



Grace's Chatter Spring - 2021



Rev. Takouhi's Reflection...

Spring 2021... *New Life is on the Horizon*



Dear Grace United Church Family & Friends,

Exactly a year ago today, March 8, 2020, was the last time that I led worship celebrations – like we knew it – at the communities of faith that I served. Without any fear we were shaking hands, hugging each other, sitting side by side, singing fearlessly, praying, passing the Peace of Christ, the offering plates, dancing, clapping, having coffee, cookies, celebrating birthdays, and breaking bread together as the Sacrament of Communion or dinners/lunches for mission fundraisings and otherwise.

Today, when I look back, I sense that a whole year has passed by so fast, yet it is not passing fast enough. I have been reminded once again that ***life can change in a split second, yet change does not happen overnight.***

Beloved, we are journeying through the Lenten Season of 2021, but it feels like we are still stuck in the wilderness of 2020. However, whether we acknowledge it or not, the days go by and do not stop because we are going through a pandemic. Spring is around the corner, Easter is on the horizon, new life will be evident, ***Resurrection will be celebrated.***

As we know, Lent is a time in the Wilderness where we learn to live through the sandstorms of life; avoiding the thorns that come our way; searching for living water in the middle of the parched lands. This silent journey in the desert reminds us to live intentionally, paying attention to who we are, how we are breathing, where we are found, and how God is journeying with us. Lent is a time to learn how to Trust the Creator who is walking with us in the deserts of life. This pandemic has made Lent into a reality from figuratively imagining the Wilderness, into a reality of experiencing the sting of death, by the millions globally.

Often, we want to avoid shadows of life because we are afraid. However, there are no shadows without LIGHT. ***The Light of the Creator is either behind us, next to us, or in front of us at times and that is when shadows become apparent. Reminding us – We are NOT Alone.***

Today, my word of encouragement is simple: ***Hang in there, this too shall pass. Hang in there, there is no Resurrection Morning without Good Friday. All seeds begin their growth in the darkness of the soil.***

This pandemic is NOT the first one and it will not be the last. Charles Dickens, began his famous novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* with these words, ***"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."*** This classical novel stands true to life because life is NOT simply good times – there are always ups and downs. Did you know that since 1334, over 12 pandemics have taken place?¹ It will be a shame for us to waste this time of isolation and not live intentionally, but ask ourselves, what have we learned or still can learn during this Pandemic? I cannot guess what you have learned or still are learning, but I can share a few of my learnings with you.

¹ "A History of Notable Pandemics" – www.theconversation.com/this-isnt-the-first-global-pandemic-and-it-wont-be-the-last-heres-what-weve-learned-from-4-others-throughout-history-136231 - March 7, 2021

First: Life is Fragile. Handle with Care

Did you know that wearing masks, washing hands, keeping physical distance, and using sanitization gels more frequently, has led to far fewer colds and flu this year?

Second: Crises of Life bring forth Truth, Transformation and Self-Discovery

The depth of racism, and ageism, has become apparent more than ever before. Innocent people are dying or being beaten because of their skin colour, race, ethnicity. We have discovered how fragile our health care system is in hospitals and retirement/nursing homes. We have learned that we might be in the same storm, but not all have the same means to weather this storm. Some barely have life jackets to survive, while others are found in their comfortable yachts.

Third: What are the Essentials of life?

Since COVID-19 took over the world, I, we, have realized that relationships are more important than material possessions, time with friends and family are more precious than we ever realized. It became apparent that we cannot live on our own, we need one another – relationships are essential for our wellbeing. The best gifts we can offer one another are: Care, Compassion, Kindness, Smiles, Wearing a Mask, Washing Hands, Respecting physical distance, and many more details of daily activities that we had taken for granted.

Fourth: The Pandemic DOES NOT affect the Creator -- God is still at Work

I never imagined that I would serve a new Community of Faith any time soon, yet God called me to Grace United Church in the middle of a pandemic. I have learned once again that God is NOT limited by a pandemic, nor a church building – God works freely and constantly. **God is NOT limited by pandemics, buildings, or natural disasters.** Moreover, the Church is not limited to her building, the Church is the people, and wherever they are found, the Church is alive. When you make someone be hopeful and experience abundant life, that is Church. The Spirit of God is reaching out since the beginning of time, through the chaos of life, and now more than ever, through technological waves of the internet, TV, and you and me.

