

WINTER 2021

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Mental Health & the Church: Seeking the Whole Story

Seeing the Savior
in a Pandemic

On the Horizon at the
NC General Assembly



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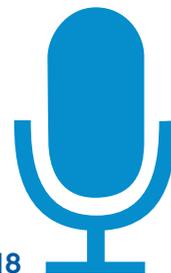
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For Such A Time As This

For almost two years, NC Family has been discussing crafting a feature article to address the declining state of mental health in America. With suicide rates the highest that they have been since World War II, we all understood there was something dire going on in our nation that we needed to share with our audience. Yet, we constantly faced various setbacks in this process; there would be another hot-button issue that required our immediate attention, or the potential authors we contacted were unavailable.

Now, I realize that our heavenly Father's timing in this has been perfect, as His timing always is. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already critical issue of mental health in our nation. More people than ever are reporting declines in their mental health as they face fear of the virus, loneliness in quarantine and isolation, and sadness and desperation brought on by the conflict in our country.

I personally have felt my mental health suffer over the past year, despite a close family—both geographically and relationally—maintained employment, and sustained physical health. I have still felt afraid, alone, anxious, and at times, apathetic. Yet I know I am far more fortunate than millions of other Americans who truly feel alone, who have lost their jobs, and who do not know the hope of Jesus Christ, who is the only way to true health and healing—physically, spiritually, and mentally.

So I am incredibly thankful that God worked to prevent our writing this feature until now. I pray everyone who reads the statistics, wisdom, and first-hand insights in “Mental Health & the Church: Seeking the Whole Story” will have their eyes opened to the real struggles of so many suffering around us. More importantly, I pray they will act as the Church, as God's hands and feet, to seek the whole story and to foster acceptance, support, and lasting healing.

We are also aware, however, that many positive and joyful things have happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in regards to more time with our families. The NC Family Staff happily shares our silver linings of this strange time in “Seeing the Savior in a Pandemic.”

Finally, the 2021-22 legislative session of the North Carolina General Assembly has just begun, and there are sure to be many bills introduced that directly impact North Carolina families. Three top experts in the areas of life, school choice, and gambling share their insights into the upcoming legislative session in “On the Horizon at the NC General Assembly.”

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Family North Carolina* magazine! Please feel free to pass this issue along to others, and you are welcome to contact NC Family to request some extra copies to pass out to friends, family, and your communities. 🏠

Calley

Calley Mangum is the Communications Director for the North Carolina Family Policy Council and is Editor of Family North Carolina.



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NC FAMILY
POLICY COUNCIL

Students should not be forced to choose between their faith and their education, and an institution controlled by a religious organization should not have to sacrifice its religious beliefs to participate in department grants and programs.

—Former U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, statement upon publishing the U.S. Department of Education’s *Improving Free Inquiry, Transparency, and Accountability at Colleges and Universities* final rule

We must not confuse the end with means. We must not confuse the King of Heaven and earth with the princes of this world. We must not confuse the potential of politics with the hope of resurrection.

—Colson Center President John Stonestreet, “A Lesson from Screwtape” Breakpoint Podcast

Religious liberty is in danger of becoming a second-class right.

—U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito in his keynote address to the Federalist Society

The problem is not the presence of darkness; the problem is the absence of light. Light always overcomes the darkness, but you’re not going to shine the light unless you’re willing to live for Jesus whatever the cost.

—David Benham at NC Family’s *Christianity and the “Cancel Culture”* Virtual Event

There’s never been a more important time for us as the church to share the hope of Christ with a fearful and uncertain world. And we’re most effective in doing so when we care for and support one another.

—Dr. Stephen Grcevich, president and founder of Key Ministry



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Mental Health & the Church:

Seeking the Whole Story

by Casey Pruet

I could tell she was nervous the first time we met. She sat across from me, leg bouncing, hands fiddling with a small piece of trash left on the table by the previous occupant. The bustle of Downtown LA traffic and students flustered about finals played an anxious tune in the background.

I had just begun working with a college ministry at Natalie's school. She was in the middle of her sophomore year, trying to balance life as a sorority member and as a student in an intensive Occupational Therapy program.

We bantered back and forth easily, but I could read a general sense of stress and exhaustion as she described her scattered sleep, Red Bull-fueled days, and loaded social and academic calendar. But wasn't this the reality for most college students? From the outside, she seemed like any other 19-year-old girl.

Over the next few years, Natalie and I ended up teaming up in ministry to the sororities, on mission trips, and eventually as roommates during her final year of school.

And that is where it all started falling apart.

Natalie was—and had been—ping-ponging between deep depression and overwhelming anxiety. From our shared apartment, I could see the restless nights, the heightened stress, and the desperate desire for an escape. I now knew this was not just your “ordinary” college experience. And I had no idea how to help. We were both lost, suffering in silence and isolation.

That is how my story with mental health began back in 2010.

I was not aware of many people talking about mental health back then, especially in a Christian setting. We tried to speak with ministry and church leaders about what we were experiencing, only to receive lots of blank stares, confusion, and unhelpful instructions. We know that these responses weren't because these church leaders didn't care; they simply were not equipped to help. Even today, only 30 percent of pastors feel equipped to deal with mental health-related topics.

Yet, even though we felt very alone in this journey of navigating mental health issues, we would soon find out that nearly one in five U.S. adults struggled with anxiety, depression, or some other mental health difficulty.

But if the numbers only give us the outline, what's the whole story?

When you walk with someone through mental illness, you learn something you never will by merely looking at the numbers: every statistic has a personal story.

So, let's look at three questions:

1. What story do the numbers tell us?
2. How does crisis (i.e. COVID-19) change the story?
3. Where does the Church come into the story?

What Story Do the Numbers Tell Us?

Nearly ten years after my mental health journey began, the numbers are even higher: **more than one in three people are experiencing symptoms of a mental health difficulty.** Across the U.S., we see youth mental health worsening as rates of severe major depression increase, highest among youth who identify as more than one race (12.4 percent). We see mental health needs unfilled, with 24 percent of adults with a mental illness and 60 percent of youth with depression not receiving treatment. And, worst of all, we see both adults and youth dying from their mental health difficulties, as suicide rates have steadily increased by 35 percent over the past 20 years.

As Natalie and I began opening up about our experience back in 2010, these statistics took shape as people shared their own stories of silently struggling through anxiety, depression, and so many other mental and emotional difficulties.

A new mom fighting to find the strength to get out of bed and care for her new baby as she carried the weight of postpartum depression.

A pastor facing burnout and anxiety after years of over-working and no plan for rest or self-care.

A 14-year-old girl dying from suicide after failing to receive the support she needed through her experience with bipolar disorder.

And while many internal and external factors contribute to mental health difficulties (brain chemistry, economic recession, trauma, stress, stigma, social media use, etc.), **there seems to be a common experience for people who are struggling: loneliness and isolation.**

This is what Natalie and I consistently saw in the lives of people who were suffering with mental health difficulties. And today, **research confirms that loneliness is one of the highest contributors to anxiety and depression for U.S. adults.**



How Does Crisis Change the Story?

In a world already suffering from loneliness, pandemic-induced isolation has pushed us even further into that struggle. In a CDC survey given in August 2020, 75 percent of respondents ages 18-24 reported at least one adverse mental or behavioral problem, and 25 percent said they had seriously considered suicide in the 30 days prior to completing the survey. The Crisis Text Line saw traffic spike by 116 percent in late March and early April. For many people, their source of community and support disappeared overnight: in-person church, therapy, friends, support groups, and family.

In North Carolina alone, adults reporting anxiety or depression symptoms have increased by nearly 8 percent in just the past eight months, going from 34 percent to 42 percent. When we think of our communities, our churches, our schools, our families, we now know that almost half of them are struggling with mental and emotional health difficulties.

But that is not the end of the story because research shows that **community is the common denominator in mental health recovery.** Everyone who experiences mental health recovery and resiliency has a network of support. We are simply not meant to do it alone.

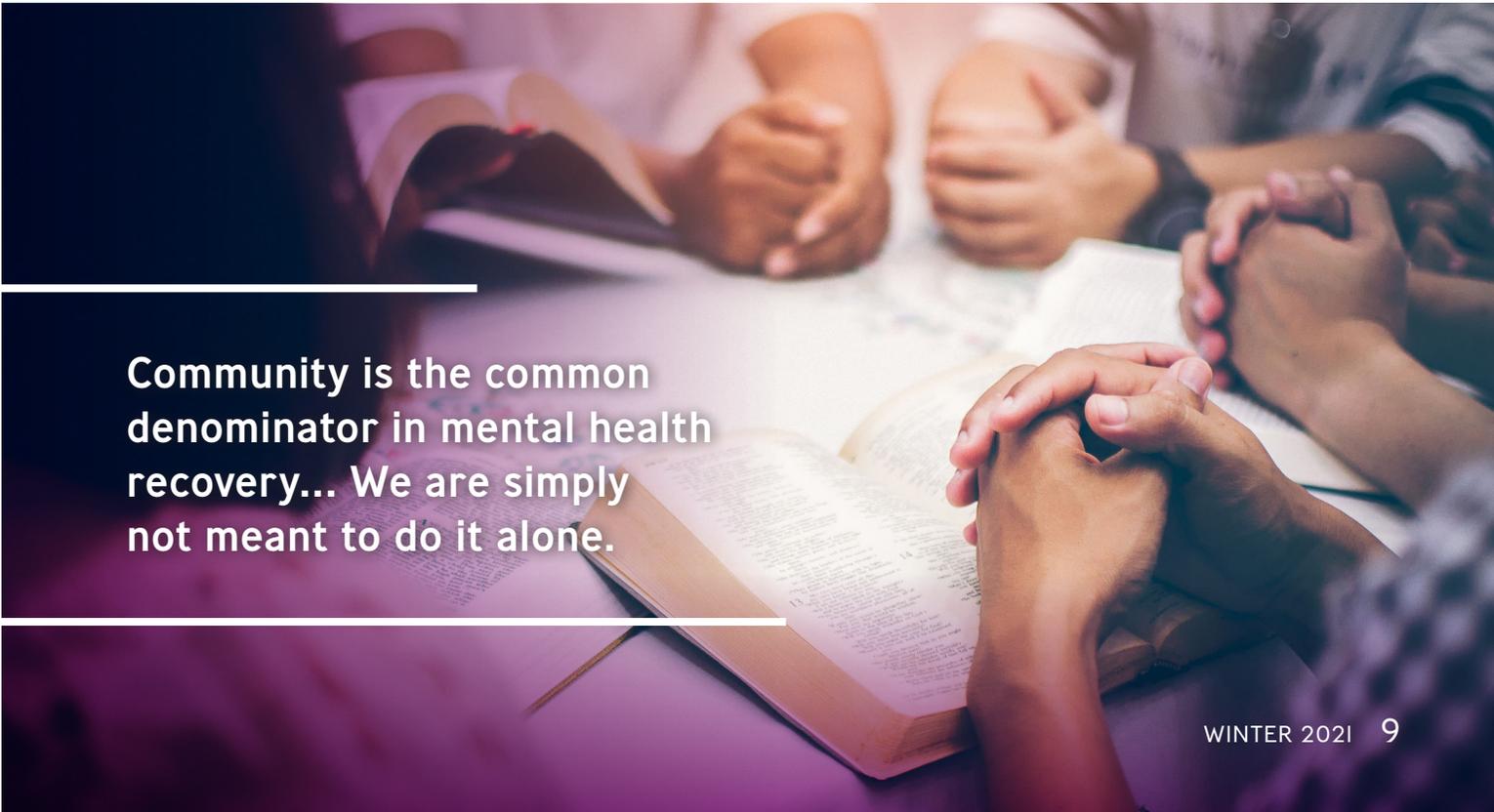
How Does the Church Change the Story?

This is where the Church comes in. The Church has an opportunity to come alongside people and help them see that there's a new story, a new narrative.

