

***We need each other to survive. We need each other to thrive.***

- words first shared over communion at UCC General Synod worship in Amistad Chapel

Dear Friends,

Most Sunday's, at the end of both services, we say, "We need each other to survive. We need each other to thrive." These words are poignant in the midst of what are often stressful and anything-but holy-days, especially for those who struggle with depression, loneliness, economic hardship and/or recent loss of a loved one. But this year our closing words take on an extraordinary weight. Regardless how we voted, many among us are struggling mightily to hold on to hope as the year ends. I think this particularly this day as I accompany George and Mariana Ruder in their grief over the unexpected loss of husband and father. Loss upon loss can be excruciating.

The truth is, we do need each other to survive. Studies show that people who attend church (and especially churches that welcome people in all their godliness) manage stress better and are more resilient in crisis. Coming together at church, sharing hugs, conversation, hearing a word of encouragement, or just the comfort of someone sitting next to each other is *animating* energy. It is life-giving. We never know when that one gesture or word will be what helps another make it to the next day. And we do need each other to thrive. When times get hard, prayers, phone calls and visits, meals, and friendships help us go beyond mere survival to thriving.

I am noticing though, a need to step up our support of one another. David Ruder was terribly sad and angry about the changes in our country that threaten the well-being of his family as a gay man, with a Mexican-American husband who has not been welcome in some churches, and their beloved adopted daughter. He suffered so when he heard about the vote of the electoral college. He died suddenly that night, before he could grasp the light and wring hope out of it.

Whether you resonate with his anguish over that issue is irrelevant. What matters is that he was not alone in feeling despair. Many among us suffer through the darkness, or the politics, or family, or missing someone, or loneliness . . . the list goes on. Yet we have been taught to stuff our feelings, to plaster on a happy smile, or use anger as a cover for terror. But suffering is not shameful. What is shameful is suffering unacknowledged and unaccompanied. It is so important that we create spaces where we can be how and whom we are, and that we hold the light for each other when our path is obscured.

I invite us all to be especially sensitive during these last days of the year, especially to venting rage or apocalyptic predictions of doom and gloom. Prophets don't simply decry what is: they hold out a vision to live into and for, and act on that vision. Our words might be what helps someone hold onto hope, not Pollyanna "look-on-the-bright-side-of-life" hope, but gritty hope that leans into the tiny light that is always burning within and around us. Our actions might be the light that reveals the next right step for someone. This is the

time to share stories of resilience, of courage, and fortitude. This is the time to **Be the Church**, to be the **Sanctuary** we always sing we hope to be.

I know you are so good at this, because I have seen you step up time and time again in the face of suffering. I know George and Mariana received texts, calls and meals today. Please continue to be tender with each other, and with ourselves. Come to church. Call me if you would like a private conversation and prayer. Come to Church-in-between-Things on Wednesdays. Come to Casa Maria sandwich-making on Christmas Eve. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, Rev. Inge Detweiler will be preaching about resilience. I highly recommend that you come. I have heard her speak on this topic, and her words were so inspiring.

The signs of the birthing of Emmanuel, God-with-us, are within and all around us. May you find your way to the manger in these holy-days, and remember the small but mighty hope that is born there.

Blessings on your way,

Pastor Delle