I remember clearly how churches, pre-COVID, were always preoccupied to get their pews filled. Now, during COVID, we have had more people listening and watching our virtual worship celebrations than our pews could accommodate. Friends, no one is immune of difficulties, but **Spring, Easter, The Resurrection Morning, reminds us that death, difficulties, and demise do NOT have the last word, LOVE does!**

Today, I implore you, do not long for the past and rush into a future, just for the sake of "returning to normal," whatever that normal was. Like Dave Hollis says, **"In the rush to return to normal, use this time to consider which parts of normal are worth rushing back to"**².

Be patient, this too shall pass, and hang tight to the **Promises, Presence,** and the **Peace of God, because NOTHING separates us from the Love of God, and Easter is the testimony to that reality, reminding us that New Life is on the Horizon – Today and Always. Amen.**

Your Servant-Leader,

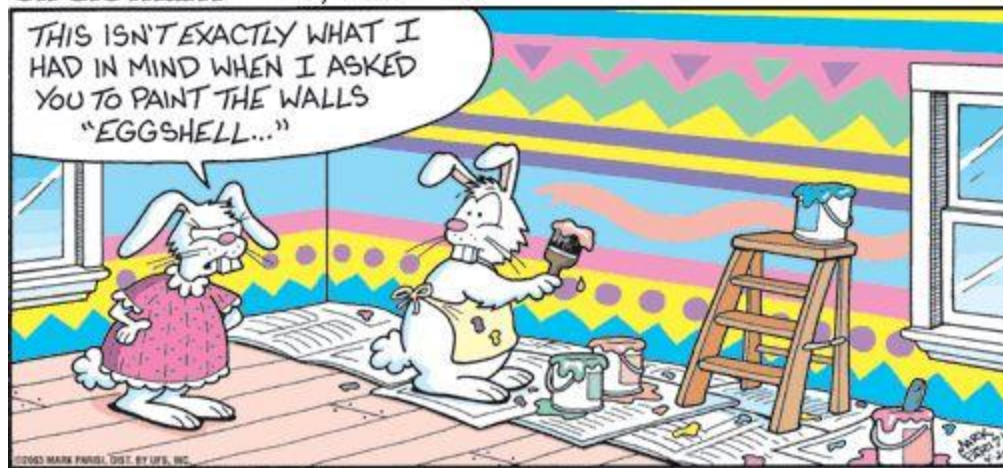
Rev. Takouhi Demirdjian-Petro

B.A., B.Th., M.Div.



²<https://medium.com/change-becomes-you/lets-not-go-back-b242b3d5c7cb> - March 10, 2021

Photos by: Rev. Takouhi – Cedars of Lebanon – September 22, 2018



Weekly Virtual Services Running Smoothly, but There are Choppy Waters Ahead

By Vicki Leakey, treasurer

I am providing a financial overview of the 2 months into 2021! We have been so blessed to have Rev. Takouhi leading us through these troubling times.

Unquestionably, the restrictions of the pandemic can be felt by many of us. Financially, our church family is very fortunate to be able to lean on some of the funds we have kept in trust. We have not had to transfer funds for the months of January and February but will likely have our first request for transfer in March.

Our operating revenue is \$2,240 lower than the same time last year and expenses have increased by \$4,800, resulting in a \$7,040 challenge. This we can easily make up once we achieve the opportunity for a couple of fundraisers. Although a sluggish start to the year, we so appreciate the continued financial support from our church family. Sunday morning TV or computer screen is not the same as sitting in our sanctuary, but we are safe, still able to stay in touch and will have real cause to celebrate when we are back together!

Our trustee funds have done well during this economic turmoil with no significant permanent losses to report.

