“Re-entering Well” Task Force update

Grace formed a “Re-entering Well” Task Force to create the procedures necessary for resuming in-person gatherings in our facility. This team includes a medical doctor, leaders in our hospitality and worship teams, and members of the Grace staff. I thank each of these dedicated persons for their hard work. Through our discussions we have affirmed that the process of re-entry requires us to be patient, thoughtful, medically informed and spiritually grounded. Caring for life, ensuring safety and loving others through our actions are the groundings for all decisions about re-entering the Grace facility.

With the stay-at-home order lifted in Baltimore City, we have begun plans to resume in-person gatherings at Grace. In July, we will offer a mid-week, outdoor prayer service on Wednesday evenings, beginning July 15 at 6:00 p.m. We will resume in-person worship in the sanctuary on Sunday mornings on Sunday, August 9. More information will be provided in the weeks ahead, as there are some things you can expect whenever it is that we do come together in person.

BEFORE YOU COME

Sign up to attend a worship service. Since attendance at our services, by city and state guidelines, will be limited in capacity, we ask that you register your plans to attend. Sign ups will be electronic.

Please see e-Notes and click on the reservation button. E-Notes is sent out twice weekly via email, so if you are not currently receiving them, please email Diane at comm@graceunitedmethodist.org. Through e-Notes, you will be updated about all that’s happening - worship services, ways to serve and ways to stay connected. Our Facebook page [facebook.com/gracechurchbaltimore/] is also a connection to all things Grace.

Take your temperature. Do a quick temperature check before you come so that you know you are healthy and safe to be in a public space with others. And, as always, if you have a fever or feel sick, please do not attend worship.

WHEN YOU COME

Face masks will be required for all persons entering the building and sanctuary.

You will be asked to confirm your attendance and provide contact information (phone.email).

Social distancing will be practiced in the parking lot, hallways and sanctuary. This means maintaining at least 6 feet of separation between yourself and others not in your family.

Maps and signage will be posted for how to enter and exit the sanctuary and where to sit in the sanctuary. We will establish a flow for entering and exiting that has all persons going in the same direction.

Please be prepared to follow all posted instructions, which are designed to keep us safe. Please come with your patience, flexibility and a ready, willing spirit amid what will be deep changes in how we gather. Please be considerate of others and follow any directions given to you by an usher or other leader.

You will be able to sit with members of your household, but others from separate households will not be permitted in your pew or nearby pews.

There will be no congregational singing because singing is one of the ways droplets spread widely and easily.

Holy Communion will also be celebrated in different, more distancing ways.

The Nursery and children’s Sunday School will not be available for the foreseeable future. Children are welcome in worship and we’ll make special efforts for worship to be child-friendly.

We will not pass the peace or pass the offering plates. There will be a receptacle for offering envelopes. You are encouraged to continue giving electronically, if you are able.

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Be assured that online worship will continue even after in-person worship resumes. We have been blessed by this emerging ministry and know that many persons who cannot attend in person welcome the opportunity to join in virtual worship.
Pastoral Letter to the Beloved Community

June 2, 2020

Dear beloved community of Grace Church,

The events of the past week have demonstrated – yet again – the desperate need for racial justice in our country. George Floyd should not have died. The anger, grief, and protests over his death emerge from a well-spring of pain and suffering whose roots trace back to our country’s beginning. Before worship on Sunday morning, we watched the morning news, sensing in the tumult that has swept across our country our collective concern for our shared future.

The church, which is the suffering yet resurrected body of Christ, has an essential role to play in the healing of these wounds and the building of a just world. We are built on the body and blood of Jesus; we are sustained by a Spirit who works tirelessly to bring unity and passionate care for one another; we are guided by a God who created us wonderfully unique and sharing a common essence as God’s children. Christian faith reminds us that however broken or sinful we might be, we are never beyond the healing, resurrecting power of God. Grace Church’s history is in Baltimore City, a city with its own racially biased past and its own present-day wounds of racism, poverty and division. Here in the Pentecost season, the Holy Spirit offers us the power to act courageously toward truth, toward healing, and for the freedom of all.

