing \$466,000 above our proposed budget. Again, that is unheard of and merely demonstrates two things: One, God is moving, and two, God's people are supporting His movement.

When we launched our focused 90 days of prayer prior to Christmas, strategically, we had a three-fold approach to accommodate growth:

- Short-term: Hire a campus pastor to give leadership to our first video venue church. The goal was not to create a church plant, but to provide another location where the DNA of our ministry could be projected, while also providing us with some much needed room.
- Short-term: Add a fourth service to give us some breathing room in the sanctuary, and to also provide for space for additional growth in our second and third services.
- Long-term: Build out the rest of our property by constructing a new multipurpose facility, primarily for use by our youth and children's ministries. This building would also house much needed adult classrooms, coupled with new offices for staff, a large kitchen, and an even larger foyer to help facilitate

the movement of people in and through the building. Please note, one of the main reasons we proposed this type of building was because we did not have the parking to accommodate a 1,000 seat sanctuary. Therefore, we took this limitation as a sign God wanted us to focus on greater outreach to teens, children and our community.

All of this strategy was working well, that is, until God opened a door we had not anticipated.

Early in 2013, we approached the county about whether they would be interested in selling or leasing the 2 ½ acres located in the woods just beyond our large retention pond. The land is land-locked and of no ultimate use to the county; therefore, we contacted the county with our idea. Our goal thinking was clear: If we could secure this land, then we could build a much needed parking lot. From the outset, they said they were not interested in selling us the land, but renting it to us was a possibility. Their concept of renting, however, was only for a ten year period, which was, from our perspective not enough time. Fast forward through many months, a number of meetings, and a couple of miraculous interventions, now the county is interested in selling us the property. They have given us a sale price of \$368,000, and we are now approaching the time of price negotiations! Shocking, wouldn't you agree? On January 21 the county is meeting to formalize just how many of the 2 ½ acres they can sell us, but, at this juncture, I must say it is all looking good for our future.

Ostensibly, what does this change of events mean? From our perspective, it will be a game-changer. If we can secure the land and build over 150 more parking stalls, then our multipurpose building would be better suited for a larger worship setting, while repurposing our current, and smaller, worship facility to suit the needs of youth and children. And since we want to be conservative and prudent with the use of the Lord's monies, we believe we should not get ourselves stretched too thin by pursuing the purchase of the land in question, building a parking lot on the new acreage, hiring a new campus pastor, securing another site for a video venue church, and focusing much of our time, talents, and treasures on developing the new 40,000 square foot facility on our remaining land.

Based on this movement of God, we sense Him leading us to re-focus on two key projects: One, the purchase and development of the 2 ½ much needed acres, and two, the continued pursuit with INTEC, our architectural firm, to complete not just a multipurpose room, but a multipurpose room which will be, first and foremost, our new and larger worship facility. Sure, we will build the structure so it can be used for youth and children's events which might want to run concurrently (viz., one group could use the new facility, while another could use the re-purposed worship facility), but we desperately need the added space for worship, especially since the Lord is continuing to bring more and more people into the body.

Costwise, developing the 2 ½ acres into a parking lot will cost around \$1 million dollars, including the cost of the land purchase. We currently have a large portion of these monies, but, I'm sure, additional monies will be needed to pay off this crucial project for the longevity of this church. Creating a new building which is primarily worship-driven, and secondarily, multipurpose-driven, will cost between \$13-15 million, according to cost estimates from INTEC. Pragmatically, this means 2014 is going to be a pivotal year where giving is concerned. Our giving has been off the charts over the last five years, with giving *above* budget running as low as \$57,000 and as high as \$466,000. (These figures do not take into account during these years we spent considerable below the allotted budget. Here are the actual overage amounts for the last five years: 2009, \$57,844.00; 2010, 241,087.00; 2011, 59,124.00; 2012, 297,758.00; 2013,

466,605.00. Praise God. ) I commend the church for this level of giving, something unseen in most churches. Yet, this year will be pivotal giving-wise as we will challenge you, along with the newly formed capital campaign committee, to give not only toward our existing budget needs, but to give sacrificially toward new structures which will touch lives well beyond our lifetimes. What a privilege is will be to be part of such a time as this. I firmly believe God has brought together the right group of people, committed to the same vision, and unified around the key ingredients of a healthy church in order to accomplish some of the grand goals He has sovereignly placed before us.

Is all of this a lofty goal? Indeed, but based on our growth patterns, it is exactly where God is leading us. How will we reach such big goals? We'll do it like the ancient Israelites did. When God gave them specific directions for the building of the first tabernacle, spending ten chapters in Exodus laying out the need for a contribution of the people and the specific needs for the new worship center (Exodus 25-35), we read how the rag-tag group of former slaves responded:

<sup>3</sup> They received from Moses all the contributions which the sons of Israel had brought to perform the work in the construction of the sanctuary. And they still continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning. <sup>4</sup> And all the skillful men who were performing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work which he was performing, <sup>5</sup> and they said to Moses, "The people are bringing much more than enough for the construction work which the LORD commanded us to perform." <sup>6</sup> So Moses issued a command, and a proclamation was circulated throughout the camp, saying, "Let no man or woman any longer perform work for the contributions of the sanctuary." Thus the people were restrained from bringing any more. <sup>7</sup> For the material they had was sufficient and more than enough for all the work, to perform it (Exodus 36).

You have had a track record like that of ancient Israel. You have joyously given just what was needed to accomplish the great goals we have realized thus far, and I'm confident, based on your example, you shall rise to fulfill what will be the biggest ministry goal God has ever placed before us. I don't know about you, but I'm excited to be part of supporting a great work of our Lord. I'm equally excited to stand shoulder to shoulder with you as, together, we realize these particular goals.

By altering our former ministry plans, as I've just discussed, we will logically need to change in another area of 2014. I'll call it a ....

## Change From A Tight Fit To A Loose Fit

By not pursuing video venue church right away (it may be a concept we will develop down the road when/if the next facility it tapped out with people), we will, in the short-term, still have to answer the pressing question: What are we going to do to accommodate the growth God is giving us? Good question. After much prayer and discussion with pastoral staff and elders, here is what I believe are our most viable options to make sure there is room for everyone in our current building.

First, last year we instituted the 12:28 (p.m.) fourth service. This service represented a two-fold goal: *Provide a worship environment for people to move to in order to free up space in our core second and third services. Provide another worship environment so there is more parking available in our core services.* This has worked well for the last year; however, it is not to the level it needs to be at to alleviate some of our needs. Currently, we average 100-120 people in this service, and many of them comment how they love this service time. I thank these folks for coming to this service because, really, you would not have fit in the two core services.



Yet, despite gains in this area in 2013, I believe they need to be greater, especially with our collective rate of growth of 123% over the last five years. In 2013, this translated into an 11% growth rate, or 134 new worshippers. Admittedly, this fourth service time is a difficult time to grow into a larger service time. I believe it is wishful thinking to anticipate 134 new worshippers in 2014 to attend the 12:28 service time. Why? It is smack-dab in the middle of lunch, and it cuts into the middle of a day, thereby making it not an optimal time to attract a bigger group of people. Whichever way you look at it, this particular time is just not going to attract the amount of people we need to free up seats for new people who typically come to the second and third services.

So, what do we need to do? We need to get more of our people to move to the first service, which averages around 250-260. The 8:15 a.m. service time is a good time offering, we have plenty of room for growth, and there is a sizeable group to develop a thriving ministry around. Hence, more of our core people need to make 2014 the year they move to the first service.

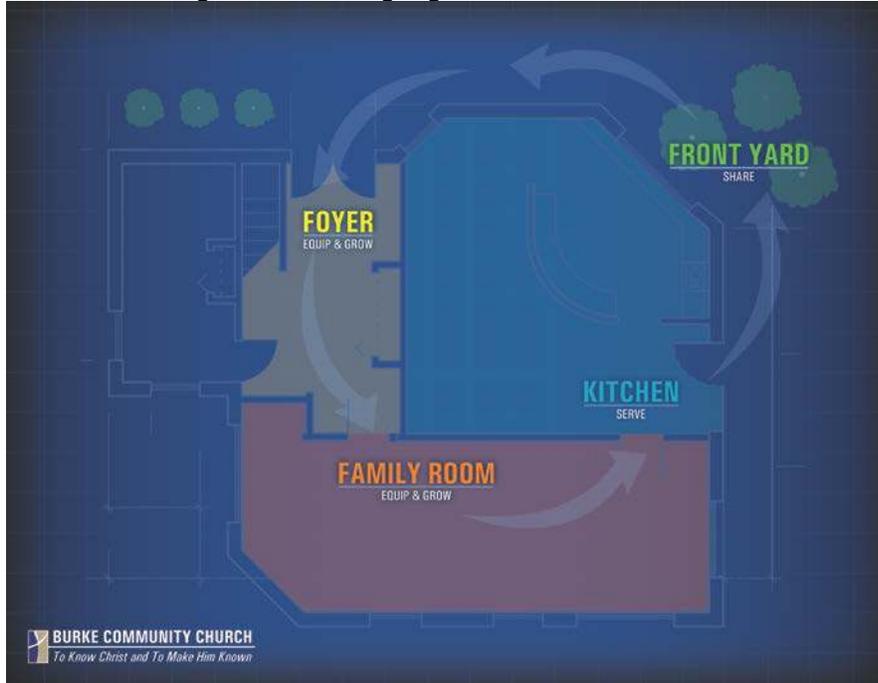
Additionally, we are kicking around the idea of having a service either on a Saturday or a Sunday night. Ideally, we believe the Sunday evening offering would be the better of the two, placing less stress and strain on staff and volunteers. Further, we believe this time slot would attract more people to it than we can attract at the fourth service. But, before we go down this road, we want to poll you. What do you think? What would you be committed to? More precisely, would you be committed to coming to the first service this next year? Would you commit to attending a service either on a Sunday or a Saturday evening? Would you sign a card today letting us know which of these offerings you would commit to? Will moving cost you something? Probably. For starters, you might not be attending the service you would like to be in; however, for the sake of accommodating the growth God is sending our way, sacrifice and change is the challenge for 2014. Who will accept the challenge?