Joe Padilla, CEO and Co-Founder of Grace Alliance—an organization dedicated to transforming the way the church handles mental and emotional health challenges—recently stated, *“This post-pandemic future is an opportunity for church leaders to innovate and move mental and emotional health from a silent, stigmatized confusion to a practical, grace-filled solution.”*

There is a new narrative of belonging, hope, and practical grace.

Even today, only 30 percent of pastors feel equipped to deal with mental health-related topics.



Community is the common denominator in mental health recovery... We are simply not meant to do it alone.

A Narrative of Belonging

If community is the common denominator of mental health recovery, the Church is the perfect breeding ground for healing. The Church provides a unique place of belonging and support for people from any background, experience, race, ethnicity, gender, and even diagnosis.

When people are suffering, they need to experience a reaffirmed sense of safety, stability, and belonging before expecting behavior and action. Jesus always reaffirmed belonging before calling for change (see John 4:1-26 and John 8:1-11).

Community is an irreplaceable solution to growing mental health needs.

A Narrative of Hope

“Hope brings about a new process of change, and it takes time,” said Joe Padilla. *“It is not a quick-fix of our problems, rather a new sense of confidence with a faith and patience that life will improve.”*

Christians are looking to the Church for support for their mental health... They're interested in a holistic approach to mental health.

Even researchers have discovered that hope is one of the key ingredients to an individual's recovery process. While hope has come to be associated with wishful thinking, that is not the correct definition. Instead, both researchers and Christians define it as a firm assurance regarding the unknown.

The confidence in remembering that recovery is a long-term process of change that includes several ups and downs is the starting point for many. However, as Christians, hope goes even further and is fixed on something even more reliable. The Christian hope in Christ fuels our faith as we rest in the confidence that we have received God's grace to see better days realized (see Hebrews 11:1).

This is the narrative of hope that not only encourages our spiritual lives but our whole lives, including our mental health journey.

A Narrative of Practical Grace

David Kinnaman, President of Barna, stated from recent research that *“Christians are looking to the Church for support for their mental health ... They're interested in a holistic approach to mental health.”*

In 2013, this was the vision that Natalie and I latched onto when we decided to begin working with the Grace Alliance.

Today, churches everywhere are catching the vision too.

For the first few years of working with Grace Alliance, we reached out to pastors and church leaders to discuss the possibility of helping them address mental health needs within their churches. Many of those conversations (about 85 percent, if I had to estimate) would produce zero results, at least to our knowledge.



The Church has a unique opportunity to enter into peoples' stories, and see grace played out in practical ways as we learn how to walk alongside people through not just spiritual struggles, but also mental and emotional struggles.

But now, the issue of mental and emotional health is trending in pulpits across the country. Pastors are asking how they can care for the mental and emotional health needs of their churches and communities. They are developing a new perspective of a need for holistic care as more and more practicing Christians see how health in one area of life positively affects the others (spiritual, physical, mental, etc.).

While there is a long list of tasks that could help accomplish this goal, it all begins with this: entering into the **WHOLE** story.

The Church has a unique opportunity to do this and see grace played out in practical ways, as we learn how to walk alongside people through not just spiritual struggles, but also mental and emotional struggles. 



Casey Pruet is Chief Operations Officer at the Grace Alliance, a non-profit organization that cultivates healthy solutions for hearts and minds through simple, innovative biblical truths, scientific research, and practical tools.

Understanding NC's Dynamic Landscape

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and for the safety of our families, friends, supporters, and staff, NC Family chose to cancel our in-person dinner events in Raleigh, Winston-Salem, and Charlotte for 2020. Instead, we invited friends and supporters to tune in to a series of five exciting virtual events titled *Understanding NC's Dynamic Landscape*. These events featured national experts on a variety of topics, and can still be viewed on our website at ncfamily.org/events.

1



Christianity & the "Cancel Culture"

In NC Family's first Virtual Event on August 27, 2020, we were excited to explore *Christianity & the "Cancel Culture"* with special guests David and Jason Benham, The Benham Brothers. David and Jason shared their first-hand experience with the Cancel Culture after their HGTV reality show was canceled over statements the brothers made supporting sanctity of life and traditional marriage.

2

Life, Liberty, and the Supreme Court

Our second Virtual Event on September 10, 2020 dealt with *Life, Liberty & the Supreme Court*, with special guests John Stonestreet of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview, Ryan T. Anderson, Ph.D. of the Heritage Foundation, and attorney Matt Sharp of Alliance Defending Freedom. These three experts unpacked recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings on religious liberty, sanctity of life, and sexuality, and discussed what the ramifications of these rulings might be.



3

Race & Society: How Should Christians Respond?

On September 24, 2020, NC Family welcomed civil rights leader Clarence Henderson to discuss the topic of *Race & Society: How Should Christians Respond?* Henderson shared his personal story of fighting racism in the 1960s through the famous Woolworth’s lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, NC. He also discussed how he feels the racial tensions in our nation now are different from and also similar to how they were in the 1960s.



4

A Culture of Life in 2020 and Beyond

For NC Family’s fourth Virtual Event on October 8, 2020, we were excited to offer an exclusive screening of the new pro-life documentary *Divided Hearts of America*, produced and narrated by NFL Super Bowl champion Benjamin Watson. This documentary featured over 30 experts in various fields and from all sides of the ideological and political spectrums, and asks the question: Can the most divisive issue of our time actually bring us back together again?



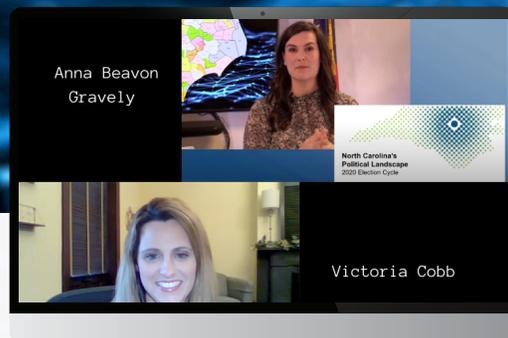
Fighting Sex-text Hotlines

NC Family joined eight other family policy councils in signing onto an open letter to the Secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services, in which we raised alarm about the existence of “sex-text hotlines” across the country. These textlines, the first of which actually began in North Carolina, exist for children to ask complete strangers questions about sex without parental consent or knowledge. Many appear to have received federal Title V funding designated for abstinence education. But these sex-text hotlines do not actually provide abstinence education, making this a gross misuse of federal funds, if not a flat out violation of federal law.