Over the past two years, Grace’s community has taken initial steps in confronting racism. Members have participated in “Vital Conversations about Race,” a series offered by the General Commission on Race and Religion, read The Blood of Emmet Till one Lent, and last fall, formed a Beloved Community Conversation group. Watching the protests of the past week unfold and listening to the pain within our own community, we know there is still much to do.

First, next Sunday we will celebrate Trinity Sunday, which recognizes the unity of triune God, which flows into the unity of Christ’s body, made of many parts yet one in the grace of our Lord. Our service will draw us toward the truth that while we are created to be one, we have not fully realized this calling. Our sermon will be a conversation about race, justice, and faith with Pastor Dane Wood, Carolyn Young, Director of Children’s Ministries, and her son, Kirk Kirby, PhD. We pray that this service will open hearts, foster dialogue, decrease the instinctive fear and defensiveness that often accompany conversations around race and help us live into our calling.

Next, a major building block of institutional racism is white privilege. And the responsibility for understanding and dismantling white privilege belongs to white people. In the upcoming weeks you will hear more about discussion opportunities around white privilege. The Beloved Community Conversation group’s next book selection is the book White Fragility. This, along with other events, will be announced soon. We invite you to participate.

Lastly, to the African-American members of Grace Church, we see you, we love you, and we mourn with you the needless, senseless deaths of too many sons and daughters. We do not believe you have to fight this struggle alone.

With prayers for strength, healing, and transformation,

Rev. Amy McCullough, Lead Pastor
Chris Schroeder, Minister of Music and Organist
George Kahl, Financial Secretary
Lynn Beachler, Treasurer
Kitty Allen, Grace Notes Editor
Pastor Dane Wood, Associate Pastor
Carolyn Young, Director of Children’s Ministries
Diane Cole, Administrative Assistant
Diane Lesman, Communications Coordinator
Tim Gause, Daytime Custodian
Talking about Race in America - two opportunities

Study Group: Understanding “White Fragility”

Group Facilitator: Dr. Ann Kaiser Stearns

A wake-up call for people who care, laid bare is a criminal justice system that protects some while brutalizing many others. Equally exposed are other enduring effects of systemic racism seen in the disproportionate pandemic deaths and rates of economic suffering born by African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans and immigrants. In the words of a college professor colleague who has lived his entire life knowing the dehumanization and experience of police brutality as a black man, "The reality is that change occurs when the majority pushes for it. You are the majority and we need you to not stand on the sidelines, but to stand toe to toe with us. We don't need your pity or outrage: We need your power and voice." As white people, we need to absorb in our hearts the eloquent words spoken by our Director of Children's Ministries, Carolyn Young, that "denial is our pathology" and "the truth will set us free!" The question is not only how do we live and work together as black, brown, and white people of faith, fostering a deep sense of community and inclusion at Grace? The next question is how do we stand together to fight against racism? In what ways will we act? Beginning with a shared reading of the book, White Fragility, our dialogue will focus on responding to those quoted words of Dr. Maya Angelou, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." All are welcome.

Dr. Stearns will be facilitating one discussion of White Fragility. The Beloved Community group also will be using the book as their monthly reading. We hope both groups can meet in July. Look for more details in the weeks ahead.

ROLAND PARK PEACEFUL PROTEST

On Tuesday, June 2 at 5:00 p.m. a Peaceful Protest supporting Racial Justice in America was held in Roland Park at the intersection of Roland Avenue and Northern Parkway. Planned in response to the recent death of George Floyd, the invitation was given to the entire community. The protest concluded with the crowd kneeling and maintaining silence for the 8 minutes, 46 seconds of the Floyd tragedy. Grace was represented by ministers, staff and congregational members.

WE CAN’T BREATHE

This past week and a half my soul continues to cry aloud. As peaceful protesters around the world stand up against police brutality and the systemic mistreatment of Black Americans, we all must condemn racism in any form.

1. Listen to and amplify Black voices. Pay attention to the voices of people who experience racism every day. Share their stories with your friends and family.
2. Call out bigotry and hate speech.
3. Teach children about kindness, fairness and human rights. Prejudice and hate are not innate. They are learned behaviors – and they can be unlearned. Racism is a socially transmitted disease.
4. Set a good example. Talk to your children regularly about differences and racism. Explain that racism is a system of unfairness and it has too long of a history in our country. Every human being has a right to feel safe and valued and to be treated fairly. If we want to fix the problem, we need to discuss it openly and be vigilant about it in our daily lives.
5. Stand up for people being harassed – intervene if it is safe to do so. When the public stands in solidarity, bullies lose their power. Verbal and physical abuse is wrong and should not be tolerated. All people deserve to be treated with dignity, humanity and respect.
6. Support human rights organizations. Violence against people of color is a human rights issue. Systemic racism is a human rights issue. If human rights are not recognized, then We Can’t Breathe. ---Carolyn Young
Financial Update

The Grace Finance Committee has met twice since the beginning of 2020 and, while the circumstances of the two meetings could not have been more different, the financial picture that we reviewed was reassuring and encouraging. The sources of that encouragement are you, and the wonderful staff of Grace.

Congregational giving remains strong. Thank you! We are continuing to provide vital ministries to our community and you have supported those efforts with your giving. Ways to give include: online giving through our website, giving by text, 844-90-7-3155, PayPal (george@graceunitedmethodist.org) or by mailing in your gift to the church office.

You continue to carry Grace’s ministry forward in other ways as well: attending virtual worship services, fostering small groups and community connections, making face masks and sandwiches, and providing GEDCO with food donations. Our Music Ministry and Communications staff have stepped up their efforts to keep us united through uplifting service music and informative e-Notes. Even through this time of social distancing and amid weeks of national crisis, our witness continues.

Thanks to the diligence of church treasurer Lynn Beachler and other members of staff, Grace has secured a forgivable loan through the CARES Act, equivalent to 2.5 months of payroll for church and pre-school employees. This will be a significant benefit as we continue through the pandemic.

Grace anticipates that our income from groups using our facility will decrease during 2020, given the closure of our building for a significant period of time. While the expense of operating a “quiet church” is certainly less than was anticipated in our pre-pandemic budget, other areas of the budget have been stretched to accommodate the need for the video and streaming equipment, which has been used to such great effect for our online services. We are working to adjust our anticipated income and expenses for 2020 to provide a realistic, updated Operating Budget.

On behalf of the Finance Committee, I thank you for your continued commitment to the church and its work during this difficult time.

Jane Benson, Finance Committee Chair

Within the Family at Grace

DEATH
Downing Jett Kay
May 15, 2020
At age 112 years, 174 days

TAMI JAMES is excited to be the new Director of Grace Preschool. She has been a teacher for 17 years and is delighted to start in this new role. She taught for 4 years in the Dominican Republic prior to her 13 years at The Gilman School where she taught first grade and was director of the Early Childhood program. She is happy to remain in the Roland Park community. She and her husband Barry have four children all of whom attended small church preschools in Baltimore.

Grace has openings in the 2’s, 3’s, Pre-K and Kindergarten. Please reach out if you have any questions about enrollment at Grace!

The nicest place to be is in someone’s thoughts, the safest place to be is in someone’s prayers, and the very best place to be is... in the hands of God.
Special Service of Lament and Healing

On Wednesday, June 3rd Grace Church aired a special service of lament and healing. One of the hymns sung at that service included a text written by Grace member Mark Gruber-Lebowitz. This is one of many hymn texts that Mark has written since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thank you, Mark, for your beautiful, inspiring and heartfelt words during this most difficult time in our lives and history. We look forward to knowing more of them.

When In A Time
Sung to the tune of “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”
by Mark Gruber-Lebowitz

When in a time of death and fear,
Cut off from those we know and love;
Friends far away, but God is near,
Watching and loving from above.

We serve the One who knelt alone,
There in the garden all night long;
Left by the dearest friends He’d known,
Only His Abba kept Him strong.

Lord, it is hard to comprehend
How such a time as this can be;
Wondering when this plague will end,
Praying for eyes to clearly see
All of the ways You bless us still
Day after day, with life to live;
Grant us new strength to do Your will,
Seeking out ways to care and give.

