

# COLORADO episcopalian

SPECIAL EDITION:

**GRIEF, GRACE,  
& GRATITUDE**





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In this time of COVID, we have experienced individual and collective loss. In this reality, we are tempted to remain in a place of scarcity and fear as our normal has shifted. Still, when we step back and see God's grace and see the abundance in our midst, we can operate and live into our collective ministry with an attitude of gratitude. This edition of the *Colorado Episcopalian* invites us to recognize and express grief, grace, and gratitude across the Episcopal Church in Colorado.

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### GRIEF, GRACE, & GRATITUDE

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### DOING CHURCH, REAL CHURCH

As we entered transition, we were told about grief, cycles of grief, and the various processes that spool out at church when congregations and their rector's part. It's all true. It's a process our whole church underwent in its many parts. At times during the transitions, it felt like we were just pushing uphill.

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## COVER:

The Rev. J. Sierra Reyes with a young girl at  
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Denver.  
*Photo courtesy the Rev. J Sierra Reyes*



# OUR HOPE

BY BISHOP KYM LUCAS

**"H**ope is forged out of the biblical call to dig deep into our innards to tell the truth of what we see, feel, hear, and experience. And it reminds us that we must always show up in the face of relentless evil, particularly in such times when it appears so normal and natural in our midst."

—E. M. Townes

This past year I have spent a lot of time thinking and praying about hope. In a conversation with my therapist (who is Jewish), I spoke about how tired I was: tired of the pandemic, tired of the violence and death that just keeps being perpetrated. I spoke of how I live in terror about my sons and their safety every day just because this world is not a safe or fair place for black and brown males. He allowed me to lament, and then said, "But you Christians are a hopeful sort of people." He paused, adding: "At least it seems you're supposed to be." Then he asked: "What is your hope?"

As we have lived with COVID-19, the pandemic has revealed not only our physical vulnerabilities but also the fractures in our society. We have seen via all kinds of reporting and news coverage how hopelessness, once it takes root, is difficult to dispel.

As the Body of Christ, we are being compelled to reimagine who we are, how we live out our baptismal calling, and how we answer the question "What is your hope?" in a broken world.

And while we're all grappling with the answer to that question, what is clear is that our hope must be bold. Our hope must be greater than simply a return to our buildings or a return to "normal." Our hope must always be rooted in our call to truth: to telling ourselves the truth about ourselves, to the rigorous self-examination of how what we profess to believe compares with how we live. Our hope must be rooted in the promise of the abundant life in Christ for all of God's children, rooted in the kingdom that has come and is coming. Our hope must be greater than our fears.

With God's help, we are moving out of this pandemic. By God's grace we will soon be able to gather in person, to see our friends and family, to rejoice in the incarnate presence of the other. My hope is that we remember all that we have learned. My hope is that this time will have so opened our hearts to God's love, that we are eager and able to share it with one another. My hope is that living lives of love, mercy, and justice will always be our first priority as disciples. ■







I have gotten almost everything I ever wanted in my life: a great education, astonishingly meaningful work, wonderful friends, interesting experiences, and a 52-year marriage to a man who was the reason

I said almost daily: “My favorite words in English are ‘we,’ ‘us,’ and ‘our.’”

Our five-year, heavy-duty struggle began in May 2016 when my husband, Frank, had a bad stroke.

# GRIEF, GRACE, & GRATITUDE

BY DR. LYNN W. HUBER

Ever since my conversion to Christianity in 1962, I have believed I must never stop praying because “whenever I stop praying, the coincidences stop happening.”<sup>1</sup>

Over a period of five years, beginning on May 28, 2016, I have managed to withstand a devastating series of losses. This year, I decided to name my Lenten prayer theme “The Three Gs: Grief, Grace, and Gratitude.”

Shortly after I named my prayer theme, I was invited to contribute my own story to a series on these very same Gs. This left me with no doubt that this was an invitation rather than a temptation.

First, I would tell you that my faith is *not* based on Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, at least not *per se*. Rather it is centered on what I believe was the real sacrifice of Jesus, which was also the basis for my conversion—from being a vaguely Jewish, consciously prayer-hungry teenager to an adult Episcopal Christian. I believe that the Holy One [whose very name in traditional Judaism cannot even be pronounced] was willing to take on the astonishing limitations of time and space and flesh (including all the vulnerabilities to which flesh is heir) simply for one, two-part

purpose: first, to let us know that we are the beloveds of that Holy One, and, second, to teach us how to live like it.

I believe that crucifixion, or any other unpleasant form of death, was simply part and parcel of Jesus’ total commitment to bringing the message of the Holy One to humanity. It was that commitment by Jesus that brought me to my knees.



Dr. Lynn and the Rev. Frank Huber.

Photo courtesy Lynn Huber

Okay—since then, there have been many, many teachers: Quakers, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and a slew of Christians, some of them even Episcopalian. They all bring the same message in various forms, a message I summarize as, “It’s all of us or none.” In other words, “love your neighbor as your very own self.” The moment that we “other” someone, or in some way make them in our own mind less than fully human, we have excluded ourselves as well.



I have gotten almost everything I ever wanted in my life: a great education, astonishingly meaningful work, wonderful friends, interesting experiences, and a 52-year marriage to a man who was the reason I said almost daily: “My favorite words in English are ‘we,’ ‘us,’ and ‘our.’”

Our five-year, heavy-duty struggle began in May 2016 when my husband, Frank, had a bad stroke.

Having retired in 2007 from his second career as an Episcopal priest nine years before, Frank by choice undertook most of the cooking and shopping, yard and garden work (his unpaid but creative third career), and much more (including managing the finances). Meanwhile, I was busily involved in social justice work, doing spiritual direction, teaching and preaching in various places (a licensed lay preacher in three dioceses and having one-shot invitations in many others), serving as the first convener of the Colorado Chapter of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, and doing several prison ministries. I loved it all!

The stroke turned our lives and our marriage upside down. I dropped almost everything (except spiritual direction). I took up Frank’s household duties (not to mention 24/7 caregiving), both of us hoping against hope that he’d recover enough for us to stay in our home and near his garden.