5

2020 Elections: What’s At Stake?

The fifth and final Virtual Event in the *Understanding NC’s Dynamic Landscape* series took place on October 22, 2020, featuring Anna Beavon Gravely, Executive Director of the North Carolina FreeEnterprise Foundation, and Victoria Cobb, President of The Family Foundation of Virginia. Gravely and Cobb spoke on the topic of the *2020 Elections: What’s At Stake?* Gravely unpacked the political landscape of North Carolina, while Cobb shared about Virginia’s difficult story of losing decades of pro-family legislation in the span of one legislative session after their last election in 2019.





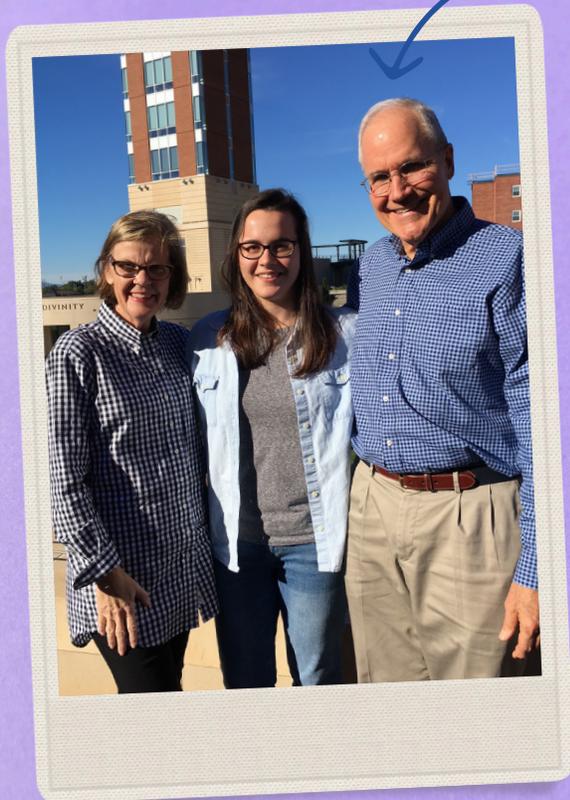
Calley, Communications Director

When rumors began to swirl in March of 2020 that there would be a quarantine, I panicked. The idea of quarantining in a small apartment held no allure for me whatsoever. But worse than that, I knew my parents would be strict “bubble” adherents, and I would not be allowed to see them for some time. But my parents graciously extended the invitation to me to move home and join their “bubble,” providing me with a loving family, a perfect dog, a nice open backyard, and a lot of free, home-cooked meals.

Honestly I expected there to be some conflict and tension, as most would if they were to move back in with their parents after having lived on their own as an adult. Conflict was bound to emerge. Yet, it rarely did. Instead, we easily fell into a routine involving daily walks with my dog, evening *Jeopardy!* competitions, regular COVID-19 research updates from my analytical father, and a lot of baking experiments with my mom, just to name a few. I experienced so much love and support, so much joy and laughter, so much deepening of relationships that I didn’t want quarantine to end. As my mother has said since quarantine ended and I moved back out, it was a precious experience with her grown daughter that she wouldn’t trade for the world.

Seeing the Savior in a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has been filled with a myriad of struggles—mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. But the NC Family staff has seen some silver linings come out of this difficult time, as God has continued to make Himself known and to shine His light in even a dark time.



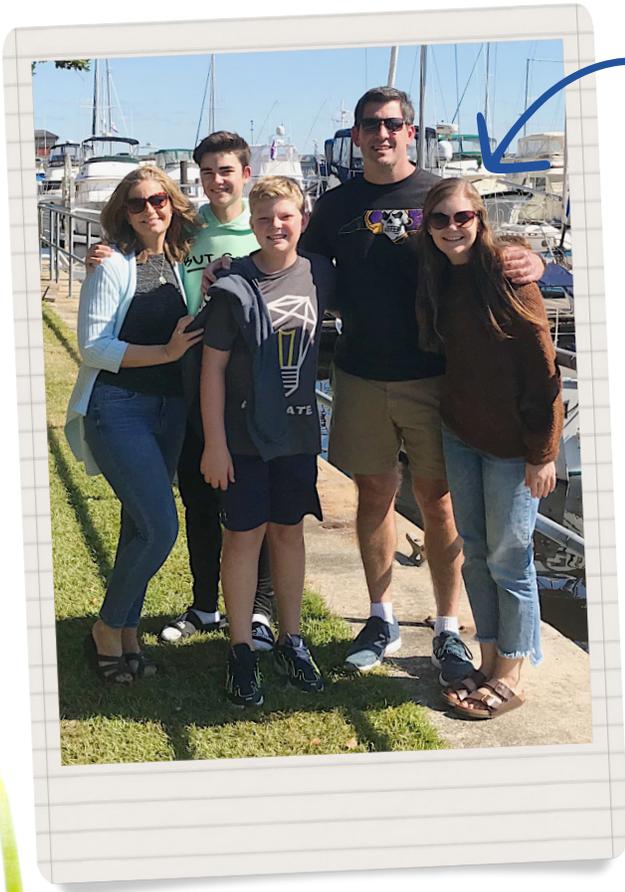
Jere, Director of Community Impact and Counsel

I have seen in new and deeper ways how vital it is to stay in God's Word each day, so that I can know Him and His love and His sovereignty in the midst of any and every situation. During the pandemic, I have learned more about trusting God and seeking to glorify Him regardless of the circumstances.

I have once again experienced the blessing that God brings in testing, where He takes knowledge that is in my head about how to live and makes it part of who I am by changing my heart.

In addition to praying for God's comfort and healing and provision for others, I have prayed even more that God would draw each person to Himself. As significant as the challenges are for so many people, it has become even clearer that the most important thing in life is whether someone has a personal relationship with God.

