



# Still Standing But Not Standing Still

Report to the Congregation and Community  
June 2020 to June 2021



Grace Presbyterian Church  
*Transforming lives through God's grace*



## **Our Vision**

Transforming lives  
through God's grace

## **Our Mission**

Inspired by the Holy Spirit,  
we grow disciples of Jesus Christ  
to love our neighbours  
and effect social change.

# Still Standing

*“And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock.”*

These familiar words of Jesus are part of a parable found in Matthew 7: 24-27. They remind us that our foundation in Christ can anchor us in the storm. But have you ever wondered about that house?

The parable offers no details, and many of us have likely imagined the house emerging from the storm unscathed. But a storm that swept other houses off their foundations would cause damage, even if a house stayed standing.

The pandemic has blown and beat against people and communities for more than a year now. It has been challenging—at times soul-crushingly so. While Grace’s “house” is still standing, it’s not hard to see the marks left by the storm.

Our strength in Christ has never been about invulnerability, and there are many stories of anger, sorrow, and grief that will need to be shared and felt for a long time yet. Even though we know we will not emerge unscathed, as we reflect on the past year, we can see the supports that frame the community of Grace are still standing. Christ, our foundation is as steady as ever. In these things, we find hope.

This report shines a light on the creative, generous, and loving work that has been bending in the wind but not breaking. These stories from the past year fill us with hope and inspire us to keep moving forward. The storm is fading, our house is standing, and there is much work to be done.

- Rev. Mark, Rev. Maren, Rev. Jake, Rev. Christian

## Ministers

The Rev. Mark Tremblay  
*Interim Moderator*

The Rev. Maren McLean Persaud  
*Associate Minister*  
*Children & Youth*

The Rev. Jake Van Pernis  
*Associate Minister*  
*Engagement & Service*

The Rev. Christian Persaud  
*Interim Pastoral Care Leader*



## Our Values

Our values guide our attitudes and actions as we seek to embody God's love revealed through the life of Jesus. These values support and give shape to everything at Grace. As we adjusted our worship, modified ministries, and embraced different projects, our values persisted, finding new expressions in and through our pandemic response.

### Engagement

Being a member of Grace is not a passive exercise. Jesus' call to "come and follow me" is a call to action. As we exercise our faith, we seek to engage with and be engaged by the people and stories we encounter.

### Belonging

Inspired by the early church's commitment to breaking down barriers, we ensure everyone feels like Grace is a place they are welcome. We work to foster a more profound sense of belonging.

### Community

Creating a strong sense of belonging inside our walls can be isolating if it's not paired with a commitment to be an active member of our neighbourhood and city. We seek out connections with those around us.

### Compassion

A compassionate church celebrates that everyone is worthy of love and belonging just as they are. We serve and connect with others not to spread religion but because we see the face of Christ revealed in others.

### Service

Jesus is a servant leader, and his love is always revealed in service to others. We give ourselves through community projects and involvement. Each of our values is expressed in how we serve others.



## Worshiping Together When We're Apart

Online worship can't replace the connection of in-person worship, but it has continued bringing us together. It has also opened Grace's doors, allowing many who might never enter our building to join us in new ways.

In recent years, Grace has taken several significant strides toward greater integration of technology. Still, it was no small feat that Grace transitioned to online worship in less than a week when in-person worship was restricted. It could not have happened without immense effort and flexibility from ministers, staff, volunteers, and other professionals.

### 3 in 1

On March 22, 2020, we launched the first episode of 3 in 1. The premise was simple, three ministers each offer a perspective on one story from scripture, the format itself bringing a unique community approach to worship.

We've learned a lot through a year of services, and as we've grown, so has our audience. These days, about 200 worshipers watch the service as we share music, welcome guests, and deepen our faith. It's not a replacement for in-person worship, but we've been able to foster a different kind of community online. A community that allows us to welcome many to Grace, who, for distance, mobility challenges, or other reasons, might struggle to attend.

We're working to establish a livestream to continue our online presence even after we can gather within the walls of Grace.