It turned out not to be. So, with sadness, we agreed in 2018 to move to Balfour Senior Living, close to our beloved church (St. Andrew’s). I did not always do caregiving gracefully, and Frank did not always receive it gracefully. We said a gazillion times, “I can’t do your work, and you can’t do mine, but we can listen, try to understand, and forgive—as many times as necessary.” And we did—every

**I am learning—no, I shall *claim* it. I *HAVE* learned—to truly love myself! I do lots of mirror work as part of the grieving process. Without even having to seek, I can now really see and serve Christ in my very own self! (Don’t be too impressed; it took well over 72 years for me to get there!) And it has made a total difference in my life.**

time. And we had some really beautiful times, even some travel, after that first stroke.

Then COVID-19 arrived. Frank and I could not see each other from March 6, 2020, until we moved again in July of that ghastly year—to Clermont Park. We had been on the waiting list for four years, and they had a full range of social and medical services so that we could be in the same place, no matter what happened to either of us.

There we had 40 days of what may have been the best time in our whole marriage—unbroken 8 hours a day together, with conversation, touching, laughter, story-sharing, tsk-tsking over the news, and more. We both were indescribably glad to be together! I was almost always almost giddy.

Then early one morning, his nighttime caregiver called to tell me Frank could not move—not at all! He had had another huge stroke and was moved into skilled care. He remained there from September 6 until he died on December 3 from COVID-19. During that time, we saw each other only a very few, very short times, and Frank had trouble even managing the phone. It was indescribably hard.

Now I am having to learn to let go of what I said at least 10,000 times over my 52 years with Frank: “My favorite words in English are ‘we, us and our.’”

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myself! I do lots of mirror work as part of the grieving process. Without even having to seek, I can now really see and serve Christ in my very own self! (Don’t be too impressed; it took well over 72 years for me to get there!) And it has made a total difference in my life.

There are lots of the 3 Gs still to do. I live with the line from Cardinal Newman’s hymn, “Lead Kindly Light”—

*I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me.*

But hope, and grace, and gratitude—and living without expectations, but with powerful expectancy—do make it possible to walk the grief walk. And I am discovering new life in getting involved again in working for peace, justice, and reconciliation. (Short public service announcement: I just got trained as a Braver Angels moderator—if you don’t know the group, check it out online).

I pray for you all, whatever you have endured during this time of so much upheaval in our lives. May you do whatever grieving you must do, trusting that you are not alone and that grace and gratitude can have space in your grieving too. God bless you. ■

**DR. LYNN W. HUBER** is a member at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in Denver.

<sup>1</sup> From Clair Lindsay, my friend and first spiritual director (before either of us knew there was such a thing).



# Away

BY THE REV. MARY KATE RÉJOUIS

**In real COVID life, every slice of our life was stacked one on top of another, in ways that have been written about so much I don't need to repeat them. Getting away was unstacking some of them, just a bit.**

**E**arly last summer, when churches and clergy and leadership were still just pivoting, and pivoting again, I was so grateful that Cathedral Ridge, under the leadership of the Rev. Kim Seidman, chose to pivot so we could get away, safely.

“Safe at home at Cathedral Ridge” was the tag line, and I leapt at the chance. I have no shame in saying it was mostly because there is no washer and dryer to use there. Laundry had become the persistent sign and symbol of everything hard about COVID-19 isolation. Laundry was always there, lurking around the corner. It was there after I finished a sermon. It was there, lurking, after another day of teaching grade 4 at home to the kids. Somehow, although we hardly ever left the house, we (the children, I mean) managed to generate the same amount of laundry, if not more, than before the lockdown. “Getting away” meant getting away from all that laundry stood for, even for just a couple of nights.

It helped also that I could send an email to Cathedral Ridge staff, and then, magically, when I arrived, food was in the fridge, prepped and ready to be warmed up, meal after meal. That was wonderful too. It made it different enough for me, that something holy and good could happen when I went up there with the kids. In real COVID life, every slice of our life was stacked one on top of another, in ways that have been written about so much I don't need to repeat them. Getting away was unstacking some of them, just a bit.

This was mostly true for the grownup (me), which became clear the moment one kid said, “I don't understand why we go sit on another couch in another house with the same old people (i.e., me and sibling) to watch the same old movies.” (We watch a lot of movies during COVID time—part entertainment, part desperation). True enough, kid, but at least in the evening I could walk a quarter mile down the road in the crisp cold air and see



the rings around a January moon and hold the quiet, good darkness of the night in my heart and feel hope, as small as a star, and as powerful too. Sometimes it takes being away, somehow, just to grasp that.

The sledding, when it was good, helped. In warmer seasons, so were the rocks to climb on, and the chance to teach the kids the term “glacial erratics” (look it up). Anything that gave us something thrilling, to remember what “thrilling” feels like—kind of like that line from “O Holy Night”:

*A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices.*

The grief of COVID-19 was like laundry: always, always there. Early on, we wondered how many years until a vaccine (thanks be to God for the progress made there!), and I imagined worst-case scenarios that involved multiple years of doing school at home. Later we wondered about other things—will we wear masks in school and church forever? Will there be college in a decade? Will we ever stand around at church with donuts and coffee again? Will it be thrilling?

We made lists of post-COVID dreams one night when we were away. When one kid put “Go to the grocery store with mom,” I choked up and said: “How about we watch another movie?” So we watched “*Dolphin Tale*” for the umpteenth time (or maybe it was “*Dolphin Tale 2*”), because those movies always get me in my heart, and I needed an apparent reason for mom to be a little weepy. The grief since March 2020 has been unrelenting. I don’t have any illusions that my grief was more or less than others, and I’ve never subscribed to a theology of comparative grief. All I know is that this virus compounded so many other slings and arrows of outrageous (mis)fortune: politics, the politics of a virus, the virus of systemic racism infecting this country, how to keep those I love safe, from all those viruses.

And, yet, every time I could step away, I found not grief, but gratitude. Sometimes these two are presented as sides of a coin—this is the silver-lining theory of enduring hard times. Just find the small graces and pay attention to them. I believe and practice this theory often—indeed, those small graces are the lighthouses that help us sail safely during hard times ... just get to the next one, and the next one, and the next one. I’ve numbered days and weeks that way. But there’s a difference

between noticing the small, good things and living in gratitude.

Real gratitude occurs in the midst of grief. It’s got rough edges to it, because there are no neat and tidy answers, not just the other side of a coin. To be thankful for my life and health and that of those I love and care for most, when close to 600,000 people have died from COVID-19 is a hard kind of thankfulness. Real gratitude is taking a breath on a gravel road because we know how much work there is to do the repair of the world (Isaiah 58:12), and our part in it. Real gratitude is gasping at beauty and then getting back to work.

