

March 12, 2021

Dear Grace Community,

It is a glorious week of near 70 degree weather and I am listening to laughter and joy outside my office window at Grace this morning. I am thinking about how grateful I am for this day and this time in person on campus while I am also remembering where we were just one year ago as Covid shut down Grace for the remainder of 2020. Last week, I gathered with Grade 3 and we had some time to reflect on that day a year ago when I came to their classroom to tell them we would be at home learning for a "little while." There were tears during that meeting a year ago when they were then in Grade 2. When I look back to last March, I think that Grade 2 maybe knew something I did not. I was utterly unprepared for the weeks and months that were about to unfold for us.

One year later, I am still in disbelief on many days that we have endured all that we have. That we have reinvented school as we know it again and again. I am continually astounded at the bonds our students and teachers have formed from afar and I am overwhelmed with gratitude for all of the ways this community has stepped up to support one another during this long and relentless crisis. There is not a day that goes by when I am not in awe of our faculty and all that they have given of themselves to keep their students learning and engaged. For the first time in many months, I am feeling hopeful that we are emerging from this pandemic. At the same time, I am processing many of the losses we have experienced and the way this time has changed us. I imagine that processing will go on for many months to come.

Now into a third month of our *One Grace* plan, we are catching a new stride. This week, Grace conducted on site Covid testing for the first week. We had no positive cases! We are dreaming of more and more hours outdoors on the playground and planning some of the events and rituals that are part of the ending to a school year. Teachers are continuing to engage students at school and at home at a deep level while keeping a close eye on emotions and feelings that crop up as we process the place from which we have emerged. I have enjoyed gathering friends learning at home for a Friday lunch bunch; it has been a gift to see new cross grade connections form on Zoom. And we have even produced some entertainment for Seesaw! Slowly, and little by little, we are learning to dwell in another kind of normal. We are celebrating our victories while acknowledging that we have work we must do to restore and regather our community after this year like no other.

What I am also processing on these glorious days of spring at Grace is how much you as parents have carried and balanced for so many months. In phone calls and Zoom meetings and exchanges at the car, I have seen you all persist in the face of this pandemic with your children in need of your care all day and all of the time. You have partnered with Grace and our faculty and you have provided a safe and nurturing environment for your children at a time when you surely felt lost and uncertain. I want you to know that we see you and we are so very proud of your resilience and trust in us as we have weathered this year together.

**In the coming weeks, the Grace team and the Health and Safety Task Force will consider the current community metrics and our own protocols with an eye towards moving to five days of in person learning in April. The data is currently promising, but we will continue to monitor numbers and our own testing. We will have more information before we depart for Spring Break.**

Until then, I leave you with this poem from Jan Richardson. It captures this place we find ourselves in as we emerge from the worst of this last year, where we can see again how wide our world truly is. I look forward to continuing to greet you on this other side with your children and to celebrate all that we have accomplished and endured together.

-Jen Danish

### **God of the Living**

#### ***A Blessing***

When the wall  
between the worlds  
is too firm,  
too close.

When it seems  
all solidity  
and sharp edges.  
When every morning  
you wake as if  
flattened against it,  
its forbidding presence  
fairly pressing the breath  
from you  
all over again.

Then may you be given  
a glimpse  
of how weak the wall  
and how strong what stirs  
on the other side,

breathing with you  
and blessing you  
still,  
forever bound to you  
but freeing you  
into this living,  
into this world  
so much wider  
than you ever knew.

—Jan Richardson

from *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief*