

Dear MCC Richmond Family,

What a crazy, meaningful, productive, and at times frustrating, fearful, and exhausting year it has been ... and it's not even over yet! In many ways 2021 has seemed like a roller coaster of experiences and emotions. If you are like me, there are times we look back over this past year in wonder and amazement. It often leaves me shaking my head and even saying out loud, *I never saw that coming!* At the same time, I find myself amazed at the ways God has generously blessed us by meeting us exactly *as and where* we are, loving us unconditionally, and accepting us ... *just the way we are.*

Together, we have been determined to thrive and not give up on God, our spiritual community, our faith, or one another during another year of Covid and other realities. We have witnessed acts of profound kindness and creative ingenuity that remind us of the better angels and presence of the Divine within us. We have helped and taken care of each other. We are watching many churches, including ours, prove themselves to be incredibly adaptable, flexible, and resilient. At MCC Richmond, our staff, leaders, interns, and many volunteers have worked long hours and done so creatively to provide virtual resources and ministry to the congregation, to the Greater Richmond Community, and to our world. This is such a meaningful gift the church has to offer in a season such as this.

Through the life and ministry of MCC Richmond, 2021 has been a year of tremendous advocacy for those struggling with the realities of the pandemic and intentional ministry to those living on the margins. We continue to grow in our effectiveness being diligent in doing things differently, listening to and celebrating others ... especially those who have different realities and experiences than our own. This has brought a mutual awareness of the Holy One working in the lives of us all.

We continue to find meaningful ways to welcome and value others while striving to maintain a safe, welcoming and loving place for **ALL** people. Many at MCC Richmond are safely engaging in meaningful ministry while also feeling empowered personally and spiritually. Our neighbors, community partners, and local businesses are supporting our efforts with donations of food, clothing and funds to assist us in making a positive difference in the lives of others. I give thanks for God's faithfulness as well as **YOUR** generous faithfulness to God as we dedicate ourselves to *Loving God by caring for and serving others.*

This Christmas, please consider making a special year-end gift contribution to the General Fund or to the Sanctuary Ceiling & Carpet Renovation Fund between now and the end of 2021. All contributions received before midnight on December 31 are tax deductible and will be credited towards your 2021 giving record. MCC Richmond is a thriving, growing, and changing congregation because of God's blessing, your prayers, partnership, and generous financial support. Please place your Christmas gift contribution in an envelope and return it to the church office or visit mccrichmond.org/giving to make your gift contribution. Thank you for your partnership in ministry through your continued generosity.

During Advent we light candles on the Advent Wreath and altar as we anticipate, remember and celebrate the birth and gifts of Jesus. This Christmas I pray you will be touched by this poem by Howard Thurman:

*I will light candles this Christmas
Candles of joy, despite all the sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch.
Candles of courage where fear is ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens.
Candles of love to inspire all my living.
Candles that will burn all the year long.*

I'm eager to see what God has in store for us in 2022 and how our lives and ministries will be transformed in ways we could never imagine. Thank you for all the ways you support the ministries of MCC Richmond. Please continue to do so with your prayers, presence, service, gifts, and witness in the coming year.

Blessings for a joyous and meaningful Holiday Season!