Call to us, Lord, that we may be
Truly Your beating earthly heart,
Setting this world from worry free —
One in Your love, though kept apart.

Then, in a time we can’t yet see,
We and our world will be restored;
Til that great morning comes to be,
Teach us to rest in You, dear Lord.

Text Copyright 2020 by Mark Gruber-Lebowitz

MUSIC MINISTRY STAFF

It is with selfish sadness that I announce that our tenor soloist and section leader, Timothy McGowan, will be leaving Grace Church on July 1st. We have been very blessed to have had Tim’s quality of musicianship, dedication, energy and beautiful singing this past year! I speak for the entire music ministry when I say that it has truly been a pleasure working with Tim. We most certainly wish both Tim and his fiancé Nick the very best as they begin a new chapter in their lives.

Chris Schroeder

A note from Tim to the Chancel Choir:

Dear Grace Choir Members,

I hope that you are all staying safe and healthy during our time apart. Given that we are not sure when we will see each other again, Chris has asked me to share some news with you all. My fiancé will be starting their DMA (Doctor of Musical Arts) in Vocal Coaching and Accompanying at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

We will be moving at the beginning of July. I have thoroughly enjoyed making music with each of you and I am immensely grateful for the fellowship that we have shared. While I am sad that we may not make music together before my departure, this group of people has touched my heart and I thank you all for welcoming me to Grace.

With love, Timothy

Godspeed Tim and Nick!

“If you want to touch the past, touch a rock.
If you want to touch the present, touch a flower.
If you want to touch the future, touch a life.”
ZOOM in!
Virtual Sunday School
9:15 - 9:45 a.m.
will be taught by
Becca Friedel
June 14 through September 13

Information: carolyn@graceunitedmethodist.org

Unable to register electronically?
The Pastoral care staff, ushers and others are reaching out to those they know without computers and email to assure them that Grace cares. To register to attend a service, you may leave a telephone message on the office phone or Rev. Amy’s extension.

Great God of All
Sung to the tune of Finlandia/This is My Song/Be Still, My Soul
by Mark Gruber-Lebowitz

Great God of light, illuminate the corners
Where lurk the darkened lives of humankind.
Shine forth the beam of wondrous new beginning,
Dispelling myths that long have kept us blind.
Oh God of light, bring clarity of purpose
to every dimming heart and soul and mind.

Great God of hope, when life seems bleak and pointless
When failures mount and disappointments loom,
Break through the clutter of our hurts and longings,
Clearing away life’s overwhelming gloom.
Revive in us the vision of a future
In which new trust and lasting joy can bloom.

Great God of peace, Your children are divided,
Lines drawn by gender, culture, race and creed.
In You we’re called to see past flag or border –
A call which arrogance forbids us heed.
Oh God of peace, bring low our rush to judgment
To live as one, our hearts at last agreed.

Great God of love, some cry for limitation
Of how and where affection’s meant to grown.
Yet any love that’s real and sacrificial
Is heaven-blessed, the Scripture tells us so.
Yes, love is love, each faithful union holy,
A taste of heaven here on earth below.

Great God, cast out complacent hesitation
That holds us back from claiming each good gift
Of light and hope, of peace and love eternal;
Raise us from doubts that keep our souls adrift.
Then send us forth into the world, commissioned,
Your voice we’ll be, Your lamp forever lift.

Text copyright 2020 by Mark Gruber-Lebowitz

Congratulations to the following graduates of our congregation! We are so proud of your accomplishment and wish you much success as you embark upon the next step this fall.

MAGGIE GRANDSIRE
graduating from Towson High School.
She will attend the University of Kansas in the fall.

CHLOE KICK
graduating from Roland Park Country School and attending the University of Maryland in the fall.

LUKE McCULLOUGH
graduating from the 8th grade at Roland Park Middle School and entering Loyola-Blakefield High School this fall.

If there are others to be recognized in the next issue of Grace Notes, please send the information to kitty.allen@verizon.net

The following young people are moving up to Youth Ministry. Congratulations to them, their parents and appreciation to their teachers!

