

Brothers and Sisters In Christ,

Our first cold snap has broken. As I write, the warmer weather has provided much needed relief for the people of Billings. Programs and school activities are back on schedule. The fragile can carefully venture outside again. Most of us can leave our driveways without getting stuck. Well, almost. Winter always seems to bring interesting challenges.

It reminds me of an unforgettable Sunday morning in January, 2011. I was on internship with Grace and Mercy Lutheran Church in Hermiston, OR. The warmer temperatures the previous night followed by a drastic drop in pressure had worked to blanket the entire town with a heavy sheet of ice, including the church's parking lot. Upon arrival on Sunday morning we encountered a ginormous skating rink that was entirely unnavigable. We couldn't drive on it let alone walk to the front door! Worship had to take place somewhere else.

We made the best of our predicament. Although we joked that skating would be an innovative way to bring the church together that day, we were more determined to worship without the fear of someone breaking a bone or two. Our safest, most impromptu place to gather (without leaving folks confused about our whereabouts) turned out to be the side street across from the church. Even though it was fa-fa-fa-freezing, we bundled up, sang hymns, said prayers, gave thanks, drank coffee, and laughed at our forever-memorable situation. For "fellowship hour" we ate quiche, sausage, and brownies out of the back of a member's car. The morning turned into a tailgate church service—unplanned, joy-filled, spirit-led.

This story goes to prove that some of the best and most memorable moments in life arise out of our calling to make adjustments and adapt to God's changing world. The spirit works in mysterious ways--ways that ask us to explore new possibilities and ways of doing things. We don't always like change, especially changes that are taking place in God's church. However, God knows that each generation approaches church and the Gospel differently. As time moves forward God is moving us into new ways of interpreting and understanding the good news of Jesus Christ, who is our assurance of God's love and forgiveness.

We're moving into a New Year as a church community. 2016 brought some challenges. It's likely 2017 will do the same. However, to be challenged isn't a bad thing. Challenges break us open, allowing new possibilities to take root. We may be in the dead of winter, but as Christians we know things don't stay dead for very long. Jesus resurrects. Spring always comes. Jesus has never stopped working to bring new life into our lives and God's church. We have so much to look forward to! I certainly look forward to a new year of doing ministry and God's good work with all of you.

Joy be with you this New Year!

Your Sister-Servant,
Pr. Stacey