I want to pray more for others, and to let the Lord live and love through me so that He is glorified and He draws people to Himself. I want to keep this perspective not just during COVID-19, but every day for the rest of my life.



Makenna, Intern

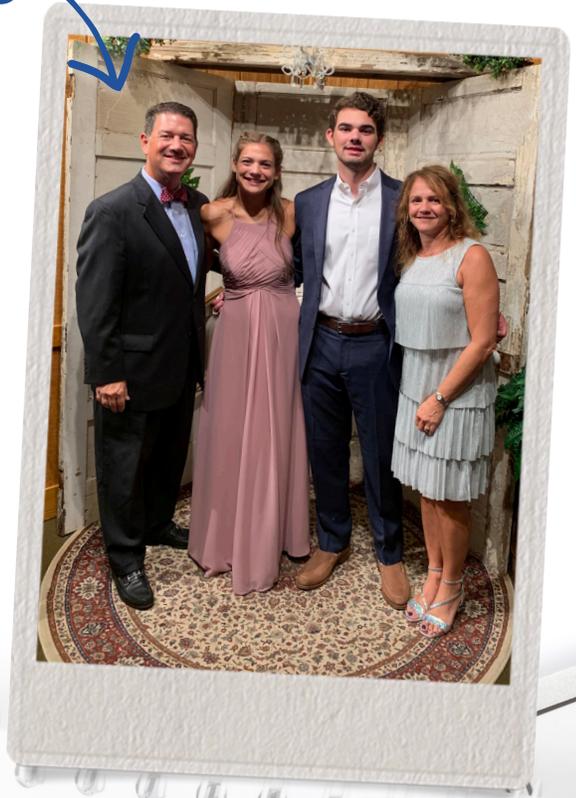
When I flew home from college for spring break with one suitcase, little did I know that I would be spending the next eight plus months with my family in North Carolina. Going from living an independent, busy lifestyle to being under the roof of my parents again has truthfully had its challenges at times. But the Lord continues to teach me how to be present in the moment and trust Him no matter where He has me. The friends I have met and opportunities I have had in this season—including the opportunity to stay at NC Family for an extra semester—never would have happened otherwise.

While before I could not wait to get out of my hometown, now I have come to appreciate its quirks and small-town feel. The long family walks outside in the beautiful weather were a special highlight of quarantine. Looking back on this season, I have realized what a gift it has been to watch firsthand how my family has navigated the many changes that this time has brought. We transitioned to a new church body. My mom entered the workforce again after 11 years. My brother started his senior year of high school. Although COVID indeed greatly changed *my* plans, I know that I needed to be with my family in this season as we walked through these changes together.

John, President & Executive Director

I have experienced two primary silver linings during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. One is the opportunity to have more focused time with my family. Although we have always loved spending time together, my daughter Amelia lives in Baltimore, and my son Jordan is at UNC-Chapel Hill. Due to COVID-19, Amelia was forced to work remotely. To break up the monotony of the day, we spent more time than usual chatting on the phone, FaceTiming, and sending each other goofy messages and gifs. She's also been home for a couple of extended visits, and that's been wonderful! When UNC-Chapel Hill sent students home, Jordan and I carved out more time to play golf and go fishing. Our golf improved, but not our fishing. Regardless, the activity was secondary to the delight of spending time with each other. As I look back on my youth, some of my fondest recollections are times I spent with my dad. I pray that Jordan has similar memories, and I thank God for the extra time.

The second silver lining also has to do with relationships. COVID also forced my church to cancel an annual short-term mission trip to Guatemala, and we were heartbroken. Not to be deterred, the incredible staff at Potter's House Association in Guatemala City invited ministry partners from across the U.S. to join them for a time of sharing and prayer each week. Those Thursday morning Zoom calls became one of the most anticipated parts of my schedule, and I feel so much closer to my brothers and sisters in Guatemala. It's amazing how technology can help bridge the divide otherwise caused by a global pandemic.





Eileen, Constituent Services

I have two “silver linings of COVID,” and they go hand-in-hand. They are time and thankfulness.

Before COVID, my days were lists of to-dos just waiting to be checked off. Work and home responsibilities, church service, family, phone calls, and on and on. Now, it’s more that I float from one thing to another, with time for reflection. That reflection has brought me great thankfulness.

I have lived in my townhome for 28 years, and in my busyness had hardly spent any time on my back deck. It overlooks a horse farm—just beautiful—and I never really appreciated it before. This year I had several meals on the deck with family and friends. I’ve had time to walk every day, with friends or alone, and I’m so thankful for that. I have a phone call with my sister every day and we talk for up to an hour. Whatever do we find to talk about? We talk about our day, our families, and reflect back to our parents. We never would have taken the time for this if it weren’t for COVID.

I love to curl up on my favorite chair with a coffee and my bible study. I just lose all sense of time until I am finished. I’m so thankful for that freedom.

Recently I received an email from my 46-year-old son thanking me for the way he had been raised. He’d had *time* to reflect on his life and was led to let me know how *thankful* he was. I guess I’m not the only one.

Heather, Administrator

Joy. Calm. Snuggles. Freedom. These are the words that come to mind when I think of the silver linings of COVID-19. Don’t get me wrong, there are plenty of other, less positive words to describe it as well! But, my fondest memories will be the unexpected moments granted to us by being forced to stay home.

While the days were long and very challenging, as we suddenly had to balance both parents working while “homeschooling” our 2nd and 4th graders, the evenings were gifts from God. Suddenly, we didn’t have to take our daughter to gymnastics three nights a week. Our son didn’t have to go to hockey three nights a week either. My part-time coaching job was closed. We had literally *nothing* to do.

So, we began making dinner every night and eating as a family, something we rarely had time for before. Seeing the kids excited to set the table and enjoy leisurely dinners together was joyous for me. We then played games together after dinner. We relaxed. We snuggled and watched movies. We became closer. It was the most calm I’ve been in a long time. In the end, we realized the importance of slowing down and found that sometimes being forced to stop can actually give you freedom.



Trillia Newbell, author and Director of Community Outreach for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention



Traci DeVette Griggs: Trillia, do you have any particular things to share specifically related to how we should communicate via social media?