I thought about that kid’s disarmingly simple wish to go to the grocery store again, the last time we were at Cathedral Ridge. Less than 24 hours into a very few days of spring break, a person with a gun broke sacred quotidian space and killed people at King Soopers in Boulder, a place closer to home for me and for us than I can hardly stand. And again, we recited the hard gratitudes—that we were safe and away and 10 people were not. How dare we?

Did grief win? Maybe, for a while. In the end, what I found is this—sometimes the world will want us to choose either grief, or gratitude. The next week, of course, was Holy Week—where Jesus leads the way in grief and gratitude, choosing both, through death, to resurrection. And so we follow him down the road, taking a breath in the beautiful darkness of night: I choose both grief and gratitude. ■

**THE REV. MARY KATE RÉJOUIS** is the Rector of St. Aidan’s and mother to nine-year-old twins, and she didn’t think it was possible to get better at multitasking until March of 2020.

I sometimes keep a list of things I wish I didn’t know. For one, the number of minutes a kid can spend \*completely\* distracted from school on any given day. For another, how my patience can disappear so quickly when holding all the things together: the lunch heating on the stove, a phone call, a new dial from Colorado Department of Public Health. For another, how much dying of COVID-19 is like drowning, slowly, and so alone. I grieve for the medical personnel who have watched this, again and again, then gone home and done their best not to share the virus with their families.





# HERE I AM

BY CANON MIKE ORR

**T**he other day, I heard from a friend—rather, the partner of a longtime friend. I didn't know him well, but I liked and admired him. He came to the point right away, admitting to his pain and anger toward the Church. Why me? He knew I was a churchgoer, a person of faith—a person who would listen. He'd grown up in rural South Dakota and had attended church regularly from childhood through early adulthood. He did all the right things: went to church camps, led small groups, played the organ, and served in church leadership. He lived a


life expected of him: married, had children, and later divorced. Eventually, he courageously confronted his sexuality and came out to his family and community as gay.

Then his church turned their back on him and pushed him out. He's held on to his grief and anger toward his former church, and toward God, ever since.

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He knew I'd relate to his story because I've shared bits and pieces, over the years, about my own faith journey and my story. I also grew up attending church, went to church camp, led small groups, "struggled" with my sexuality, and spent long, painful years in reparative therapy. My relationship with God could have been characterized as tirelessly serving God with my gifts and





## **Evangelism is a work of saying “Here I am” when presented with the opportunity to show love or answer a call to talk about who Jesus is to us personally; to share that Good News we hold in our hearts and on our lips.**

skills and doing good works, hoping God would overlook me as an abomination and could somehow pity me enough to love me. For eight years, I worked at a nondenominational megachurch where I played the part I was supposed to play, complete with a fake, shiny, plastic persona where I buried my authentic self. Of course, I feared opening up in any genuine way to anyone. This tragically twisted understanding of God and myself turned me into a wreck. God didn't give up on me though. I sought out a therapist who told me, “I don't believe God doesn't love you...all of you. I believe you are perfectly and wonderfully made...all of you.” A ray of light entered my shadowed world. Carrying that hope, I sought out resources that painted God in a much different light...that explored a theological understanding of God and God's wholeness in an entirely new way. A God of grace. A God of love. A God who beautifully and wonderfully made each of us.

My friend expressed grief and pain during our conversation. I responded with accounts of hope and Jesus and love and sexuality and how they were life-giving to me, and I hoped they would be for him as well. A few days later, I listened to a podcast about

evangelism that prompted me to recall this recent encounter. That moment, that conversation, WAS evangelism. Not the “E” word we have often come to dread in the church. In this conversation, I'd earned the trust through sharing my own stories over time, to hear the story of a fellow human being who needed to share his pain and look for a glimpse of hope; that same ray of light that had been extended to me years previously by someone who had earned my trust enough to share my own pain and grief. And this is the space where I trust the Holy Spirit to work. Work that can pry open the hardest of hearts, calm the worst storms, and comfort those who feel unlovable.

Often we think evangelism is a big corporate churchwide initiative of shouting that “God is Love!” whether it be on our church signs, from street corners on our Easter banners, through church initiatives to “invite a friend to church,” in participation in secular community events where we can sneakily slip that message in, or by posting an encouraging sermon from a church leader or service on our church Facebook pages. God certainly can work through those initiatives to communicate, but in my own experience, evangelism

is a deeply rooted work of personal storytelling, sharing, loving, and listening. Getting real and sharing our lives and faith authentically. Evangelism is a work of saying “Here I am” when presented with the opportunity to show love or answer a call to talk about who Jesus is to us personally; to share that Good News we hold in our hearts and on our lips.

This June is Pride month. It is a time where LGBTQIA people feel a sense of community and draw from that strength of being in community. It is a time for celebrating families and communities of intention, where hope, love, and even God can be found. If you feel called, I encourage you to listen to peoples' stories in the diverse LGBTQIA community. It may open a conversation where you can understand the grief and pain of someone who has walked a challenging faith journey, been abandoned by family members, or feels estranged from God. It may be a time for you to extend grace and be the face of Jesus they never knew existed.

Pride month may also be a time where you feel called to explore the Bible in a new way and hear from others who've wrestled



with the complexity of pastoral, personal, scriptural, and prophetic theology in the context of moving from fear to love; from conditional to unconditional. I commend to you a few books that have helped both myself and my friends and family members grow in our understanding of God's Love:

- *This Far by Grace: A Bishop's Journey Through Questions of Homosexuality*, by J. Neil Alexander
- *Unclobber: Rethinking Our Misuse of the Bible on Homosexuality*, by Martin Colby
- *Letter to my Congregation*, by Ken Wilson

Additionally, the Episcopal Church in Colorado has a treasure trove of formation resources, mentors and coaches, and opportunities to learn about how you can support LGBTQIA persons in your churches and greater communities online at <https://episcopalcolorado.org/welcoming-and-inclusion/>.

Let's listen for God's call together. Let's be open to listening to one another and welcoming others who are "beautifully and wonderfully made." Let's seek and serve Christ in all persons together, loving our neighbors as ourselves. God is at work. Perhaps you will be the ray of light that someone needs. Maybe you will be the Jesus someone never knew existed. ■

**CANON MIKE ORR** is the Canon for Communications & Evangelism for the Episcopal Church in Colorado.

Bryan Fleming (L) and Canon Mike Orr (R) at their wedding with presider the Rev. Elizabeth Marie Melchionna.

