

THE FAMLET MONTHLY



Dear Family,

I don't attend the temple as often as I ought to, and I almost never go on Saturdays because I get annoyed when it's crowded. But circumstances dictated that I make an exception this month.

In less than a week, our beloved Washington D.C. Temple—an edifice that was built around the time I was born—will close for two years to undergo some much-needed refurbishment.

Families sometimes seek to cram in as much time together as they can in the weeks leading up to the departure of a missionary for two years, and it seems that a lot of us are treating the temple similarly. Neither of these tendencies strikes me as particularly rational—does it really matter how much you eat immediately before a two-week fast? (not that I would ever do such a thing)—but I get it.

Consequently, Saturdays this month at the temple have been the Mormon equivalent of Christmas Eve at Saint Peter's (perhaps with worse parking). And there's no way you could have gotten me there had it not been for a half-dozen members of our stake's French-speaking Takoma Park Branch who for the past several months had been dutifully preparing to receive their endowments before the shutdown.

Apart from conducting a few temple recommend interviews on behalf of the stake president (who, notwithstanding his many virtues, does not speak French) I had nothing at all to do with their



Fourteen current and former members of the Takoma Park Branch (plus Crystal and me). Outside the Washington D.C. Temple, 17 Feb 2018

preparation. But I've grown rather fond of these members over the past four years during which I've had some delegated responsibility for their branch, and I had no intention of missing this. It is impossible for a human being not to love this little branch. The branch president hails from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (which I still think of as Zaire, since that's what it was called when I taught people from there in France a quarter-century ago). A counselor in the branch presidency and the elders quorum president are from Cameroon. The Relief Society president is from Cote d'Ivoire, and other members come from Gabon, Haiti, and some of President Trump's other favorite non-Nordic countries.

The endowment session was in French. Crystal got headphones and dialed up the English (channel 0, if you're ever in a similar spot) but I think she could have made it through without them. I'd never attended a French session and the whole thing was rather emotional for me. I suspect that people feel this way about many different languages, but the experience reinforced to me that if there's a single Celestial Language, it can't possibly be anything but [French](#).

The session took forever, as you might expect with six first-timers, but, uncharacteristically, this did not annoy me. Afterward, virtually our entire company walked directly from the celestial room (on the 4th floor) up to the sixth floor to what I believe is the same sealing room where Crystal and I were married and watched two of the people who had just been endowed get sealed first to each other and then to their 15-year-old daughter. You probably don't care about all this detail, but it was all kinds of cool and the highlight of my month.

As we were leaving the sealing room I remarked that it would be great if we could get a picture of all of us there together dressed as we were. I was joking, but a nice temple worker quietly and kindly informed me that that was not allowed. She helpfully pointed out that we could take pictures outside after we had changed out of our temple clothes. And so we did. And those are pretty much the only pictures I have from this month, and so I hope you like them. To those who have an image in their minds of what Mormons look like, I present to you these photographs.

I sometimes enjoy pointing out that the only member of the U.S. Congress of Haitian descent is a Republican



The Takoma Park branch president (left) and a newly sealed family.



Raise your hand if anyone in your stake presidency has a beard this awesome.

Mormon woman from Utah. Those who think they have us all figured out are almost always wrong.

In other church news, during the first quarter of the Eagles' historic Super Bowl triumph I had the privilege of joining the stake president in visiting my longtime friend and neighbor Rick Kemper and asking him to be our bishop. He is a smarter, kinder, and more patient man than I and will be wonderful in that role.

I've been thinking about Bishop Kemper this month as I've read news accounts of bishops reportedly giving bad counsel to victims of domestic abuse. Stories like these are both heartbreaking and haunting and force me to take inventory of every stupid thing I've ever said during an interview. I'm sure I've given bad advice that I've either forgotten or never knew was bad, and I feel badly about all of it. Bishop Kemper will doubtless learn from the mistakes of others and I expect he will say fewer dumb things than I.

Meanwhile, our now-former bishop, Eric Baxter (who I can't imagine has ever said a dumb thing in his life), will have a little more time to devote to his real (paying) job defending the religious liberty rights of bearded Sikhs desiring to serve in the military, headscarf-wearing Muslim women seeking to work at Abercrombie, Catholic nuns who don't feel comfortable directly financing their employees' contraceptives, and others. We go to church with some truly remarkable people.