Max Wiseman
Suzanna McCullough
Addie McGuire
Natalie Riddle
Matthew Franklin
Breanna Gullett
Interview with Philip Schroeder, Video Producer for Grace Church’s Pre-recorded Worship Services

At our virtual Pentecost Sunday worship celebration on May 31st, Chris Schroeder interviewed his great nephew, Philip Schroeder who has been video producing Grace Church’s pre-recorded service. This was a wonderful chance for our viewers to officially meet and see Philip. Here are some of the highlights of the interview:

Philip’s Dad is Bob (Jr.) Schroeder, Chris’s oldest nephew; and Philip’s Grandpa was Chris’s oldest brother, Bob. Not only are Philip and Chris related but they also share a birthday: August 22nd!

Philip is a junior at Purdue University in West Lafayette, IN majoring in electrical engineering and technology. He is currently working in an internship at Indiana Municipal Power Agency doing engineering “stuff” with the distribution and generating side of electricity.

His experience with video-making began at his home church in Richmond, IN when he was a freshman in high school. It began with some “fun, little, silly things” with the youth group at the church. Philip’s experience progressed over time with shooting a few weddings, taking a video class his senior year and doing two video projects for his high school.

Since then, Philip hasn’t really focused on this video-making skill and talent until now, with us at Grace. He said, “It’s been a good experience getting back into (video) things; giving back to the community while also having fun!”

Both Philip and his Great Uncle Chris have really enjoyed being able to work so closely together on a project and to be in contact by text or by phone several times a week. It has been a blessing for them both.

Chris explained how this all came about: When the pandemic caused our closure at Grace Church, for several Sundays we did live streaming through Facebook with Rev. Amy, Pastor Dane, Chris on organ and two soloists, along with a few people who helped with the recording. With the “stay at home” order set in place, we were beginning to wonder if live streaming was the safest and best approach to take.

Chris had been impressed and had participated in the pre-recorded Masses that his community of Dignity-Washington Gay Catholic group was doing in DC. He suggested it to Rev. Amy and Dane who embraced the idea immediately. Chris remembered that his great nephew had an interest in video producing and had some experience, so he reached out to Philip to ask about his availability and interest. Without hesitation, Philip was very gracious and eager to work with us. Our first major worship video production was Palm Sunday followed by three major services in Holy Week and Easter! That was a busy week – which included Philip and Chris doing an all-nighter on Friday to finish up the Easter service! They both admit that they learned a lot that week, which helped them streamline the whole process as they and the entire ministry team at Grace moved forward to our weekly worship services.

Philip finished the interview by saying that he’s appreciated being a part of Grace’s community through this whole experience. He has really appreciated working with Rev. Amy and Pastor Dane – “they’re really great people”! We think so too, Philip.

Thank you again and again, Philip Schroeder for being part of our worship ministry at Grace Church! You are a blessing!

Pre-Recorded Services at Grace: The Process

The support and appreciation of our pre-recorded worship services has been overwhelming. We are grateful to so many people who make it possible week after week. Most certainly, we appreciate Philip Schroeder and all the behind-the-scenes work he does to create the final product for each week’s virtual worship. But we also appreciate all of the participants (ministers, music personnel and volunteers) who give countless hours to creating the different segments of the services. We thank God for the gift of technology to keep us connected as a community, not only through our weekly online services but also through zoom sessions, emails, texting and personal phone calls. The entire program staff including Rev Amy, Pastor Dane, Carolyn Young and Chris Schroeder, our five soloists along with our video producer Philip continue to perfect the process by which we create the weekly pre-recorded services. For those who are interested, below is a timeline that we follow in order to make the online worship available to you week after week.

Friday: (10 days prior to the date of worship): Rev. Amy or Dane send hymns selections to Chris.

Saturday morning: Chris records audio tracks of hymns for the soloists. Soloists have until Wednesday Noon to submit their videos (often 5-7 tracks or more per week) by listening to the audio track from Chris as they audio/video record themselves.
**Sunday:** Rev Amy or Dane send draft of worship services. Ministers reach out to potential liturgist to read the scriptures – those volunteers have until Thursday Noon to record and send in their videos.