Trillia Newbell: One of the questions you want to ask yourself is would you say this in this way if that person was standing right in front of you? I really think that will help the way we communicate. But another thing we have to remember is that everyone you're engaging with on social media is an actual person. [...] That means we are called to love them. That is our Christian calling. And it is a hard one, but it is one that we must do. God says, "If we don't love others, we don't know Him." That's what 1 John says. So, we are called to this difficult task of loving people. When we engage, we need to see that there's someone behind that keyboard.

R.J. Snell, Ph.D., Director of Academic Programs at the Witherspoon Institute and Academic Director of the Aquinas Institute for Catholic Life at Princeton University



Traci DeVette Griggs: You've written that "many Americans (not all, certainly) have forgotten what it means to be citizens" during this pandemic. So, what do you mean by that?

Dr. R.J. Snell: [I]t seems to me that to be a citizen entails two principles. The first is obligation. The old understanding of natural rights assumed that we had rights because we had responsibilities to people. [...] The new understanding of human rights sees us as isolated individuals. [...] The second principle of being a citizen is not only are we encumbered, but we're real agents; we're responsible for self-governance and self-rule. And at the current moment, I think both of those principles are under attack or are being swamped by a dual movement. The first is a kind of rabid, isolated view of the individual; we're all alone. And the second is state-overreach.

Kelly and Courtney Litvak, founders of the anti-human trafficking organization Childproof America



Traci DeVette Griggs: Courtney, talk about why you couldn't walk away [from human trafficking]. Once you realized that you were in a dangerous place and you had been misled, what kept you there?

Courtney Litvak: When people imagine someone who's being "held against their will," they imagine them maybe in chains. Maybe they imagine them physically being bound, something holding them where they are, where they're in danger. Because otherwise if they had any control themselves, they would choose to leave. Okay, that is not the case. [...] People need to break these stereotypes and these stigmas and realize this is more about relationships and people, the heart and the mind. [...] Mental control is mixed with physical control, because it is that mental brainwashing that keeps people from leaving.

Michael Donnelly, senior counsel at the Homeschool Legal Defense Association



Traci DeVette Griggs:
After finishing last school year at home, did you hear of families who discovered that they were surprised to find they could actually homeschool?

Michael Donnelly:
Traci, absolutely. During the early stages of the virus situation, a

lot of folks decided that they were going to try the homeschooling thing. And a lot of them found that it worked out really well, and they decided to keep on doing it. And what we saw over the summer was that that number actually grew significantly. [...] And we saw record-breaking growth, which has been validated by government surveys, members of our association, and other organizations involved in homeschooling. I think it's safe to say that what we've seen is that regular homeschooling has at least doubled in most places, and in some cases, it's grown by much more than that.

You may also stream *Family Policy Matters* online at www.ncfamily.org



Family Policy Matters is a 15-minute radio show and podcast featuring interviews with national, state, and local experts on a wide range of policy issues important to North Carolina families. *Family Policy Matters* is hosted by Traci DeVette Griggs and airs each week on over 20 radio stations across North Carolina. You can listen and access a full transcript at NCFamily.org. *Family Policy Matters* is also available as a podcast on your favorite podcast app.



Family Policy Matters is available as a podcast on your favorite podcast app! Search for "NC Family's *Family Policy Matters*."

Radio Stations Airing *Family Policy Matters*

Belmont/Charlotte	WCGC 1270 AM	Sunday, 11:45 AM
Bennett/Asheboro	WYTR 88.1 FM	Saturday, 2:00 PM
Charlotte/Gastonia	WCRU 960 AM/ 105.7 FM	Saturday, 6:00 PM
Charlotte/Harrisburg	WOCR 1540 AM/ 88.3 FM	Saturday, 3:45 PM
Durham	WDRU 105.5 FM	Saturday, 6:00 AM
Fayetteville	WCLN 105.7/ 107.3 FM	Saturday, 7:00 AM
Greensboro/Winston-Salem	WTRU 830 AM/ 97.7 FM	Saturday, 6:00 AM
Newland	WECR 1130 AM	Saturday, 9:06 AM
Raleigh/Durham	WETC 540 AM	Saturday, 11:00 AM
Raleigh	WDRU 1030 AM/ 105.7 FM	Saturday, 6:30 AM
Rocky Mount	WLQC 103.1 FM	Sunday, 11:00 PM
Salisbury	WOCR 93.3 FM	Saturday, 3:45 PM
Sanford	WLHC 103.1 FM	Sunday, 11:00 PM
Taylorsville	WACB 860 AM	Wednesday, 5:00 PM
Troy	WJRM 1390 AM	Sunday, 8:15 AM
Wake Forest	EPIC 103.5 FM	Saturday, 1:00 PM
Wilmington	WZDG 88.5 FM	Sunday, 5:30 AM & 6PM
Winston-Salem/ Piedmont Triad Area	WPIP 880 AM	Sunday, 4:15 PM

On the Horizon at the NC General Assembly

The 2021-2022 legislative session of the North Carolina General Assembly began January 13, 2021. The state House and Senate welcomed several new members, and while the Republicans retained control of both chambers, the majority margins have slightly changed. Democrats picked up one seat in the state Senate, reducing the GOP majority to 28-22; and Republicans picked up four seats in the state House to widen their majority to 69-51. This new legislature is likely to continue working to address numerous issues pertinent to North Carolina families, including sanctity of life, school choice, and gambling, while facing a Democratic Governor with an active VETO stamp.



Sanctity of Life

The 2019-2020 session of the General Assembly showed some promise but broke little new ground on the pro-life front. The budget for 2019-2020 included continued funding for Crisis Pregnancy Centers of \$650,000 for each year, but several pro-life bills were not able to be passed. For example, bills prohibiting dismemberment abortions, abortions on children capable of feeling pain, and others were filed but not considered. The General Assembly did ratify the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act to provide new protections for children who survived an abortion, but Governor Roy Cooper vetoed the bill, and the House was not able to override the veto. **With renewed pro-life strength in the House in 2021, a probable win would be overriding the governor's likely veto of a new Born-Alive bill.** Only two or three votes from Democrats in each chamber would be necessary to override. Additionally, legislation has been prepared to stop the new phenomena of “do-it-yourself” abortions by mail.