Photo courtesy Alli Dunham







# The Amazing Grace of God

BY THE REV. RICHARD PAXTON, THE REV. SALLY BROWN,  
& THE REV. NANCEY JOHNSON BOOKSTEIN, DEACONS

BY THE REV. RICHARD PAXTON, DEACON  
ST. PETER'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, BASALT

**As** I reflect on my year of quarantine, “grief” seems to be the wrong word. “Outrage” hits much closer to the mark. Among all the bitter events of 2020, I was most outraged over the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the city in which my wife and I became engaged—a city of fond memories. I grew up in the Mid-South—in a culture steeped in overt racism. Years later, my midwestern college peers often chided me, arguing that “southerner” and “bigot” were interchangeable terms. I wondered.

A few years after college, as I stood waiting for the train on the northbound L platform in Chicago’s Loop, I was struck by a realization. Looking across the electrified rails, I noticed that virtually every

passenger standing on the southbound platform was a person of color. We were mostly white over here on my platform.

That very day, some 35 years ago, it crashed down upon me that racism is an all-American problem, not just a southern problem.

And on that fateful day last summer in Minneapolis, I felt as though our nation had not advanced at all. In spite of a pandemic that should have *united* Americans, racial and political divisions remained stubbornly in place.

And I was outraged. Is outrage too strong an emotion for a follower of Christ? The grace of God tells me no.

Throughout Holy Scripture, we are reminded again and again just how important justice is to our God. Justice is an overarching theme of the





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Bible. And so, yes, outrage in the face of injustice is a fitting response.

The Bishop of Washington, Mariann Edgar Budde, backs me up here. Asked repeatedly by national media how she felt when her church was attacked last summer by officers using rubber bullets and tear gas to break up a peaceful Black Lives Matter protest, Bishop Budde consistently responded, “We are outraged.”

The pandemic is, outrageously, cruelest to those who suffer the worst injustices imposed by our societal systems. It was my experience that the grace of God shined a light on all the injustices not *caused* by the pandemic, but those *exposed* by the pandemic.

I often remind people that a deacon is ordained to “interpret to the Church the needs, concerns,

and hopes of the world” (BCP p. 543). I took several opportunities over this past year to do just that. The grace of God, I hope, was channeling through my virtual preaching, a lot of which reflected the deacon’s outrage.

And yet, I remain grateful. I am grateful to be married—married to an excellent chef who made all our meals interesting and nourishing. I am grateful for the daily walks with our son who thrives in spite of his disabilities. I am grateful that the vaccine became abundantly available. I am grateful for essential workers and frontline workers.

And I am grateful for the amazing grace of God, who certainly did not always send us “warm fuzzies” in 2020, but who did equip us with our most essential ministry: transforming lives through the power of our Christ. ■



BY THE REV. SALLY BROWN, DEACON  
RETIRED

**A** Wednesday morning in mid-March 2020: My usual day to serve at the St. Francis Center just as I have done every Wednesday each week for a quarter century. Although retired from parish ministry, I continue to live out my diaconal call to bear presence to those experiencing homelessness in Denver by volunteering at the St. Francis Center. But that particular Wednesday began an extended period of time when I would not be able to serve on site due to COVID-19 precautionary measures. Being 85 years old, I obviously needed to honor the guidelines established by the St. Francis Center to protect their older volunteers, and I also needed to listen to the wise and loving counsel of my daughter, an infectious disease physician.

My head told me to be patient and obedient, but my heart was breaking. The St. Francis Center community is where my heart sings and my spirit soars. It is where I find the Gospel embodied in the sacrament of holy relationships with staff, volunteers, and the guests we welcome and seek to serve. In my grieving I questioned in prayer how I might continue to bear faithful physical presence, the essential gift of personal encounter, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic?

And so, on that Wednesday morning in mid-March 2020, I began what became a twice weekly sacred journey to the St. Francis Center

neighborhood. With a nod to Pope Francis, who often moves about in his “Pope Mobile,” I converted my Subaru Crosstrek into my very own “Deacon Mobile.” Wearing a protective mask and keeping my car windows tightly closed, I managed to create a perfectly safe way to bear physical presence to my friends on the streets experiencing homelessness.

Twice a week for over a year I spent mornings safely encased in my “Deacon Mobile,” driving ever so slowly and sometimes parking for a few minutes on Champa, Curtis, Arapahoe, Lawrence, and Larimer streets and occasionally near the encampment sites located in the Capitol Hill neighborhood. I said aloud the names of those I saw and knew, I waved, I gave a thumbs-up and prayed as I drove along. Some waved back. Some yelled “Sally, be safe—we miss you.” Others yelled: “Thank you for coming,” while others offered socially distanced high fives or the peace sign near the closed windows of my car. I quickly realized that I was being ministered to. Humbled and grateful, I received so much more than I could ever have offered on those “Deacon Mobile” mornings, month after month.

A pandemic pilgrimage of grief, grace, gratitude. During that pilgrimage, I experienced amazing grace—the grace that is “God’s favor towards us, unearned and undeserved, by grace God for-gives our sins, enlightens our minds, stirs our hearts, and strengthens our wills” (BCP 858). Thanks be to God. ■

Photo courtesy Andrew Spinks







BY THE REV. NANCEY JOHNSON  
BOOKSTEIN, DEACON  
ST. BRIGITS EPISCOPAL CHURCH, FREDERICK

Several years ago, to celebrate my ordination, a friend gave me the gift of a large coffee cup. Until this past year, however, it had lived in the back of a cupboard. I rediscovered it there during the pandemic. The message on the cup? “FIND JOY IN THE JOURNEY.” And what a journey it has been. Who knew the three-legged stool of the Episcopal Church (scripture, tradition, reason) could also be grief, grace, and gratitude? When I think back to where we all were—me, my mission church, my friends and family—I continue to be amazed at how God’s grace has transformed us.

One of the most important gifts of grace for me was the opportunity to be at home. Not only could I focus more efficiently on my diaconal work. But I also spent more time with my family. I took walks outside, now with greater appreciation for creation and the Creator. I thank God for providing me time in such abundance. I watched my family, friends, and congregation grow closer. People grieving the loss of in-person gatherings developed a greater appreciation for each other. We have become more aware of and grateful for those whose lives intersect with ours.