**Monday:** Chris records his hymn accompanying – video record with his phone, audio record with digital recorder out in the sanctuary.

**Monday-Thursday:** Amy and Dane write prayers and sermon, recording all and sending in the files by the Thursday Noon deadline.

**Tuesdays/Wednesdays:** Chris practices and records his gathering and parting music – video on phone and audio with digital recorder, just like the hymn recordings.

**Wednesdays:** Chris uploads all the soloists’ files/renames them/creates a cheat sheet for Philip on what files go in what order with instructions on header titles and text of hymns.

**Wednesdays:** Chris uploads video and audio of hymns and gathering/parting music.

**Wednesday nights:** Philip compiles the files for the hymns and puts them on Chris’ computer.

**Thursday morning:** Chris adjusts volume of the organ and all the soloists on all hymns.

**Thursday Noon:** Final deadline for all videos and texts to be used in Sunday’s worship.

**Thursday:** Chris creates worship order cheat sheet for Philip with the correct order of video files/indicating what goes well/specifying headers and titles for each section of worship.

**Friday:** first draft of worship service from Philip, with review by Amy, Dane and Chris. Philip makes corrections and edits creating a final copy by Saturday.

**Saturday:** Dane uploads to FB for airing on Sunday morning.

Thanks to all who participate in our weekly service and thanks too to all who join us each week for our virtual worship time together! – Chris Schroeder

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**SINGING IN WORSHIP**

I imagine you have been hearing news reports and seeing articles about the danger of singing in choirs and in worship. We at Grace are taking this discussion very seriously. We want all to know that our first priority is the health and safety of our musicians as well as our congregational members who choose to worship with us when our doors finally open. Each new day, we receive new and updated information on singing in worship. Below is the most recent information (June 11, 2020) presented by The Center for Congregational Song, which might be of interest to you.

**ECUMENICAL CONSULTATION ON RESUMING WORSHIP:**

**NEW GUIDANCE ON SINGING TOGETHER**

The Center for Congregational Song (CCS) has been participating in an ecumenical consultation led by United Methodist, Lutheran, and Episcopal liturgical scholars, medical experts, and in consultation with the CDC to create a document entitled “Resuming Care-filled Worship and Sacramental Life During A Pandemic.” CCS Director Brian Hehn was one of the dozens of theologians, pastors, ministry leaders, and public health experts involved in the process of developing this document. The full 36-page document can be found on their website.

While singing is not recommended at this time, there are many other ways to worship together and make music together. In times such as these, we are called as leaders of the church to think creatively about how to serve God and God’s people. The document does not include any specific timeline on when singing might or might not resume again. The science is changing too rapidly to do that with any certainty.

The section on singing and music is as follows:
SINGING AND MUSIC

Music is a gift from God given to all creation. It is a means of connecting with God and with one another, and of unifying our thoughts and understanding, our heartbeats and breath. Whether by singing, playing, moving, or listening, music is an integral part of the majority of Christians’ worship life. Praising the Lord is a scriptural mandate (see Psalm 150) and singing is a primary way most Christians have “praised the Lord” together. However, we are now coming to grips with this disconcerting fact: The coronavirus is spread through moist breath. Several recent studies have found that forceful, sustained breathing, such as during singing and playing brass and wind instruments, appears to pose a greater danger of spreading the coronavirus than ordinary speaking at low volume. These findings lead us to recommend the following during the pandemic:

- Refrain from congregational and choral singing.
- Encourage the congregation to participate in music with body percussion such as clapping, tapping their thighs, and stomping.
- Refrain from using any musical instruments that require breath (wind instruments, brass instruments, anything into which one blows to produce sound).
- Use all other instruments (keyboard, percussion, string).
- Avoid sharing instruments and take care to disinfect instruments before and after use.
- Limit the size of ensembles (4 or fewer) and maintain a 6-foot distance between performers with face coverings on.
- Employ silence effectively. Consider using American Sign Language to sing a hymn or song silently.
- Keep up to date with ongoing research: https://thehymnsociety.org/covid-19/

Project Transformation is coming!

