Dear friends,

The contemporary Christian music group called Casting Crowns produced a song entitled “Thrive”. The lyrics remind us of the truth: “It’s time for us to more than just survive. We were made to thrive.”

This past year we have had the privilege of driving thousands of miles visiting churches and ministry sites throughout the western United States from northeast Montana to the Mexican borders of Arizona and California. We visited the two western-most United Methodist Churches in America: Saipan and Guam. When not traveling we reside deep in the woods of Washington State.

We found some delightful bright spots of people and congregations thriving. We also found disheartened folks filled with anxiety and grieving about the future of their beloved UMC. Our words were appropriate to them then and to all in this Advent season, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” We do not know the future but we know God does and we claim God’s grace, wisdom and knowledge as we encourage those we meet.

**MONTANA**

Everywhere, we found United Methodists living out their faith by offering hope, peace, joy and love in countless tangible ways such as food pantries, homeless shelters, and hygiene kits for UMCOR, mission trips, etc. using what resources available.

**Blackfeet**

United Methodist Parish Advance Project # 910092

Our call is to help those on the Blackfeet reservation equip themselves in Christ to find ways to use the blessings that God has provided to better provide for their families and the entire community.

**UMCOR TEAM 18 – SAIPAN**

We had the privilege of leading UMCOR Team 18 to Saipan this past November.

We have to admit before breaking out a map we had no idea where Saipan is. Nor did we know that Saipan (part of the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianna Islands) and Guam are American Protectorates. Those born in these nations (and Puerto Rico) are citizens of the United States.
Super Typhoon Yutu made landfall in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and brought maximum sustained winds of 150 – 180 mph and gusting to 220 mph recorded around the eye of the storm. Super Typhoon Yutu engulfed Saipan and the entirety of Tinian just before 2 am on October 24 and 25, 2018. Yutu is the most powerful storm to make landfall on U.S. soil since 1935. Tinian is the island that the Enola Gay took off from carrying the atomic bomb during WWII.

In churches around the world we light the advent candles of hope, peace, joy and love. We are called to remember why God’s Son came to earth. The lyrics of “Thrive” continue: “Joy unspeakable, faith unsinkable, love unstoppable, anything is possible.” We would also add peace unflappable, hope unquenchable.

How can this be? On Christmas Eve we light the Christ candle in the center of the wreath. With Christ at the center of our lives, indeed, anything is possible. Christ Jesus is the one who provides joy unspeakable, faith unsinkable, love unstoppable, peace unflappable, hope unquenchable even in the midst of life’s storms.

We celebrate what God has done and is doing through our Lord, Jesus. By the power of God’s Spirit, we can know in our spirits we are not alone. As grateful recipients of God’s grace we reach out to others both locally and around the world.

We cannot all travel to the far flung reaches of the globe but we can all participate in spreading the good news. On behalf of the 350 United Methodist missionaries we encourage you to support the work of God’s – not ours – mission.

The virtues of love, joy, hope, and peace fill us immeasurably more than the gift of any physical item. We all long to feel love, experience joy, see hope and be at peace. The paradox is that you won’t know these for yourself until you give them away.

Your gift to Global Ministries translates to care, compassion, survival and thriving around the world in the name of Jesus Christ. We hope you’ll consider making a year-end donation today.

We thank you for your prayers and support.

Teri and Evelyn Erbele

Teri: erbele@gmail.com
907-220-1953
Advance # 10831Z

Evelyn: eerbele@umcmission.org
907-220-1951
Advance # 10832Z