### It Was Great Seeing You Online

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- Before the pandemic, people gathered for DWELL Coffee, a chance to check in, talk about faith, and be present with people in the community. Moving online, DWELL stayed focused on connection and digging into the scripture text for the week.
- Children, the Youth Group, Grace Bethany, and others also moved online.
- #BellsOfThanks rang out from Grace and other churches across Canada to acknowledge frontline workers. An online campaign encouraged Beltline neighbours to join in by banging on pots and pans.



## Unquenchable Spirit of Service

Grace's volunteers are stout-hearted and tireless. In the face of evolving challenges and an unpredictable public health crisis, volunteers kept us moving and held us together.

Volunteers are essential to Grace, making significant contributions to almost every aspect of church life. Even during the pandemic, they gave their time and wisdom on committees, supported ministries and worship, managed our finances, and helped us imagine and prepare for our next steps. Volunteers have helped us check in on individuals and have been central to our community involvement.

Grace has always had a strong group of volunteers from the congregation, and it's been encouraging to welcome a growing number of community volunteers. We're grateful for the strength and generosity of everyone who volunteers with us.

### The Food Bank Project

In October 2020, Grace became a satellite depot for the Calgary Food Bank, allowing individuals and families to pick up an emergency hamper close to home. Operated by volunteers from Grace and the community, the depot provides hampers for up to 15 families each week.

### Community Care in the Parking Lot

Last summer, we set up a community care booth in the parking lot to support community members while the building was closed. The booth offered a coffee, conversation, and resources to anyone who stopped by. Incredibly, this care for our neighbours remained active throughout winter as health guidelines allowed.

### Responsive and Creative

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- Volunteers supported two graduations in the parking lot for participants of Catholic Family Service's Never Too Late program and another graduation for RESET Calgary.
- Grace partnered with Connaught School and I Can for Kids to support hungry families. Connaught School distributed grocery gift cards in the spring, and Grace did the same during the summer.
- Grace quilters continued creating and distributing quilts, but they also made and shared hundreds of masks.



## Giving Families a Break

**Our history stretches back more than a century. In that time, we've had the privilege of supporting many families as they grew. Today, families remain central to Grace.**

This past year was challenging, and many families who were doing okay before were struggling. It was hard to make ends meet after a job loss. Balancing being a parent, employee, teacher, and partner was exhausting. The sustained stress weighed on everyone, and many families were feeling overwhelmed. We supported families in various ways, including hosting events where they could have fun and enjoy each other's company.

### Trunk 'n' Treat

An abundance of condos means the Beltline isn't a great place to trick or treat. Our Trunk 'n' Treat event features elaborately decorated car trunks transforming Grace's parking lot into a spooky outing for families. Last-minute public health restrictions required us to adapt the event, assembling take-home packages instead of gathering. Even so, families enjoyed time together with plenty of treats!

### Community Easter Egg Hunt

This Easter, 80 families registered for an egg hunt or take-home kits. The hunt saw over 20 volunteers spread out over a two-block radius. Families set out from Grace's parking lot with a map to find Easter bunnies hiding in the community and filling a basket with treats along the way. Take-home kits allowed families to enjoy the fun at home.

### Other Fun Events

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- Grace members bundled up for Coldest Night of the Year.
- Advent in a Box delivered packages full of resources, activities, and gifts to celebrate Advent at home.
- The Grace Virtual Stampede Party video showed people how to make buttermilk pancakes, line dance, and flip a pancake. The campaign raised funds for I Can for Kids.



## Church is About People

**A church is not a building, a collection of programs and ministries, or weekly worship services. It is a community of people united by faith and sharing God's love.**

We've been able to create online worship services, studies, groups, and carefully distanced events with limited capacity. In doing so, we've recreated many of the functions of the church. However, we haven't been able to recreate the feeling of being with each other—singing, speaking, and sharing.

One thing we've missed this year was saying farewell to, and welcoming new, team members. We want to acknowledge them here.

### **Welcome!**

**Ian Charter** – We're delighted to welcome Ian as our Interim Music Director. He taught with the Faculty of Music at Ambrose for 28 years and is a long-time friend of Grace.

**Elena Kroeker** – Elena is our new Youth Director. A biology major, camp counsellor, and dance instructor, Elena has brought incredible energy to the youth program.