2021 is more promising in the courts as well. There is a pro-life majority on the U.S. Supreme Court and improved numbers on the State Supreme Court. North Carolina's 3-year almost total ban on post 20-week abortions is now before the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond. It was in effect from January 1, 2016 until May 25, 2019 when a district court judge enjoined it, allowing North Carolina to go back to having no effective legal impediment to late-term abortions up until birth. But there is a ray of hope with the new judges at the U.S. Supreme Court level.

Unfortunately, there is a new threat in the state courts as well. Planned Parenthood filed a lawsuit attacking most North Carolina pro-life laws enacted since 2011, including one law that has been around since the founding of the state in 1669—the prohibition on “do-it-yourself” abortions. Planned Parenthood is also attacking the Woman's Right to Know Act—ensuring women are allowed to make informed decisions about their pregnancy and abortion procedures—the regulation of abortion clinics, and the prohibition of abortions by Skype. Finally, Planned Parenthood is asking the courts to invent a constitutional right to abortion in the State Constitution.

2021 has the potential for some major pro-life wins in our state, with a renewed pro-life majority in the General Assembly and improved support on the state and federal courts, but it is still likely to be a difficult battle.



Paul “Skip” Stam is Former Speaker Pro Tempore of the NC House of Representatives





Gambling

Thankfully for the families and communities of our state, NC Family’s work as a leading voice against the expansion of predatory gambling has been mostly successful in keeping the spread of legalized wagering at bay. **The lure of “easy money” may seem like a harmless enticement to some, but we know for many it is an addictive demon that ruins lives, destroys families, plagues communities, and corrupts governments.** Despite decades of research clearly showing the relationship between gambling expansion and increases in problem and pathological gambling, we seem to encounter more extensive gambling proposals in the N.C General Assembly every legislative session. It is likely that 2021 will be no exception.

Raffles, bingo, the state lottery, nonprofit “casino nights,” and gambling at two Cherokee tribal casinos in the far western reaches of North Carolina are the only forms of gambling that are currently legal in the Old North State. Although illegal, the video gambling industry continues to thumb its nose at the law. Every time the state legislature passes a new measure to crack down on video gambling, the industry and its attorneys seem to devise new ways to circumvent the law.

Recently, we’ve seen efforts to fully legalize video sweepstakes machines, to authorize sports betting, to expand tribal gambling on the Cherokee Reservation, and to allow the state lottery to initiate online video

poker, also known as “digital instants.” This is highly likely to continue into the 2021-2022 legislative session. There was even a bill in the United States Congress in 2020 that would pave the way for the **Lumbee Indian Tribe in Eastern North Carolina to establish a massive Las Vegas-style gambling casino on the I-95 corridor near Lumberton.** Another federal bill would enable the South Carolina-based **Catawba Indian Nation to construct a 200,000-plus square foot tribal casino 30 miles west of Charlotte along I-85 in Kings Mountain.**

In the state legislature, support for legalizing games of chance crosses party lines, but the most fervent opponents of gambling are typically the most conservative Republicans and the most liberal Democrats. **NC Family will continue working to educate all of these elected officials about the ills of predatory gambling, including personal bankruptcy, theft and other crimes, domestic violence, child abuse, divorce, and even suicide.** We pray these lawmakers will see what a bad bet gambling expansion would be for North Carolina.



John L. Rustin is President of the North Carolina Family Policy Council

School Choice

Last session, lawmakers passed a sweeping coronavirus relief bill that included expansion of school choice in the Tar Heel State. **Their first step was to strengthen and expand the Opportunity Scholarship Program, which provides up to \$4,200 in support each year for a student to attend a private school of their parent's choosing.** A modest increase in maximum household income brought more working-class families into eligibility. The legislature also eliminated the cap on kindergarten and first grade student awards for Opportunity Scholarships, opening the program to new students. Senator Deanna Ballard (R-Watauga) led the effort, and Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina and advocated for these important updates to the program.

Opportunity Scholarships are not the only area where the legislature has been active. Using federal CARES Act funding, Senator Joyce Krawiec (R-Forsyth) led the charge as **lawmakers also allocated \$6.5 million to fund the waitlist for North Carolina's two programs serving students with special needs: The Children with Disabilities Grant and Education Savings Account. The funds helped students with special needs use ESAs and Disabilities grants in fall of 2020.** The move to virtual learning in the spring of 2020 left many students with special needs behind, but their families were able to use these new resources to access in-person instruction or other resources in the fall to prevent further declines.

We also saw efforts to defund and dismantle school choice programs. This included a budget proposal from Gov. Roy Cooper to phase out the Opportunity Scholarship Program, and a handful of lawmakers in the General Assembly introduced legislation that aimed for the same outcome. Thankfully, neither proposal was successful during the 2020 session, but we expect a continued campaign by Governor Cooper to phase out school choice in our state. We strongly believe that his efforts will be unsuccessful.

