

Advent, 2020.

*Restore us, O God;  
let your face shine,  
that we may be saved.  
(Psalm 80: 3, 7, 19 NRSV)*



Dear Siblings in Christ,

We are writing to you with gratitude and praise for the many and varied ways that you continue to represent and support The United Church of Canada throughout the Living Skies Regional Council. There is no greater expression of Christ's ministry of justice and compassion than that which responds to the needs of individuals, families and communities with generosity and grace. For all you do as individuals and as Communities of Faith, to share the gifts of God's hope, peace, joy and love, thank you very much!

We are also writing to acknowledge the many and varied challenges you are encountering, as you continue to be the church – as you continue to worship and serve, teach and learn, comfort and care – in these exhausting and frustrating pandemic times. There is absolutely no doubt that these past eight and a half months have presented many unusual difficulties and tests. If we had a choice our preference would be to live and work and worship without restrictions. But this is not a faithful response to living in the midst of COVID-19 and the coronavirus, so we must adapt. For all you have done as individuals and as Communities of Faith, to respond with respect and dignity and in faith to the limitations of these current times, thank you very much!

Friends, we are also writing to you as a gesture of solidarity and unity. We write to remind us all that we are God's people – that, together, we are the Body of Christ. Our faith is painstakingly built upon belief of and trust in a God who creates and recreates – who brings life into being, and renews. Our faith is also nurtured and molded by the person of Jesus, who is a symbol of redemption and restoration. Sometimes (like, in the midst of a pandemic, as an example), it can be hard for us to recognize God's creative presence, and it can be hard for us to hear Jesus' message of Good News.

In light of these experiences, and as the season of Advent draws near, we recognize that we are presented with a wonderful opportunity to be renewed and restored. Our tradition urges our engagement with this season, in a spirit of anticipation and expectation – in a spirit of actively witnessing to God's love being born, again. As the psalmist repeats their prayer (Psalm 80:3, 7, 19), may we find in these words the encouragement we need to always give our energy, our time, ourselves to the work of preparation – to the work of hope... The work of faith.

With sincerest Advent Blessings,

Rob Reed (DM),  
Convenor of the Regional Gathering,

Rev. Tricia Gerhard,  
Living Skies Executive Chairperson.