

April 19, 2021

Dear Grace Community,

As I write this letter, so many of our students are here at school enjoying another day back on campus after what has been an extraordinary year. Greeting them and many of you each morning, I realize that I will never again take for granted our ability to learn and play together each day at Grace. The joy we are experiencing in greeting, sharing, and learning together five days a week is immeasurable. There are still some students learning from home, and I also hold each of them in my heart and mind, just as I know their teachers and classmates do.

We continue to strive for “One Grace” as we approach these last eight weeks of our 60th year. Soon, there will be cicadas to count and play with on our playground and we will work to recognize the end of another school year, as unusual as this one has been. Through this great crisis, and in being in person with our students once again, I am struck by the resiliency and optimism of all of our children and our faculty. Not one obstacle thrown in their path has been too great for them to meet.

Amidst my joy of these new days at Grace is my abiding sorrow at the tragedies that continue to unfold in our world. We are enduring other pandemics: systemic racism, police violence, mass shootings, and an unfolding mental health crisis. We strive each morning to arise anew and face the day with optimism and courage. Some days that is easier than others. I imagine for many of you that the weight of all of this can be too much to carry sometimes. In the joy of being with our students this spring, I am carrying my worry for the world they are entering as they grow older. How can we be sure they are safe and seen as whole people by society? How do we protect their optimism and at the same time inspire their activism to make the world better? How do we have conversations about death and dying, injustice and racism, hate and violence?

Earlier today, our school counselor, Renee Stewart, shared a variety of resources with our faculty to help them in their ongoing conversations with students at school. As we anticipate the verdict in the Derek Chauvin trial, we are preparing ourselves to answer questions and hold space in ways that are age-appropriate and also honest and affirming. We will continue to remind the children that they are safe and deeply loved. Renee will also hold two parent sessions this week to help you navigate your own conversations with your children. **We hope you can join us on Thursday evening, April 22 at 5:00 pm and/or Friday, April 23 at 12:30 pm via [Zoom](#). Passcode, Sr0feM.**

As we face this week as a nation and as a small community, I offer a prayer from the Sisters of Mercy that Nana Susan shared in this morning’s Healing Prayer Service. That space each Monday at 7:30 am continues to be an offering to all of us in these uncertain times. Her prayer offering today was a comfort to me and so I wanted to pass it on:

Let the Shooting End

God, our hearts are broken with pain at the senseless deaths caused by gun violence. Families mourn, children live in fear, and some in our nation respond by arming themselves with more guns with greater capacity to end life. Our disconnection and alienation has caused some to turn to guns for protection and safety. We ask that you touch our hearts with your love, heal our brokenness, and turn us away from violence toward peace. Help us to transform our own hearts and to seek peaceful ways of resolving our differences. Let our hands reach out and connect with those who feel alone, those who live in fear, and those suffering from mental illness. Let our voices be raised asking our legislators to enact gun laws to protect all in our society, especially those most vulnerable. Let our pens write messages demanding change while also scripting words of hope and transformation. We ask this in the name of the God who desires that we live together in peace. Amen (Sisters of Mercy)

As comforting as prayer can be, I also know it cannot bring back all we have lost. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Duante Wright, Adam Toledo. The multitude of victims from mass shootings just this month. We need more than prayer to find our way forward. As we gather strength for the battles ahead, I hope you know that we continue to believe in the beloved community that is Grace. We are so eager for the day when we can *all* gather together on campus and offer each other healing and connection. Until then, we offer sessions for conversation and we pray for change and healing. I am also including a few resources that were shared with me recently to help with your conversations at home.

I continue to be deeply grateful to be a member of this community and your head of school. My heart is brimming over now that I am back in place with our students. Thank you for trusting us with this return and supporting us all along the way.

My best to you always,

Jen

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/living-with-the-bear>

https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.aimsmdc.org/resource/resmgr/docs/Facilitating_Critican_Dialog.pdf