The pandemic brought us isolation. But it also bestowed on us a gift: competence. We began

to use technology. Zoom meetings allowed us to bridge our isolation from one another. Many of our technophobic congregants learned to use tablets and smart phones. Others spent hours helping them remotely. Once they knew how to use electronic devices, they became supporters of others. Having a congregation that had tech competence from expert to zero and a leadership team willing to move from a mindset of scarcity toward one of abundance transformed us. We had energy and expertise, now, to function at a higher level. We held an international symposium on Celtic Spirituality as a fundraiser. We conducted food drives and paid utility bills for people in the community. When we moved to outdoor worship, parishioners bought what we needed and spent hours of their own time helping prepare and two days doing dry runs.

Despite the grief and loss felt by so many, the people at St. Brigit displayed abundant determination, creativity, perseverance, generosity, and they took risks during the disruptions of the pandemic. Emerging from a pre-pandemic mindset of scarcity, driven by a newfound hope, we now see with gratitude the abundance we have—abundance that provides ministry both for worship and for new ways to serve.

Our long isolation from one another is ending soon. What we once took for granted, connection, is returning with renewed strength and meaning. Thanks be to God! ■



Volunteers help with the Annual Campaign distribution at All Saints', Loveland.

Photo courtesy Carl Peterson



# A PANDEMIC YEAR OF GRIEF, GRACE, & GRATITUDE

BY TAD LEEPER





**P**icture this: It is the second week of March 2020. The gravity of a COVID-19 pandemic was dawning across the United States—including the state of Colorado. On March 8 that same week, a Sunday, All Saints' Episcopal Church in Loveland

**Thankfully, All Saints' has a strong, resilient, and creative leadership team and staff. Throughout the pandemic, decision-making by church leaders and staff was guided by the Bishop's office, by public health best practices, and, most important, by the Great Commandment—to love God and to love each other.**

had conducted two in-person worship services. Then on March 12, 2020, in the evening, I faced a life-threatening medical emergency—an acute cardiac event caused by atrial fibrillation (A-fib). The quick action of my wife, Mary, saved my life that night. She called 911, and after the Loveland Fire and Rescue EMTs arrived, they rapidly stabilized my heart rate and transported me to the hospital. Thirty-six hours later, I came home from the Medical Center of the Rockies. Implanted in my chest was a double-lead pacemaker. That same weekend time, I hugged my daughter Abby: We didn't realize it then, but that hug would have to hold us for more than a year until we were both vaccinated against COVID-19.

The following week in March 2020, when I was recovering at home, Governor Jared Polis and the Colorado Department of Public Health imposed a statewide stay-at-home order to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Thus began my pandemic-shaped year of Grief, Grace, and Gratitude.

Just as the pandemic upended my life—and the lives of all Coloradans—so too was the All Saints' community knocked off its even-keel. The final 2020 entry in the church's visitor register was on March 8. More than a year later, All Saints' parishioners

were still not worshipping in an in-person congregant setting. The pandemic forced the suspension and/or cancellation of virtually all scheduled activities at All Saints'. A few examples: in-person worship services—including last year's Lenten and Holy Week services, in-person funerals, Eucharistic visits to shut-ins, and other pastoral care events. All Saints' also halted the use of the church building by outside groups. Even the church's participation in outreach programs came to an abrupt stop. Most significant, the communal celebration of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist ceased for the foreseeable future. All these sudden and wholly unexpected changes to the communal life of All Saints' were accompanied by a profound and collective sense of Grief.

Thankfully, All Saints' has a strong, resilient, and creative leadership team and staff. Throughout the pandemic, decision-making by church leaders and staff was guided by the Bishop's office, by public health best practices, and, most important, by the Great Commandment—to love God and to love each other. In practical terms, this meant making church-related decisions to keep the All Saints community safe during the pandemic. Gratefully, few All Saints' members contracted the coronavirus over the course of this pandemic year, and of those, no one became seriously ill. No one died.



**At some point, after the parish began using Zoom services, it became clear to many of us that the two in-person services had separated the members of our congregation based on which Sunday morning service they typically attended. Now, via remote technology, we were all worshipping together as a single faith community. And we could even see each other's faces while doing so. What a blessing indeed!**

Early in the pandemic, All Saints' leadership decided to embrace Zoom meeting technology. This decision turned out to be a blessing! As a result of virtual meeting technology, the past year has been filled with many unexpected moments of Grace. The All Saints' community celebrated Easter Sunday 2020 via a live, albeit virtual, Zoom church service. The use of Zoom proved to be a safe, effective, and engaging means to bring the All Saints' community together remotely on Sunday mornings and throughout the week. As Sunday worship services resumed a regular schedule via Zoom, Sunday morning and midweek virtual 'coffee hours' with parishioners soon followed. Vestry meetings, committee meetings, and even congregation-wide virtual town hall meetings were all conducted using the technology. Somewhat surprisingly, All Saints' real-time virtual church services attracted worshipers living in Wyoming, Texas, Washington, California, and Arizona—and even an on-the-road, long-haul truck driver. Many from out-of-state still regularly attend our live remote worship services.

Zoom technology proved itself to be an unlikely font of Grace and Gratitude for the All Saints'

community in yet another way. Before the pandemic, All Saints' conducted two Sunday morning in-person worship services each week. With the advent of the pandemic, All Saints' moved to a single, virtual worship service on Sunday mornings. At some point, after the parish began using Zoom services, it became clear to many of us that the two in-person services had separated the members of our congregation based on which Sunday morning service they typically attended. Now, via remote technology, we were all worshipping together as a single faith community. And we could even see each other's faces while doing so. What a blessing indeed! While worshipping via Zoom, people had the opportunity to 'match' the faces of the worshipers on their computer screens with their respective 'screen names.' Further, since people were worshipping together virtually from their living rooms, dens, and even kitchens, parishioners were essentially welcomed into each other's homes on Sunday mornings. A growing sense of intimacy within the All Saints' community—along with much Grace and Gratitude—emerged as a result.

