

September 4, 2020

Dear Grace Community,

It has been wonderful to see so many of you on campus this week for packet pickup and physically distant orientations. After a long summer of complex planning and problem-solving, seeing you again has reminded all of us at Grace of our purpose. It's been refreshing and rejuvenating to be with you all again. We have missed you and your children so much.

I recently listened to one of my favorite writers/researchers, Brene Brown. She has a podcast called *Unlocking Us* and her new season starts with the notion of "Day 2." The idea comes from her 3-day intensive training for therapists, where day 2 is often the hardest to endure because there's none of the excitement of starting out and none of the relief of being in the home stretch -- just a day full of hard work. She describes Day 2 as the "messy middle". As we finish a difficult summer, both with the pandemic and the uprisings for racial justice, we are in a metaphorical Day 2 -- the place from which we cannot go back. As she describes, we have entered a dark room, the door has closed behind us, and we can't see a light anywhere ahead of us. We are fumbling for a light switch, some kind of familiar footing to show us to the next place. The pandemic has brought so much uncertainty, and remaining in that messy unknown indefinitely is taxing all of us in ways we don't always realize. And with the fight for racial justice, we don't ever want to go back. We must face the sins of our history and figure out how to dismantle and recreate a world that values and cherishes Black people. We must undo the systems that are constructed to undervalue and harm.

And so how do we actually go forward? I stumbled on a moving TedTalk just before we gathered as a faculty a few weeks ago. Human rights activist Simone George shares this quote near the end of the talk that she gives with her partner, Mark, who is both paralyzed and blind. She says, "Acceptance is knowing that grief is a raging river. And you have to get into it. Because when you do, it carries you to the next place. It eventually takes you to open land, somewhere where it will turn out OK in the end." I love the image of getting into the raging river. It is the last thing we want to do at this moment. So it requires faith, and I also think it's easier to do if someone is beside you. As I shared with the faculty, we need to accept the challenge and grief of our present for our children. They are counting on us to hold the center for them. To give them hope that we can make it around the bend to that solid land. We need to light the fire of learning for them this week and all year despite the conditions we ended last year with and begin this one in.

To that end, I want to continue to offer all of you some pockets of comfort and support as we start a new year in this ever challenging time. You -- our children's brave parents -- need to be sure you care for yourselves. This is a marathon we are running and you in the struggle day in and day out. With input from our Wellness and Support Task Force and our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force, I wish to share the following offerings with you for the fall. You are carrying so much, so I hope some of these offerings can help you navigate "Day 2."

- **Meditation Monday** - Beginning Monday, September 14, Marisa Martucci, our Yoga and Mindfulness teacher, will offer a morning meditation for faculty and parents every Monday at 7:30 am. It will be a short practice and a good way to center yourself as the week begins.
- **Healing Prayer Service** - Beginning Wednesday, September 16, The Reverend Susan Thon, our School Chaplain, will offer an 8:00 am morning prayer service. This is in addition to a Chapel for the whole school offered at 12:30 every Wednesday and beginning September 16.
- **Head of School Lunch** - I will continue my Head of School Lunch Zoom gatherings. They will be offered bi-weekly starting on Friday, September 11 at 12:00 pm. On Friday, September 24, I will be joined by Melissa Lafionatis, Director of Learning Support. She will share details about her learning support for all of our students at Grace.
- **Next Town Hall** - Decisions about Grace's move to Phase 2 (Connected Remote Learning + Outdoor Learning Days) will be made in late September. You will be notified by email on September 30, and invited to a 7:00 pm Town Hall on Thursday, October 1.
- **Campus Open for Play** - During the month of September, you are welcome to come to campus after school hours, between 3:30-6:00 pm, for play outside with friends. Grace staff will not be supervising this play, but we open the campus to you for use. The building is not open for bathrooms or any use during this time. We ask that you not be on campus after 6:00 pm as county soccer teams may begin arriving at that time.

Zoom links for all of these offerings will be coming soon in next week's Gryphon News.

As we begin this school year, I hope you can see the time and effort that the faculty and staff have invested in constructing our Connected Remote Learning experience. It has been our intention to connect with you in more than one way during our week of packet pickups and

orientations in person and online. We are excited that each classroom has two teachers, making it possible for more attention and connection for all students. Despite our distance, we remain committed to creating community connections and offering support to each parent and family.

I hope you and your family enjoy a joyful Labor Day Weekend. We look forward to kicking off our 60th year on Tuesday. Until then, be safe and know we are enthusiastically preparing for next week with the Gryphons!

-Jen Danish