July 11, 2020

Greetings in the name of Jesus, in whose way we follow as we reflect God’s love in the world.

Well here we are already in the month of July…. a time in the life of the church calendar when normally we would have already started a rest or sabbath from our regular church routines. Throughout the summer months our Rainbow Club regular leaders take some time off, the choir sits in the congregation, monthly Board meetings are not scheduled, worship attendance takes a dip in numbers, powerpoint team takes a break, office admin. hours are shortened, committees and groups have time to catch their breath after many months of activities, and the ministry team has time and space for quiet reflection and planning. Even though there is a pause during the summer, the life and work of the church always continues – just at a much-welcomed slower pace.

This year, some of us may feel like the break came too early and has lasted far too long. Since the middle of March we have missed being with our friends at church, longed to be surrounded by our church family as we mourned the death of a loved one, felt left out of the work of the Board & Committees, grieved the absence of in-person worship in our lives, experienced isolation and loneliness without pastoral visits, felt lost without the sharing of hugs, smiles and warm greetings that fill our building. We are ready for things to return to normal.

For others of us, although we share many of those same feelings and losses, there is a need for that slower pace to begin. The last four months has brought an incredible amount of busy-ness and challenges into the life of the church. Difficult decisions had to be made, new ways of communicating figured out, responsibilities of office admin. shifted, processes and procedures changed and adapted, worship re-imagined, new technology explored, home offices created, home worship space set up, ever changing updates and information from the different courts of the church and from the government read and shared, staff hours changed…. and the list goes on.

Despite the challenge and stress that everyone has felt in the life of the church and no doubt in our personal lives, there is much gratitude to be named.

We are grateful that Alan McGee, Board Chair, and members of the Board Executive have been willing to adapt to monthly meetings through Zoom. It has not been easy to communicate in that format. We have had to adapt to the amount of energy and concentration it takes to listen to and understand one another through this way of meeting.

We are grateful that Cathy Manzato, our new Treasurer, has been able to move so many of our financial processes online. Cathy barely had time to learn the role of Treasurer before she had to figure out how to make major shifts in how bills are paid, payroll processed, and donations are received. On top of that, there were continual webinar updates from the national church for Treasurers engage with in order to learn about government funding available.

We are grateful that Islay Scott and the rest of Ministry & Personnel have kept up-to-date with changes affecting staff and adhering to government and church guidelines when modifying staff hours.

We are grateful that so many of you have been caring for one another with cards, letters, phone calls, emails, Zoom chats, food drop-offs and more. That sharing of your time is so important. We are also grateful for continued financial support of the work of the church. It enables us to listen for and respond to the needs of the wider community, either through extra financial support for partnerships already in place or establishing new partnerships.

We are grateful to all who have participated in any way in creating, offering leadership or being a part of our online Sunday gatherings. Katie Pergau started us off on Mar. 22 with a lovely hymn sing, knowing that songs of our faith bring comfort in ways that words alone cannot. We have stumbled our way through since then trying to adapt worship to a new medium.

We are grateful that the team planning for the full return to the building has carefully developed safety protocols that will be updated and added to as we live out our mission and ministry in the midst of the continued Covid-19 pandemic. On Wed., July 8 the Church Board Executive approved the first part of our **Safe Re-opening Plan for the Building and In-person Activities**. We have included the document with this mailing for you to be fully informed.

No doubt most of you will want to turn first to the last few pages of the document to find the plans regarding worship. While we know that many of you have been able to join us for the livestream Sunday gatherings that we have broadcast from our homes, others have not been able to be part of those as they are happening or even able to watch them later. Therefore, our priority at this time is to prepare for the move back into the building so that we might be able to accommodate both online and in-person worship until we can return to full capacity in the sanctuary.

We have much work to do to ensure our space is safe for the gathering of people. There is also time needed to investigate and acquire the technical equipment and personnel required to broadcast a worship service from the sanctuary. It will take both time and energy to get things in place and to implement safety protocols, not only for worship but for other in-person ministry and for those external groups that depend on us for space to meet. An important part of our preparations is taking a sabbath from online or in-person worship for the remainder of the summer.

The Hebrew word “Sabbath” literally means to cease. It is a time to cease from the normal routines. Over the last few months many of us have spent a great deal of time in front of computer screens for work, for school, and for church. We want to encourage you to step away from the screens if you can and find rest in the presence of God. We are inviting you to consider different ways to spend your "Sunday worship" time during the summer. Look around you and wonder how God is present in your midst whether you are enjoying a walk, gardening, birdwatching, having a backyard distanced visit, or making phone calls to others in our church family. We want you to find ways to be with people even if it is a small group, physically distanced outside. Send the office an email about the places and ways you are spending time with God and God’s people.

Taking a “sabbath” is an act of faith… believing that God is present wherever you are and that you are worshipping the Sacred wherever you pray, whenever you sing, however you speak of God’s love in your life, and in whatever you do to live that love. *“So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest”.* – Hebrews 4: 9, 11a

Remember, even though there is a pause during the summer, the life and work of the church will continue – just at a much-welcomed slower pace so that we can return in September refreshed and ready to face any new challenges. Please be in touch if you have any questions or concerns.

Blessings, Andrea Wheaton, DLM

Minister of Word, Sacrament & Pastoral Care