Right now we are experiencing a tight fit in our second and third services, and this needs to change for 2014 quickly, especially since January is one of our biggest numerical bumps of the year. What we need is a loose fit so we can all enjoy worship plus all the other ministry offerings from BCC. So, what about it? What will you do this year to help us have a looser fit?

Lastly, we are in need of change in a third area. It is what I call a ...

## Change From One Graphic To Another Graphic

For the last five years, we have enjoyed the house model to market our vision of “To know Christ and to make Him known.” This particular model helped us teach vision to the church, and to make sure we had a balanced approach to worship, Bible study, service, and evangelism, or a balance between discipleship and evangelism, to defer to our Lord's Great Commission from Matthew 28:19-20. However, after five years, it is the collective conclusion of leadership that a marketing change is in order. No, this doesn't mean we will change our commitment to the vision Jesus has commanded for us to have. On the contrary, it means we propose re-packaging that vision so it is easier to recall, more noticeable, and hopefully more effective in helping us reach and disciple even more people for Christ.



Admit it. Explaining the house diagram to a new attender or a completely stranger took some effort. You'd say, "First, we are all about being in the Foyer." They'd say, "What's the Foyer?" You'd reply, "Well, it's our worship environment?" They'd respond, "What's up with the Kitchen? Does that mean you want us to all cook at some time? And what gives with the Front Yard? Does that mean you want me to do

something with my front yard?" You'd typically answer, "Well, not exactly. We want you to be out in the world being a witness, in a variety of ways, for Christ."

Some grasped this concept, others found it somewhat confusing. Others thought our large, colorful architectural diagrams positioned strategically around the church represented some of our building plans. Well, sort of, but not quite! Those graphics spoke of our strategy for building lives for Jesus Christ, not in building a building, per se. Taking all this into consideration, imagine sitting with a friend at a Starbucks and trying to tell them what our church is about. Try writing the house diagram and all of its explanations on a napkin. Good luck.

All of this is part of the reason we believe we are in need of a vision marketing upgrade. This last approach was beneficial, but it wasn't perfect, and people have grown too accustomed to it now so they do not give it any thought or reflection anymore. So, after working on a new concept for quite some time, here is how leadership proposes we develop the Lord's command for us to be committed to evangelism and discipleship. We've embraced a concept you may have encountered at another church sometime in your worship experience, but we have adopted it because it isn't just pithy, it's powerful: **Gather, Grow, and Go**. Say that again with me.

What does it all mean? I'm glad you were thinking of that question.

**Gathering** speaks of God's call for us to draw together to worship Him. In both Old and New Testaments, God is concerned that His people get together to worship Him. When He moved to free Israel from Egyptian bondage, it was all about worship:

"Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt. But Moses said to God, 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?' And He said, 'Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain'" (Exodus 3:10-12).

God eventually freed His people and challenged them to build a tabernacle where they could worship Him on a continual basis.

Nothing has changed in New Testament times, in this age of grace.

<sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (Hebrews 10).

If discipleship is about anything, it is about being committed to being in corporate worship of the living God with other committed saints.

- Growing saints want to lift God's name high along with others.
- Growing saints want to be present in a service when God shows up.
- Growing saints want to want to hear from God's Word so they can head toward maturity.
- Growing saints want to see non-believers become believers as they are exposed to powerful worship and preaching.
- Growing saints want to be equipped to go back out into the world with the gospel, and corporate worship helps them achieve this facet of discipleship.