Of course, in addition to Grace and Gratitude, the pandemic

year brought Grief. My underlying health conditions meant the coronavirus was a constant, looming threat of contracting the disease, likely fatal for me. As many others did, I isolated from family and friends for the duration. Yet, along with all of the fear and Grief, I've also been blessed with numerous moments of Grace—and many reasons for deep Gratitude. Last summer, I was appointed junior warden by the All Saints' vestry, a role that has filled my life with countless opportunities to learn, build relationships, and experience Grace and Gratitude. I am thankful for the many blessings that I have received as a result of serving in this church leadership role.

Moments of Grace and Gratitude also occurred within my immediate family. My daughter Abby and her beau Madison were married last August at a socially distanced, high country wedding—a beautiful, outdoors gathering—and no one attending the event contracted the virus. Then in late November, my other daughter Liz gave birth to Layla, our first grandchild.

At the advice of Liz's doctor, my wife, Mary, and I isolated at home for a month. Liz and her husband, Jay, did the same. The four of us tested for COVID-19 soon after Layla was born. Since we were all virus-free and had quarantined for several weeks, Liz, Jay, and Layla (and their 75-pound golden retriever "puppy") all resided safely in our home for December, as a single-family bubble. This gave Mary and me the opportunity to help the new family with newborn care, grocery shopping, cooking, laundry, dog walking, etc. The



blessing of three generations of our family living together in our home for a month was a source of profound Grace and deep Gratitude for all of us.

Of course, the current availability of the COVID-19 vaccine is a source of enduring Gratitude for my family and me, as well as for many members of the All Saints' community. The opportunity to become vaccinated has collectively resulted in a newfound sense of safety, freedom, and emotional well-being.

I close this reflection on the past year with one final anecdote illustrating how God worked through the All Saints' community to 'birth' a wonderful moment of Grace and Gratitude during this past Holy Week 2021. At their pre-pandemic retreat in February 2020, the All Saints' vestry decided to move forward with several architectural modifications to the church to make the building more physically accessible to all. A key accessibility change targeted by the vestry was redesigning the church's chancel to make it easier and safer for worshipers to approach the communion rail to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. Unfortunately, the onset of the pandemic halted the vestry's plans to remodel the chancel. Because the pandemic meant continued masked & socially distanced practices into 2021, the nave and chancel were not being used for in-person worship. What an opportune time to deconstruct and remodel the chancel with minimal disruption of worship services. At the same time, the nave itself was refreshed with a new coat of paint on the walls and wood polish on the pews. The chancel

redesign project was completed over a three-month period this past winter and early spring—just in time to conduct masked and socially distanced in-person Holy Week worship services. The newly redesigned chancel and refreshed nave provided a beautiful sacred space to again welcome small groups of All Saints' in-person worshipers. This was truly a source of Grace and Gratitude for our resilient community of believers.

Upon reflection, this pandemic year has provided All Saints'

parishioners, and me personally, with numerous, and numinous, examples of God's Grace. This past year, unlike any other, has also proven itself to be a wellspring of deep Gratitude for the Grace moments of new life, new learning, new and abiding relationships, newfound resilience, and new beginnings for the All Saints' community. Amen. ■

**TAD LEEPER** is the Junior Warden at All Saints' Episcopal Church, Loveland.



The technology setup for worship in the newly remodeled Chancel at All Saints, Loveland.

Photo courtesy Carl Peterson



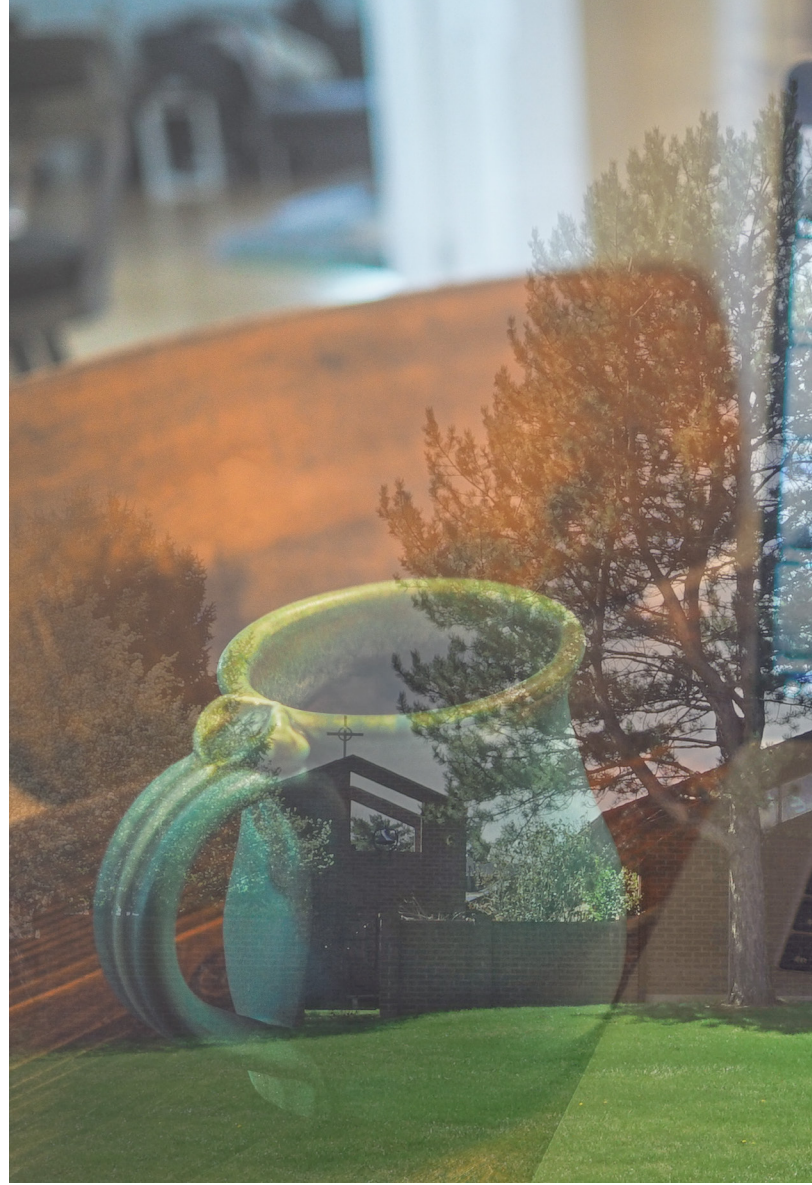
# Doing Church, Real Church

BY IAN NELSON

**St.** Stephen's Longmont has been through an interesting three years of growth. Before the pandemic hit, we had retired two rectors over fifteen months. First, we said goodbye to our long-term rector of more than 28 years, and then we bid farewell to our interim rector. We had known they were planning to retire. Still, when it came time, the departures were bittersweet for us. Adding to the uncertainty, the Episcopal Church in Colorado was transitioning to a new bishop. So while things went smoothly, at St. Stephen's, we navigated the transitions with some trepidation. I had joined the vestry at the beginning of this period, and then halfway through my first year, was named senior warden. I'm currently in my third year.