Again, there are several Offerings' options available which you may consider. **E-transfer** from your on-line bank account is popular. Look for "send an e-transfer" and send to grace.gan@outlook.com. Just follow the instructions given.

If more convenient, you may drop an **Envelope in the mail box** at the Pine St. choir door on Thursdays before 1:00 pm that day as Laurie will be at the church office and will make sure contributions are safely received. **Offerings by mail** is another option – send by mail to Grace Church at 120 Pine St. Gananoque, On K7G 1C7.

We are so thankful for your continued support, as we are all aware there are some basic costs that continue whether we are in the building or not and your financial contributions have helped immensely.

Above all, continue to look out for each other, be sure to share should someone be aware that a visit or phone call might be helpful to someone we know.

Our Grace United Church family has much for which to be proud and together, we will stay strong!

Staring down the pandemic becomes a journey of faith and perseverance

By Paul Harding, Director of Music

Now that we've been at it for a whole year, a retrospective look at our virtual worship celebrations seems in order. In one short week in March 2020, Donna Norman, Tammy Fergusson, Dave Charles and I learned how to create a virtual church service and publish it on YouTube. Although some of the personnel have changed, the video is essentially the same now as it was then. A Worship Leader offering prayers and a meditation, volunteers offering greetings and readings, and the Director of Music creating music for hymns, preludes, postludes and special musical presentations by musicians from our own community of faith and beyond.

With the addition of our new minister, Rev. Takouhi Demirdjian-Petro and Gary Petro, and the honing of video and musical skills by other participants, our services are the envy (not the sinful type) of many other churches. When we added Facebook live-streaming, in October, and Cogeco Television, in January, to our broadcast media we pretty much completed the picture for virtual services.

Online services offer a safe way for our community of faith to participate in weekly worship in a way that is new and yet familiar. We fully expect that, after we are safely worshipping back in our building, we will continue to broadcast our services on these media for those who are unable to attend or who may not be in a position to join us in person.

The Official Board has approved expenditure of funds to upgrade Grace United Church's media capabilities in order that, when we return to the building, we will be able to maintain those extra touches to which we have become accustomed – hymn words on slides, graphics to accompany the spoken word, videos to expand on social responsibilities, to name but a few.

It would not be possible to summarize the past year of virtual services without a shout-out to the more outstanding contributors to our efforts. First – Donna Norman was there when we needed her most. She led our Discussion Group and when the pandemic struck she stepped in as our Minister pro tem. Second – the dozens of guest musicians who, when asked, agreed without exception to share their musical talents to inspire us in our worship. Third – thank you to Tammy Fergusson and Dave Charles who, on a regular basis shared their expertise in our services. And, last, all the volunteers from our Community of Faith (well, some were conscripted) who read Scripture and offered Greetings and otherwise made it seem like we were right at home. Thank you all.

Ed.and a sincere thank you to Paul Harding, who in a matter of days scaled the steep learning curve and transitioned from our organist and choir director to creator of computer music, visual arts, video editor and Facebook navigator. We are richly blessed at Grace United. Thank you all.

Easter Yokes

Knock! Knock! – Who's there? – Ann – Ann Who? – An Easter Bunny

**What happened to the egg after it told a funny joke?
It cracked up! 😄**



From the Chatter Box

Easter Season Services

Please join us this Easter season as we mark a most important celebration of the Christian calendar. We will the links on Facebook and YouTube.



Sunday, March 28 – Palm Sunday Virtual Service – 10:30 a.m.

Thursday, April 1 – Maundy Thursday Virtual Service – 7 p.m.

Friday, April 2 – Good Friday Virtual Ecumenical Service - 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, April 4 – Easter Virtual Service and Communion – 10:30 a.m.

Sunday Services on COGECO Ch 13 or 700HD

In January we received word from COGECO Kingston that Grace United's Sunday services would be carried each week on their Community Channel 13 – HD 700. Since the pandemic changed the way we worship, Grace Church Session was looking for ways to extend our reach to our members who did not have computers and therefore could not join us on Facebook or YouTube. Enter COGECO Cable! The services broadcast are from the previous week, but the messages, music and readings are a blessing to those who wish to tune in. Sincere thanks to Rev. Takouhi and Gary Petro for bringing this initiative to life. Rev. Takouhi said it best, "What a wonderful gift it is for us to be able to reach out beyond the church building and beyond the internet."