**Brad Lavenne** – Brad is our new Communications Coordinator. His experience with print and digital communication helps us stay in touch with each other.

**Debbie Roorda** – You already know Debbie, our excellent Facilities and Events Manager. After 18 months on contract, we're delighted to welcome her as a permanent member of our team.

### **Farewell**

**Rev. Dr. Nick Athanasiadis** – We're grateful for Nick's time at Grace. Early in 2020, he resigned from his position as Lead Minister, Vision, Worship & Discipleship.

**Kathy Chyla** – Our former Administrative Assistant, Kathy, was a helpful and friendly face for those who came through Grace's doors during the week.

**Amy Dunn Moscoso** – Amy led our communications, sharing news and information. Her calm and professional work was immensely valuable during the pandemic.

**Susan Woodward** – Susan retired as Grace's Music Director in the spring of 2020. Her vitality and wit haven't gone far. She says she will be back in the pews when everyone else is!





## Still Standing but Not Standing Still

Reflecting on the past year, and as we see pockets of clear sky on the horizon, we know the storm has left its mark, but our house is still standing. That isn't true for everyone.

It has not been an easy year, and there have been hardships and heartbreak. As we put together this report, it's also clear that it's been a remarkable year. As a church and a community, we've shown flexibility and courage. When things needed to change, we adapted, and when faced with adversity, we persisted.

We've continued exploring and deepening our faith, and we've lived our values. As a result, Grace was still present and supporting our faith and Beltline communities.

As we look toward the second half of 2021, we're hopeful that we'll be able to begin opening our doors. We're eager to be back in shared spaces, to see each other's faces and to laugh and cry together in person. We also know that not everyone has weathered the storm equally.

There's work that needs to be done around the church, rebuilding some programs and ministries. We also need to reconnect with each other, repair some relationships, and strengthen families.

Across our congregation, our community, and our city, people are hurting. The wounds caused by this storm are deep and will take time and compassion to heal. Already we're planning and preparing for the work that we know is needed. We continue to be present for members and the community around us, and we have so much hope after seeing all that was possible in the past year.

Our house is still standing, but we are not standing still.

# A Year in Numbers

A snapshot of Grace from June 2020 to May 2021

## Volunteering



**250**

volunteer opportunities in  
and around the church



**130**

active volunteers  
throughout the pandemic



**11,000**

volunteer hours  
contributed (equivalent to  
1,375 eight-hour workdays)

## Pastoral Care



**736**

conversations at the  
community care booth  
in the parking lot



**\$2,250**

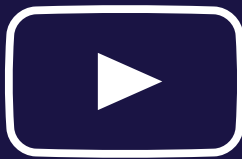
of grocery gift cards  
distributed by Grace in 2021



**\$44,608**

given to members  
of the community (Grace  
and the Beltline) who  
needed assistance

## Digital Connection



**13,500 views**

of Sunday Services  
on YouTube



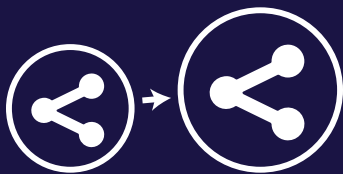
**174**

online meetings,  
events, programs, and  
study groups



**1,941**

attendees at online  
meetings, events, programs,  
and study groups



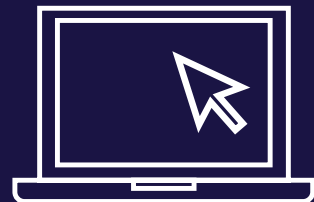
**30%**

growth in social  
media audiences

**40k**

**40,000 people**

the approximate reach  
of all social media  
channels combined



**10,729**

users visited the website,  
collectively viewing over  
49,000 pages



## Your Grace

Grace is committed to nurturing our community. We are immensely grateful for the determination and ingenuity of so many people who rose to meet last year's challenges. This report shares some of the successes we have had as we tried new things and partnered with others who share our hope for a vibrant and inclusive community.

If you're interested in these programs and ministries or have an idea for a new community initiative, get in touch with us.



## Connect with Us

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