The end of February often brings the end of weather-related school closures. Let's hope so since we've already exceeded the allotted number of snow days and are likely going to have to make them up somehow. I try to make a point of not second-guessing the people charged with making the difficult decision whether to cancel things. But I take more than a little pride in pointing out that I managed to ride my bike to work (in Rosslyn—14 miles away) on multiple days that school either was closed or opened late due to "emergency weather conditions." Despite now having more cars than licensed drivers at our house, I still haven't driven to work since July and have taken Metro maybe a half-dozen times. Apart from that, it's been all bike. Yes, I'm amazing, thank you very much.

Last weekend Lucy decided she wanted to be a vegan. She has somehow held to it for the past 8 days despite incessant mockery from her unenlightened, omnivorous father. So, good for her. Stay tuned.



Two of my favorite Eagles fans (Pete and Mom) on Super Bowl Sunday.



Two photos from my short trip to Portland this month—Above: fresh cut flowers above the urinals at BWI—Classy! Below: Portland airport—I hate the word “preventative.” Like “utilize,” it should be banned from use.



Grace is back in the county honors chorus for the second consecutive year. She was invited to audition for a solo, which she didn't get, which made her sad, but she generally seems content with her life.

Crystal texted me at work on Wednesday to tell me that our water heater was leaking water all over the basement. I'm not sure what she thought I could do about that even if I'd been home. If you'd asked me which thing down there is the water heater, I probably would have gotten it on the first or second guess, but I don't think I would have made the situation any better. And so she called our guy, Conrod, who comes to our house every few months to fix the latest broken thing. (He gets destroyed on [Yelp](#), but we like him.)

The carpet in the guest bedroom down there smells bad and might never dry out, so apologies in advance to whoever comes to town for Hannah's wedding and has to sleep there. But, \$2,200 later, we have a bunch of new equipment down the basement and can take hot showers again. It's a good thing the TV in our bedroom broke *last* week—a crisis I rectified with an unscheduled Costco run almost as quickly as we addressed this week's busted water heater. If the incidents had occurred in reverse order, I might have concluded that a new TV was an unaffordable luxury. Tender mercies.

In light of this month's mass murder at a Florida high school, it was decided that "Carrie—the musical" will not be performed at Northwood High School this year. The obscure show, I'm told, is based on a Stephen King novel of the same name about a bullied, disturbed girl who kills everyone at her high school prom. Why anyone thought this sounded like a great idea for a high school production to begin with is beyond my ability to comprehend, but I'm not very sophisticated. Sophie had a role in the cancelled play and is now being recast in the school's replacement show—something Sophie describes as "even more sketchy"—called "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change."

Neither Sophie nor Grace joined the large group of high school and middle school students who walked out of school on Wednesday to march on the U.S. Capitol, White House, and I don't know where else. Before I write the next paragraph, which will annoy some people, I wish to establish some *bona fides*, which will annoy everyone else. I can no longer prove that any of the following is true, but I solemnly swear that it is.

While an undergraduate at BYU in the mid-1990s, I did all of the following things:

1. Wrote a fan letter to Hillary Clinton.
2. Had published at least one letter to the editor of the [Daily Universe](#) in support of gun control.
3. Authored an essay entitled "Capitalism—An Assault on the Gospel of Jesus Christ" that my English professor suggested I submit for publication. (I didn't.)

My views on these and other topics have become somewhat less strident and more nuanced as I've aged, but I don't mind pointing out that it takes a lot more courage to express them in Utah County than it does here in Montgomery County. Actually, it takes precisely zero courage to express them here (interestingly, I find here to be a somewhat less tolerant place for minority opinions than Utah) which is why I have a hard time taking local student "walkouts" seriously. It is neither noble nor courageous to join a boisterous throng in cutting school on an unseasonably warm and sunny February day when there is no risk of punishment for doing so. Young voices have value, but students wishing to be taken seriously by anyone beyond the already deeply converted should sacrifice something and demonstrate on a weekend. Otherwise, it's just a bunch of truants pouring gas on the outrage—and outrage, while understandable and justified, is not productive. (Having some workable ideas might also help. Slogans are not ideas.) It seems to me we would do better by teaching our children this instead of fawning over them for angrily parroting back the opinions of their parents and teachers.

And that is officially the closest I get to a rant nowadays. All things considered, I guess my life, while not without its dark moments, is just too pleasant and lacking in things to get agitated about. A lot of that has to do with the privilege I have of being related to such a fine person as you. I hope you are well.

Love,

Tim