Pies for the People

Once again, we want to thank the dedicated group of women who met regularly and with Covid 19 protocols in place kept making pies when allowed to gather. There were four pie sales in July, September, December and January which raised \$8,315.

Worship Committee

In January, Grace United Session established a Worship Committee to work with Rev. Takouhi and help with the details of our worship celebrations. The team of five includes the ordained minister, director of music, lay leader, representative from Session and representative from the congregation. They meet monthly or as required. Their mandate: be a bridge between the Community of Faith and the Session; provide worship experiences that enhance our Faith Journey; make arrangements for pulpit supply and music supply when the minister or director of music is away/on vacation.

The current members of the Worship Committee are Rev. Takouhi, Paul Harding, Donna Norman, Tammy Fergusson and Colleen Harding.

True Meaning of Easter

Grace Church was invited by MyFm Radio to participate in the True Meaning of Easter presentation – a series of 30, one-minute messages will be broadcast between March 22 and April 4. Rev. Takouhi looks forward to extending the Easter Message beyond our building and into our community. We trust that you will catch her message of blessing and hope this Easter.

The Numbers are Impressive

Folks are interested in how many people are viewing our virtual worship services online. The numbers are impressive; it's just that we don't know what they all mean – exactly! We see weekly Social Media Viewings on Facebook of 136, 193, 247 etc. And that begs more questions than answers. But what we can tell you is this – throughout this pandemic we are consistently reaching more people on Facebook, YouTube and COGECO 13 than we had worshippers in the pews on Sundays pre-pandemic. And we know that there is a convenience factor involved. Folks can worship in their homes at different times or on different days – whatever works. That does not mean that gathering for in person worship on Sundays is somehow redundant. Each week we hear our members asking when we will be back in church. But, what Covid 19 has taught us is that our Community of Faith is indeed our whole community. We have embraced

that lesson and must continue to serve the wider Gananoque community even after we will once again be meeting at Grace on Sunday mornings.

The Virtual Sunday School

Our regional council is filling a need during this pandemic and has contracted with Kate Hubble to host a weekly Sunday School program on Sundays at 9:30 a.m. on Facebook Live. Kate earned her Early Childhood Education Diploma from Algonquin College and is currently Director of the North Gower Cooperative Nursery School. Her wealth of experience working with children along with her training in "First Words, Kindermusik and American Sign Language" will be a benefit to this weekly Sunday School program. Search for EOORC Sunday School on Facebook and join in with your children on Sunday mornings for Kate's 30-minute program.

<https://www.facebook.com/EOORC-Sunday-School-109076924573757/>

Discussion Group: Led by Rev. Takouhi.

"Join, Journey, Read & Explore "Living the Questions: The Wisdom of Progressive Christianity" By: David M. Felten & Jeff Procter-Murphy Wednesdays – 7 PM via ZOOM. The Journey Begins: April 14, 2021 All Are Welcome... This is a safe space where we wrestle with our faith, respect each other's questions, opinions, and find blessings on this path of life! Contact Rev. Takouhi, By April 4, 2021 (Easter Sunday)" *A poster and schedule is being sent out with this newsletter.*

Contributors this month – Rev. Takouhi, Vicki Leakey, Paul Harding, Laurie Cadue, Paul Scott.

Next deadline: Friday, June 11, 2021

Contacts:

Minister: Rev. Takouhi Demirdijian-Petro Direct line: 613-777-0880

You can also follow and learn more about Rev. Takouhi on Facebook, YouTube and her Blog www.RevTakouhi.ca

Church Office: Laurie Cadue 613-382-2161
grace.gan@outlook.com

Church Boards:

Official Board – Brian Brooks 613-382-2385
Session – Paul Scott 613-382-4386
Board of Stewards – Carolyn Scott 613-382-4386
Treasurer - Vicki Leakey 613-382-4015