As we entered transition, we were told about grief, cycles of grief, and the various processes that spool out at church when congregations and their rector's part. It's all true. It's a process our whole church underwent in its many parts. At times during the transitions, it felt like we were just pushing uphill. Volunteers were hard to locate. It wasn't apathy, I think. We just didn't have much energy. We pushed through it. But it was a challenging time to lead—a challenge that may have prepared us for the pandemic. We had already embraced that things were going to be different at St. Stephen's.

We celebrated the installation of our new rector, the Rev. Melissa Adzima, about a month before



we closed our doors to public worship due to the pandemic. Still, we persisted in worship and service, meeting outdoors and online. Once, we directed our congregation to tune in to the live stream from St. John's Cathedral, Denver. But every other week, we've provided a morning prayer or Holy Eucharist on Sundays, and subsets of our people do compline every night. There is morning prayer on Thursdays. The only difference is we're not in the same room, and we're using technology for it. We have been attempting to meet outdoors at least once a month, weather permitting, for communion. And during the coldest part of winter, we offered a "drive-by" communion. Our book club, men's ministry, and meals for people-in-need groups have been strong during the pandemic, all meeting virtually or outdoors. From what I've seen at St. Stephen's—and this may be at odds with the experiences in other congregations—the grief of physical separation has not been as acute as the grief of transition. We are still praying for, talking to, and loving one another.





It's just a little different. We're still getting to know our new rector, and pastoral relationships are still forming. The pandemic isn't stopping that. I think it has been kind of fun because we're trying new things, and there is no fear of changing something that would upset someone— everyone is just grateful for what we can do.

We meet as a parish on Zoom; it's interactive, not a one-way streaming application. People can talk to each other, and if they have cameras, they can see each other. We "screen share" our bulletin. We have music—sometimes live and sometimes recorded. We've had guest speakers give homilies. Three different priests have presided at various times over the year.

We have altered our bulletin as we have had people to help with it. Initially, we had a PowerPoint that we received from a sister church, and we customized it with our announcements. For about

seven months, a temporary parish administrator, gifted at graphic design, redesigned our bulletin using the colors of the liturgical seasons. People loved it. This successful experiment has made us think we might try to expand that position into more of a communications director. It has absolutely impacted our thinking on what we're looking for in a new staff member.

We've used audio and video recordings. At least one homily was recorded by a guest speaker because he simply couldn't be available at our meeting time, but we still got to hear his message when we otherwise wouldn't have. We've used audio and video clips from other sources pretty regularly when it fits. We had previously brought a video projector into our sanctuary and used video in our services. But it was rare. Since we've been able to do it reasonably easily during our virtual gatherings, we have used video more frequently, and it feels a little less like a special treat and more like an integrated part of our services. We have experimented with recording the readings as videos we play during our service, but we usually have our lectors read from home. We like it when more people get to take part. We still haven't figured out a great solution for responsive reading, but we make do.

Before the pandemic, people would write their prayers out at a prayer station in the sanctuary. Now, they submit them beforehand via email or type them into the chat window. I think we have as many openly expressed prayers this way as we would have in person, maybe more. It feels remarkably intimate.

We have made some mistakes, but our parish has been gracious about it. Through the entire pandemic, I have only heard two complaints, which pertained to technical issues. I think some of the mistakes are what make our online gatherings more real. Our "screen sharer" will get lost from time to time, and the wrong part of the bulletin is up on the screen. It feels terrible when that person is you. The few seconds of trying to find the right page feels like an eternity. But everyone understands. We have had people unmute themselves to voice support when it happens. Another time we tried to use an extra-long cable connecting our computers and the cameras so we could increase our physical distancing. The cable stopped working mid-sermon. I had to stop the service and ask our assistant priest to begin her sermon again. She was much more gracious than I think I would have been. Sometimes things just don't work out as well as you'd like, but we learn



from them. One member recently told me that “it feels more participatory than when we’re in person,” and “it feels like we’re still in church.” So I think we’re going in a good direction and maybe even making some aspects a little better.

Pretty early on after the pandemic started, I noticed that a couple of our regular “Zoom congregants” were people I know couldn’t attend Sunday morning services regularly because of health reasons. Before the pandemic, we reached the homebound through our Lay Eucharistic Visitors, now we reach the homebound virtually. At that point, it felt like we weren’t just trying to “get through the pandemic,” we were doing church, Real Church. Our online services are not for everybody. I know that. And we have a group of people that are waiting for our doors to open back up. But bringing people in, virtually, who can’t normally be there is important work. We weren’t openly talking about what it was we hoped to take away from the pandemic. Our vestry decided to make a major investment in some cameras and audio systems in our sanctuary. The expressed intent is that we would continue to share our services with those that can’t physically attend. As many of our children have been doing with school, we are planning on a “hybrid model” with in-person and remote worship services if they can’t be in-person. Although the pandemic is impacting our finances, this was a strong move of faith by our vestry.

We’ve had visitors to our online services. Some are out-of-state family members of our parishioners. But we’ve also had entirely new people visit. One of our recent visitors has been taking part by being a lector and getting involved that way. We have talked a little bit about using the online service as a way to introduce new folks to our church. It’s a low-friction, low-risk way to see what we do and hear our message. We have to figure out some of the details on how to do this, but I think it’s solvable. We plan to create an “internet greeter” who will greet visitors, answer any questions, and maybe direct visitors to a virtual guestbook. Maybe we’ll have monitors somewhere we can see each other at home during the Peace.

Another surprise from this time, since we had to pause our outreach efforts, I believe the pent-up desire to do outreach has focused us some. We have done two outreach efforts, donating food and toiletries to those in need. We were able to donate

about 1,000 lbs. of food and goods, more than we have normally done. We are also launching a “little free pantry” where people can come get things as they need. I believe there is more interest and intensity surrounding these projects than there would have been otherwise.

