



Grace Presbyterian Church
Transforming lives through God's grace

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The Rev. Mark Tremblay
Interim Moderator
The Rev. Maren McLean Persaud
The Rev. Christian Persaud
The Rev. Jacob Van Pernis

Report to Congregation from Rev. Christian Persaud

The last year has presented a number of changes, both in positive and challenging ways. Inasmuch as we have been living with the pandemic for over two years, there have been reasons to celebrate in 2021. A few highlights of last year include offering mental health training to pastoral care volunteers, resuming in person worship, and being creative in delivering opportunities at Grace.

It has become increasingly clear over the past two years that mental health is a serious topic; and while many of us recognize its importance, we also feel under-equipped in knowing how to respond or support someone experience mental illness. One way the Pastoral Care Committee helped to address this is by paying for training for pastoral care volunteers – including elders, homebound visitors, and deacons – in the form of the *Start Course* by LivingWorks to address suicide prevention. This self-paced online course, with several modules, offered practical training which could be completed according to individuals' schedules and availability. By making this training available, we helped to better equip individuals as they attended to the care of congregation members, and those in their lives.

One of the joys last year was resuming in person worship. One of the most important aspects of this return meant being able to see one another – being able to share a smile (under masks), a kind word, and adding greatly to a sense of community. This is especially true when Grace was able to resume having funeral and memorial services. The sanctuary is a special place for a number of reasons, and it has been a blessing to give thanks for the lives of faithful saints who have completed their earthly life and now experience new life in Christ. It has been heartwarming to worship as one body of faith, supporting one another in many different ways.

Lastly, a lesson learned from 2021 is to be creative in delivering opportunities at Grace. Although we were unable to have an in person Preaching Grace event in 2020, we were able to hold Preaching Grace in 2021 with guest speaker Will Willimon through an online platform. Many of us – myself included – will be looking forward to when the pandemic is over, but there are helpful lessons to keep with us. It is my hope that we continue to be creative in delivering opportunities for engagement, belonging, community, compassion, and service in 2022 and beyond.

Looking forward, here are three things I am anticipating with excitement: reconnecting with each other, completing important work for future pastoral care, and coming out the other side of this transition period.

As mentioned above with resuming in person worship, we are slowly but surely opening up again – both in terms of the building, and in our social interactions with each other. I have become familiar with a number of names in my role as Interim Pastoral Care Leader, but there are many people I have not met or spoken with. While I have become familiar with many names, I am less familiar with some faces and look forward to changing this. As we reopen, and embrace support, I hope to have more in person visits as circumstances allow.

Secondly, I am looking forward to completing some important work that supports a strong foundation for future pastoral care. This includes getting a better sense of who makes up our congregation in 2022, realigning elders districts, and recruiting volunteers to ensure there is ample pastoral care. Inasmuch as I thoroughly enjoy serving at Grace, I am also aware that the nature of my role is explicitly interim. It is my goal to continue building on a strong pastoral care foundation and ensure that the present, and future of, pastoral care is well supported and strengthened. Part of this includes that making sure we have a suitable number of pastoral care volunteers to serve the congregation. While some volunteers have discerned a change in their role, we need to ensure that all members and adherents are cared for accordingly.

Lastly, I am looking forward to the other side of this transition period. No one knows what the rest of the year will look like, but we are hopeful that the good work that has been started will lead to a good end. We anticipate having the right Lead Minister at Grace, and a solid grounding beneath our feet. The past two years have presented much change and transition – some good, some we wish we could have done without – but I look forward to moving forward with the lessons we have learned, and the hope that is ours in God.

I have found joy in the mystery and promise of Isaiah 43:19 which reads, “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” God is doing a new thing at Grace. Perhaps we are unable to perceive it in the moment, but I hope in the years to come we can look back and say that in 2021-2022 God was making a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. May we look up and look forward.