Where gathering is concerned, I commend you as a church. Whether it is 100 degrees with 90% humidity, or 10 degrees with snow on the ground, the majority of you put the worship of the Lord on the front burner of your lives. I'm sure He is well-pleased with you, and I'm equally sure you are benefitting from the weekly engagement with the Holy One through great music and biblical preaching.

**Growing** speaks specifically about the need for Christians to move from infancy to man or womanhood. Many biblical texts support this conclusion:

"... like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord" (1 Peter 2:2,3).

Drinking the milk, or easy portions of the Word, is what new believers do, and this ultimately leads to sinking your teeth into the meat, the harder teachings/principles of the Scriptures. As one does this, individually and corporately, as one applies the truths they encounter, either in private study or in a church setting, spiritual growth occurs.

Paul's words to the spiritually immature believers in Corinth are equally instructive:

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7).

This pretty much sums up the goal of every believer. God desires for us to perfect holiness in our lives by becoming obedient to put aside all those things which defile our lives. And what is perfecting holiness but growing up in Jesus?

Sure, we grow as our lives are exposed to the Word of God as imparted in a sermon; however, this is not the only venue for achieving spiritual maturation. At BCC we will constantly challenge you to get into the study of the Scriptures. Last week I challenged you to start actually reading the Bible on a daily basis, but there is so much more. If you are serious about moving from spiritual infancy to maturity, then we challenge you to get into a Sunday morning adult class, a weekly Life Group, a men's study, one of our many women's studies, or a study with our Singles or Young Adults ministries.

As a sidelight, I would say on January 26<sup>th</sup> we are offering a meeting in the Student Auditorium called Linked In Life Groups. In this setting you will meet Life Group leaders who have openings in their groups. Come and check out the leaders and the groups, and then commit to one of them.

Lastly, I would say if you are growing spiritually, then, you will logically place yourself in leadership settings where you can grow even more. Our Life Groups are always looking for new leaders, and starting new groups is vital to a church of our size because this is where community, care, and compassion occur at a more intimate level. Will this be the year where you will move from being a participant in spiritual maturity to being a leader of others toward the same goal? And don't just think leadership is limited to Life Groups. We need leaders in every area in order to function well and to impact souls for Christ. For some of you, this is the year where you will need to step forward and tell Pastor TJ, who is over our Children's Ministries, "Here I am. Where do you need me?" For others, based on your gifting, this is the year you will get the attention of Pastor Matt or Kenneth and say, "I have a heart for youth. Someone poured into my life and now it's time for me to pour into the lives of teens. What can I do and when can I start?"

Spiritual growth. It's what we are about because it is what God is about. Lastly, we focus on ...

**Going.** This concept speaks of several things.

First, it speaks of taking the training you receive here and using it present and defend the gospel in the world where the Lord has placed you. Yes, we are not concerned with just making you a smarter believer, but we are passionate about motivating you to be a sharing believer, one who seizes opportunities to share about the Jesus has done for you and what He can do for others.

Second, it speaks of going forth to serve. As Jesus told the disciples on the eve of His crucifixion after He washed their feet:

<sup>14</sup> "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. <sup>16</sup> "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them ( John 13).

On Christmas Day we had over 100 saints in our kitchen preparing meals for the 25<sup>th</sup> project, which focuses on caring for the needs of the homeless living in the woods east of Woodbridge. They sacrificed to show up on that day, but that is what servanthood is all about. It's about doing the hard thing, while knowing it is the right thing; it's about putting the needs of others before your needs; and it's about being selfless when you could be selfish. We have a church full of folks who understand the importance of going, but there is always room for improvement. Let this be the year when you constantly pray, "Lord, where do you want me to serve? Where do you want me to get plugged into meet needs?"

So, as you can see, we are not changing our vision "To know Christ and make Him known" one iota. Quite the contrary. We are just repackaging how we market this great commandment to the church at large so we get recharged and recommitted to why God has us here in the Northern Virginia area.

The future is before us, and we have a good idea of what that future holds as we consider how God is leading us. And how is He leading us? He wants us to ...

- Change From One Road To Another Road
- Change From A Tight Fit To A Loose Fit
- Change From One Graphic To Another Graphic

For applicational purposes, let's just assume that as Christians today your name is Johnny B. Good. What does God want from you? The song tells you. He wants you to get up and GO. This is a year for a whole lot of going ....