



## GRACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

2020 Pastor Report  
Rev. Sarah Clark, Pastor

November 22, 2020

Late last year, while Covid-19 was a fairly distant headline for many of us, a colleague of mine wrote a blog post about her experience with cancer treatments. What she said is something that I have returned to many times this year. She said “I’ve come to realize that nothing is lost,” she wrote that experiences she’d had in her life had helped her overcome fears, build strength and resilience, find reserves of faith that she needed in this season of her life. I remember the assurance of the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans: *We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)*. And I think, as I reflect on this year, as I’ve watched our church, all of you, adapt and stretch, care for each other through prayer and new ways of being present, that you (that we) could not have done this with access to the reserves of faith that our lives and our experiences have given us. And I am confident that this season in the life of our church, is such a building time – a time we will look back on as a changing moment in the life of our church. I really believe that my colleague is right, and Paul is right, nothing is lost, God works all things together for good.

This year we have learned, by necessity, but also by choice, new ways to be the church. In many ways this year as pushed us much further along the path of change than we would have wanted or expected. But it did, I believe, push us in positive directions. It’s funny to look back on the goals set by the Church Council in 2019 and note that “increase online presence” was among them. Be careful what you wish for, I suppose! We have experimented with livestream worship, with pre-recorded services and interaction online, and the current incarnation of hybrid worship that involves live worship with pre-recorded elements. Thanks to a generous gift, we were able to purchase equipment that is essential to creating online worship now, but will allow us to continue to have a worship presence online when we return to the sanctuary through livestreaming our worship services. In the fall, we experimented with Worship Pods as a way to meet in person while maintaining safety protocols.

We also set out to strengthen and grow the collaboration between the United Methodist churches in Billings. Through this time of Covid, we have seen the collaboration grow principally through shared online worship, but also through shared outdoor services, and shared resources. The collaboration will continue in Advent with a shared Advent Study and Advent Retreat. In 2021, we hope to continue sharing discipleship opportunities like studies, retreats, and small groups and we hope to strengthen the collaborative work, not only of the clergy but also the laity.

This year we have had to make some prayerful and difficult decisions about cancelling many of the missional programs that happen through Grace. We have not been able to hold GEEP or Rainbow Coffee House due to concerns about safety. On the other hand, the quilters have been busier than ever, making over 150 quilts to give away this year. The Free Store continues to serve the community with volunteers acting as

personal shoppers for customers. In the fall, we joined forces with Hope for a coat drive that made it possible to donate coats to the Free Store and other places. Individuals at Grace have made masks and provided meals through Family Promise. Through the generosity of the folks at Grace, we were able to provide clothes and other needs for 7 children through the Dress-A-Child program. And as usual, during the season of Advent, our Angel Tree project will provide Christmas presents to two families who are part of the Family Promise program.

In the coming year, we will continue growing our presence to our community online, by providing increased discipleship opportunities, and continuing to improve online worship. An updated website is in the works, and will hopefully be completed by the new year. One of my goals for 2021 is to provide training for our staff and volunteers about ways to improve our engagement in the digital space. We will also continue the collaboration with the other churches and hopefully expand our collaboration in new ways. Most importantly, we will continue to follow God's lead as we discover new ways to be church. When Covid ends (and it WILL end), we at Grace plan to take what we've learned over this year, the strengths and graces we have discovered, combined with the best of who we have been, and continue moving forward into the new thing God is doing among us.

Grace and Peace,  
Rev. Sarah Clark