Project Transformation is a national ministry that focuses on building reading skills in underprivileged children while also developing young adults with leadership and ministry skills. Pastor Dane had the opportunity to work with this ministry in Memphis and is super excited to learn that this organization is coming to Baltimore for their first year.

Grace UMC has committed to providing support for this program through monetary donations, craft and school supplies and volunteers.

YOU CAN HELP! If you are interested in being a reading tutor online through Zoom or volunteering to pack supply bags, email Pastor Dane at dane@graceunitedmethodist.org. You may also donate directly to Project Transformation and provide supplies directly. Visit their website: https://projecttransformation.org/washington-dc/covid19-partner-churches.

Checks may also be written to Grace UMC with Project Transformation on the memo line.

If you would like to remember a loved one by sponsoring the flowers for our altar, please contact Claire Greenhouse at aschoolrn@verizon.net or 410-337-7407. There are openings in July:

July 5: Carl Weber (1) and ______
July 12: Janet Ander (1) and ______
July 19: Mimi Corry (1or 2) and ______
July 26: _______
When the Israelites were led out of Egypt into the wilderness, in what is known as the Exodus, they had to learn new survival tactics, practices like collecting their manna from heaven each morning and trusting Moses to find God’s gift of water in a rock. In this strange new world of the pandemic, we are similarly challenged to discover our survival tactics; through questions like: Is this piece of my life essential? From whence shall come my daily bread? How do I stay physically distant and yet rooted in our shared humanity?

I hesitate to dwell too long or celebrate too easily the gifts the shutdown might bring – slower pace, shared family time, new insights – as if the destructive path of illness, death, and trauma were given at the service of some privileged silver lining. It is a privilege, as some journalists have rightly named, to be able to practice social distancing. Last weekend’s newspaper was filled with articles about the disproportionate suffering brought by the pandemic on communities of color, the ways the closing of schools has exposed the vast inequalities in our educational systems and how deep the devastation may be for those unemployed or underemployed. Reading it, I felt even more in the wilderness, for the pandemic has laid bare the brokenness of life that exists alongside our common humanity.

So perhaps a better analogy than the Exodus is the Israelites’ second journey into the wilderness, that historical period known as the exile, when the people of God existed apart from their land and its accompanying structures of meaning, worship, and identity. Exile might capture the disorientation of our here-and-now life, with its mixture of new questions being asked, deep suffering revealed and traumatic uncertainty over the future. Exile exposes the folly of the past, the courage needed for the future and – Israel’s primary lesson – the promise of God to be ever-present, no matter the place or the circumstances.

Neither of our scriptures today deals with Israel’s exile. But each attends to the impact of exile – the sense of alienation between what life used to be and what form it has yet to take. 1 Peter was written to communities facing exclusion because they gave their hearts to a suffering God of love rather than a powerful empire. The letter says, in essence, keep doing what is right, even if you are ridiculed for it. No matter how scared you are of the future or how vulnerable you feel to forces beyond your control, keep your eyes, heart and mind on Jesus. Keep making choices to allow your life
to be part of God’s ever-flowing love for the world. The good that you do will endure and in so choosing the way of Christ, you will find yourself next to God.

One way to approach the pandemic is to say all that I need to be concerned about is myself or my small circles of loved ones. I’m going to care exclusively about my needs, the goods I require. I’ll look away from the painful news, focused on my self-sufficiency rather than admit how scary this all is. Another approach risks opening the eyes, and the heart, wider to take in the enormous suffering, as well as the tremendous acts of hospitality, sacrifice, and good will happening around us. It is to learn how risk, fear, and courage often go hand-in-hand. Keep doing what is right. When we move closer to another’s suffering, Christ comes among us, too.

When the disciples gathered around Jesus at his final meal, the location of our text from John’s gospel, they were not in exile. But by every indication they were about to lose their leader. They were facing in the days ahead, a life forever altered, and their fear was that without Christ’s bodily presence a wide gulf would emerge between his love and their lives. Jesus offers the bridge across the distance, a path through the wilderness: If you love me you will keep my commandments. Love me, act like me. When we care for the vulnerable, notice the pain and move closer to someone in need, we find our way forward. When we act like Jesus, we find him coming toward us.