I am grateful that the pandemic happened now and not ten years earlier. In a way, I’m grateful that I was in this position when it did happen. I have been active in broadcasting our services. It’s not a typical senior warden job, but I’m an engineer in my day job, so I’m comfortable with technology. Besides, it has been fun getting out of my comfort zone, closer to the altar side of things on Sundays. It feels like I’m using my gifts to make our priests more comfortable, knowing they do not have to worry too much about the technology as we do this entirely new thing together. The technology to stream and connect is almost ubiquitous now. But, really, just a few years earlier, things could have been much different. I have been amazed by how many members of the congregation have been able to connect to our services without missing a beat. I cannot fully express my gratitude for how dynamic and adaptable they are.

St. Stephen’s has a strong vestry. Immediately before the pandemic, we had five people volunteer to serve. In all the previous years, I can remember having to beg people to be on the vestry. I am grateful for them and their commitment. More voices and more ideas make it all easier.

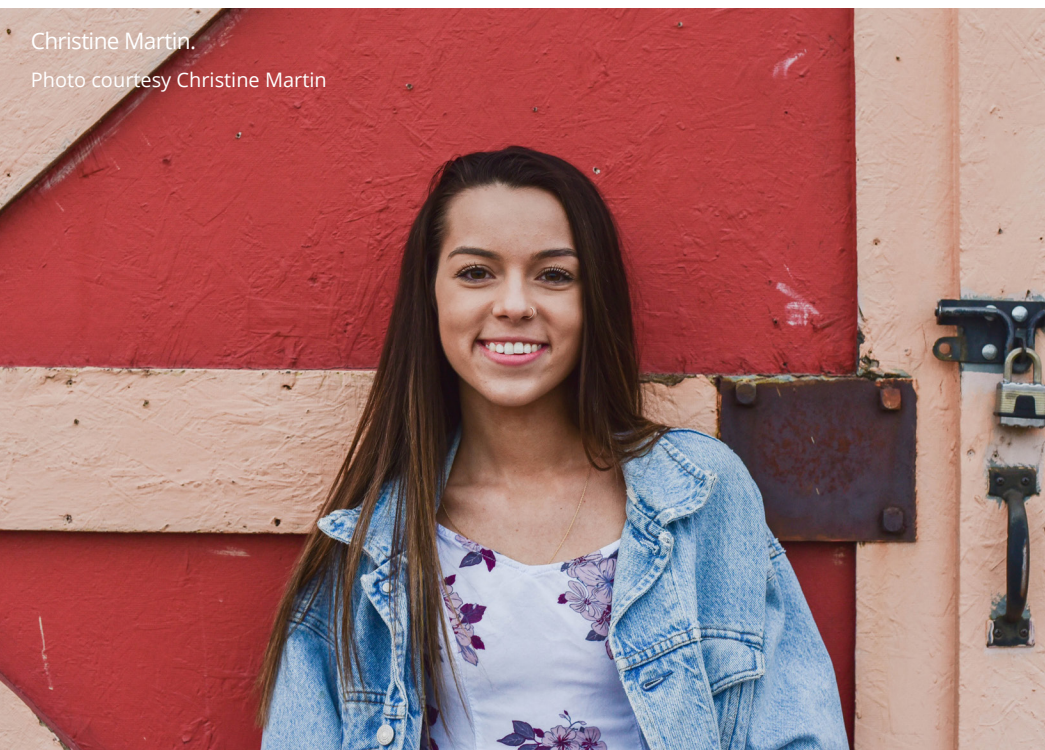
We’ve also been blessed with a fantastic rector and assistant priest. They’ve been forced out of their comfort zones and have gracefully adapted. We’ve had to work more closely than we might have without the pandemic, and I’m grateful for that opportunity. I told our vestry at the beginning of the pandemic that I like big challenges when they happen because you get to work closely with people, and it brings a team together.

COVID-19 has absolutely brought us together, caused us to listen to one another and God more closely, and pushed us in new ways. We’ve shared the grief of COVID-19 together. We’ve learned how to receive grace, give grace, and *Do Church, Real Church*, together. ■

**IAN NELSON** is the Senior Warden at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, Longmont.



Christine Martin.  
Photo courtesy Christine Martin



# JOURNEY TO GRATITUDE & GRACE

BY CHRISTINE MARTIN

**T**o say that the last year has been a nightmare is an understatement. Throughout the last 13.5 months or so, the entire world faced such a drastic change; our new normal was a global pandemic. Like most people this last year, I have struggled greatly to find the joy in such a dark time. It felt all too easy to lose myself in the loneliness, and I was barely able to hold my closest relationships during quarantine, including my relationship with God. Who knew after 12 long months of grief and frustration I would manage to find goodness?

I've lost so many things due to COVID- school dances,

assemblies, sporting events, rites of passage. My classmates and I have had to manage four different schedule changes! For the last 4 months it was up in the air if my graduation this summer would even happen. And while I know these losses may seem small to some, to a senior in high school, they have been devastating.

I have also watched as social issues were brought to light across the nation. I experienced so much heartbreak from the violence I was seeing. Living with so much fear has been hard for my mental health and I know it's been hard for others as well. It felt rather impossible to find peace with all that was broken.

While preparing for the Quest retreat in the fall of 2020, I ordered a brand-new Bible off of Amazon. Despite my anger toward God from the pandemic and all the world news, I had decided that even if I couldn't attend church or retreats in person, I wanted to try to find peace in God. The best way I knew how to do this was through scripture. I opened my bible and, amazingly, opened right to the book of Hebrews, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). As I read that verse over and over, I reflected on the pandemic. I realized that there was grace in the pain. God had given me the strength to persevere in the face of all of the loss, the hurt, and sorrow from the last year.

More than a year later, things are slowly returning to normal. Vaccinations are given to millions of people every day, and things are looking up. I am grateful, now, for the year of reflection I had. Despite the pain, the confusion, and the heartbreak, I have gained more than I could ever know. I am now attending school 5 days a week. In the Fall, I will be attending Grand Canyon University to study Nursing with a minor in Christian studies. My loved ones are alive and healthy. And though the pandemic is not yet over, I am more aware, full of grace, and so grateful for all that I have learned, and will continue to learn, from this time in history. ■

**CHRISTINE MARTIN** is a member of St. Gabriel the Archangel Episcopal Church, Cherry Hills Village.





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