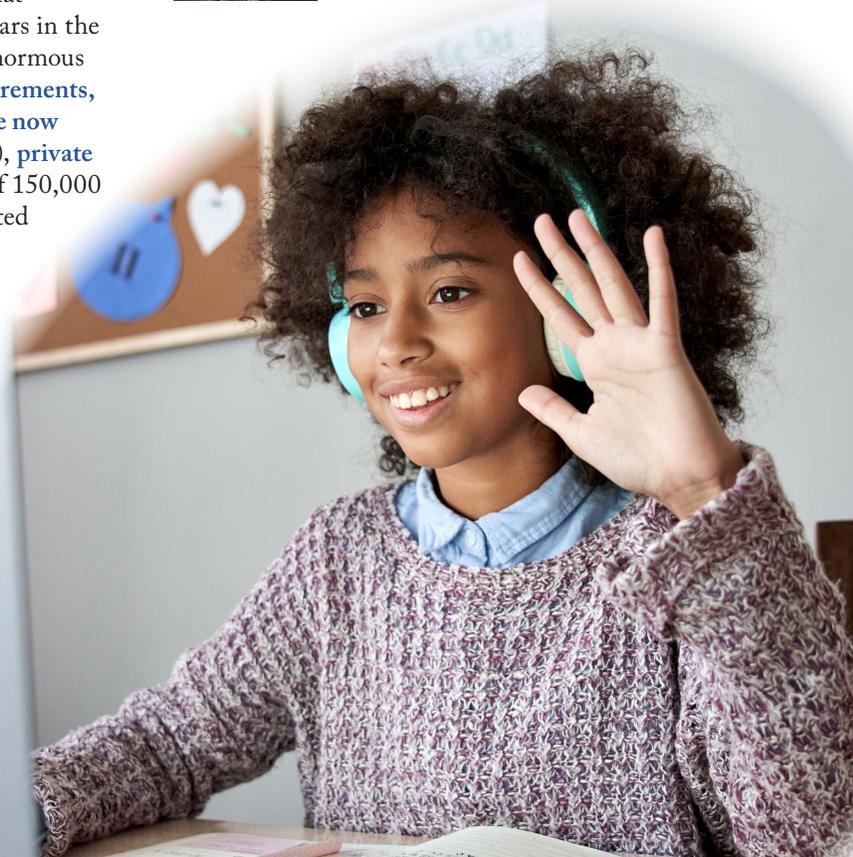
Looking forward, Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger (R-Rockingham) identified in an election night press release that expanding school choice is a key objective over the next two years in the legislature. One issue that lawmakers are likely to face is the enormous influx of students into schools of choice in 2020. **By our measurements, North Carolina is closing in on half a million students who are now enrolled in either public charters** (more than 127,000 students), **private schools** (nearly 104,000 students), or **home schools** (upwards of 150,000 students). Adapting to this changing dynamic and unprecedented growth in demand for school choice options should be topping lawmakers' list of priorities in the 2021 session.

Polls show public support for school choice initiatives, and that is reflected in the pro-school choice majorities in both chambers of the state legislature. In 2020, the COVID-19 relief bill that included support for NC's three school-choice programs passed on a broad bi-partisan basis (104-10 in the House and 44-5 in the Senate). In fact, school choice remains more popular than ever. According to a recent poll by the Civitas Institute, nearly 7 in 10 North Carolinians support the Opportunity Scholarship Program. A Civitas poll from earlier in the year found 81 percent support for the statement that parents should be the ones to choose where their kids go to school. Our own recent parent survey showed that 94 percent of parents feel more inclined to support policies expanding school choice during the coronavirus crisis.

Every parent of a school-age child had to make a difficult decision about their child's schooling last year, so school choice hit home more than ever before. In 2020, it's no exaggeration to say that school choice went mainstream in North Carolina and the country more broadly. School choice has solidified itself as a mainstay in North Carolina, and we believe public policies ought to continue to support it.



Brian Jodice is Executive Vice President of Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina





Celebrating 30 Years of Service to North Carolina Families!

2021 marks the 30th Anniversary of the founding of the North Carolina Family Policy Council, and we couldn't be more excited or encouraged as we reflect on this major milestone in the history of this organization, and look toward the future.

The first thing that needs to be said is a big **"THANK YOU!"** to all of our ministry partners! You have helped make this achievement possible by working together and sustaining NC Family over the past three decades. We could not have made it here without your involvement, action, financial support, and most importantly, your prayers.

In the mid-1980s, Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family and other national Christian leaders recognized a shift in U.S. politics and policymaking. More decision-making authority was being handed down from the federal government to the states, and it was becoming more and more imperative to have a strong voice speaking up for families and biblical family values in state legislatures across the nation. It was out of this realization and need that the North Carolina Family Policy Council was born in 1991.

With an initial staff and Board of Directors made up entirely of volunteers, NC Family quickly established itself as a credible and reliable source of research, information, and analysis on policy issues impacting the family. Since our founding, NC Family has been a leading and trusted voice in the cultural battle over issues like the sanctity of human life, marriage, adoption, religious liberty, education, sound fiscal policy, human trafficking, drug abuse, and gambling. As a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) organization, we seek every opportunity to share information and form coalitions with like-minded organizations, individuals, and policymakers—regardless of political persuasion—to support good policies and oppose bad ones.

In fact, several years ago, a top Democratic leader in the North Carolina Senate referred to NC Family as "The Conscience of the General Assembly." This was a high, but humbling compliment, because every member of our staff and Board of Directors takes seriously God's calling for us to be "salt" and "light" in the world (Matthew 5:13-16), and to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). After all, what do we gain if we "win" a legislative battle but leave behind a wake of broken relationships and compromised values?

But don't take this to mean that NC Family won't "go to the mat" for the issues we care about—we absolutely will, and we do! However, while we are passionate about the issues we address, we are even more passionate about the relationships we seek to develop, some of which span decades. (You can hear more about what state leaders think of NC Family by watching the testimonial video on our website at: NCFamily.org/about.)

And speaking of decades, NC Family has been extremely fortunate to have had strong and honorable leaders over the years, including former NC Family presidents Susan Renfer, Steve Maye, and Bill Brooks, as well as a host of faithful and dynamic board members like past Chairmen Dick Douglas from Greenville and Henry Williamson from Lewisville, and our current Board Chairman Alan Cole from Winston-Salem. We have also been blessed with incredibly talented staff who have invested their time, energy, and talents in pursuit of our vision of "A state and nation where God is honored, religious freedom flourishes, families thrive and life is cherished." Throughout our history, these men and women have built a stable structure and a lasting heritage that, Lord willing, will carry on for decades to come.

But, as I said at the beginning, it is the support of valued partners across the state who believe in what we do and who have invested their time, efforts, prayers, and finances, that has enabled NC Family to make it to this point and to be so well-positioned for the future.

So, as we look ahead to 2021 and the decades to come, THANK YOU for partnering with NC Family to champion the cause of families and biblical family values in our state and nation! 🙏

To God Be the Glory!



John L. Rustin is President of the North Carolina Family Policy Council



North Carolina Family Policy Council
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**“ Whatever you did for
one of the least of
these brothers
and sisters
of mine,
you did
for me.**

- Matthew 25:40