Biblical scholars often employ a threefold framework to describe the exilic experience: a progression from orientation, dis-orientation, to re-orientation. Before the loss of land and the accompanying loss of identity, the people of God had one view of the world and their place in it. Being transported into exile disorients them. In the suffering and uncertainty of a strange existence, along with the grief, they cannot live as they have in the past. A new way of living becomes essential. When they settle into a new land, new communities, new rhythms, their re-orientation demands humility – God, we acted wrongly, - vulnerability – God, it is upon you that we depend - and a renewed determination to act as God’s own people.

There is a message here for us about a faithful way forward in this strange, painful, grieving season. My prayer for us, and my charge to you, is that we find a way to dwell long enough in the dis-orientation that God can re-orient us toward a better future. Here in a strange land we face where we have gone wrong, where we have misshapen God’s character and where we need to act with more passion for those who are not only suffering now but have long struggled. Is there one way in the weeks ahead you can move closer to Jesus by acting as Jesus acts? Is there a story of a life different than yours you can listen to? Is there something you thought was essential to your life that needs to be released? Is there an act of love to which you are called?

Thanks be to God who is with us, on every path, in every place, calling us into God’s circle of love.

Scout Troop #612 Food Drive
The Grace Scout Troop #612 has kept busy during the pandemic. They have held Zoom meetings on Friday nights and they planned a food drive. On May 17th the scouts gathered on the Grace parking lot to accept donations for the GEDCO food pantry. After the collection, the troop took 130 bags of non-perishable food items and $300 in cash to Saint Mary’s Catholic Church distribution center.

On June 28th from 12 noon-12:30 p.m., the scouts will hold a second food drive and hopefully can again help GEDCO and the clients they serve in a significant way. Thank you to all of the church members who support the GEDCO community and the scouts.
Grace United Methodist Church
Virtual

Summertime Fun
Summer Activities for Kids

August 3–7, 2020

Children ages 3 years and older

North Castle is hidden in a frozen land. The King's valiant Knights are on a quest in search of the King's Armor. But the armor is not what they think it is.

Knights of North Castle: Quest for the King's Armor, invites children to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power! Kids will take on the role of brave Knights and begin their quest. They will explore Old and New Testament stories and discover different pieces of protective armor-the Belt of Truth, the Breastplate of Justice, the Shoes of Peace, the Shield of Faith, and the Helmet of Salvation.

Wildlife Adventures will return as part of the VBS program! Each day a different animal will be virtually shared.

Virtual Field Trips and More

Parents will need to register children online so we know how many packets to prepare. You will receive Zoom invites to participate.
Wishes for a Happy Birthday for those celebrating in July!

1  Stuart Kahl, Philip Shaw
2  George Hocker, Jr., Janina Stetz, Bobby Yanega
3  Madi Casey
4  Ann Dahl, Andrew Pflaum, Christina Rushing
5  Cary Achuff, Katie Buffington
6  Erin Eisler, Tom Moore
7  Chris Rinker
8  Caitlyn James, Mary Strobel
9  Michelle Riddle
10 Rowan Ferguson
11 Angie Chobanov
12 Kathleen Bossom, Garrett Charlton, Walt Greenhouse
13 Brian Kick, Al Saxon
14
15
16
17
18
19
20 Ann Martin
21 Justin Graves, Getty Greenman, Amanda Pfeffer
22 Abbey Sinfield, Donald Topper
23 Alex Greenland, Tonya Sapre
24 Cristin Hickey, Jeff Sewell
25 Rory Ferguson, Kittie Simmons
26 Sara Hackley
27 Carole Polk, John Scott III
28 Chris Hayes, Tom Wellener
29 Nancy Cornbrooks, Jenai Paul, Sharon Schillinger, Kristin Simmons
30 Ross Burbage
31 Glenn Rowley, Anna Sinfield

Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.

-- L. R. Knost