

**2021 Michigan Annual Conference
Closing Worship | June 5, 2021
Rev. Paul Perez Preaching**

Musicians –Rev. Carl Gladstone & Ali Belsky

Liturgist – Rev. Corey Simon

Worship Leader – Rev. Cora Glass

**Worship Participants – Rev. Paul Hahm, Rev. Ruth Vandersande, Ms. Audra Hudson,
Rev. Kelsey Burns-French, Rev. Elizabeth Hurd, Rev. James Cogman, Rev. Zack Dunlap**

OPENING MUSIC: SPEAK O' LORD - ALI BELSKY

Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of Your Holy Word
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness

That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith
Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us
All Your purposes for Your glory

Teach us Lord, full obedience
Holy reverence, true humility
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity

Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority
Words of pow'r that can never fail
Let their truth prevail over unbelief

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity

And by grace we'll stand on Your promises
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us
Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory

WELCOME & PRAYER - ALI BELSKY

Welcome to this closing worship led by young clergy and leaders from across our conference. If you've not yet assembled bread and water, please find those elements in order to participate more fully in this time of reflection and worship. Let's pray: Ever loving God, you call us into a relationship with one another and with you. As we conclude time of holy conferencing, make your spirit known to us wherever we are worshipping. Help us to listen to your song of wisdom, peace, love, and hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.

COME THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING - ALI BELSKY

Come, thou Fount of every blessing,
tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,

mount of thy redeeming love.

Here I raise mine Ebenezer;
hither by thy help I'm come;
and I hope, by thy good pleasure,
safely to arrive at home.

Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
he, to rescue me from danger,
interposed his precious blood.

O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it,
seal it for thy courts above.

COLLECT PRAYER - MOUNTAIN VISUAL ONLY :10

VOICE 1 -REV. RUTH VANDERSANDE
God of the end,

VOICE 2 - REV. PAUL HAHM
God of the beginning,

VOICE 3 - REV. PAUL REISSMANN
God of the right now,

VOICE 1- REV. RUTH VANDERSANDE
we have our marching orders.

VOICE 2 - REV. PAUL HAHM
Sing a song in a strange land, we are told,

VOICE 3 - REV. PAUL REISSMANN
and those who will be changing appointments ready our voices.

VOICE 1 - REV. RUTH VANDERSANDE
Those who listen to long-loved congregations say they've had enough of this abnormality ready our voices.

VOICE 2 - REV. PAUL HAHM
Those who have learned to lead in unfathomed ways ready our voices.

VOICE 3 - REV. PAUL REISSMANN
God of the foreign and the familiar, will you teach us to sing?

VOICE 1- REV. RUTH VANDERSANDE
Creator,

VOICE 2 - REV. PAUL HAHM

Redeemer,

VOICE 3 - REV. PAUL REISSMANN
Sustainer,

VOICE 1 - REV. RUTH VANDERSANDE
our voices will never encompass all the songs,

VOICE 2 - REV. PAUL HAHM
our prayers will never offer every need,

VOICE 3 - REV. PAUL REISSMANN
our conferences will never include the whole vision.

VOICE 1 - REV. RUTH VANDERSANDE
But you do not need us to have the map of your kingdom in hand;

VOICE 2 - REV. PAUL HAHM
You ask us to sing the song in ourselves,

VOICE 3 - REV. PAUL REISSMANN
You ask us to step forward in faith.

VOICE 1 - REV. RUTH VANDERSANDE
God of the stanza,

VOICE 2 - REV. PAUL HAHM
God of the coda,

VOICE 3 - REV. PAUL REISSMANN
God of the rest and the rhythm,

VOICE 1 - REV. RUTH VANDERSANDE
You bring us to the end of our conference to listen for your song.

VOICE 2 - REV. PAUL HAHM
Open our hearts to the melodies you have given others.

VOICE 3 - REV. PAUL REISSMANN
Remind us that no land is strange to you.

VOICE 1 - REV. RUTH VANDERSANDE
Sing in us.

VOICE 2 - REV. PAUL HAHM
Sing in us.

VOICE 3 - REV. PAUL REISSMANN
Sing in us.

VOICE All: REV. PAUL HAHM, REV. PAUL REISSMANN, REV. RUTH VANDERSANDE
Amen.

SCRIPTURE PSALM 98 NRSV - REV. COREY SIMON
O sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvelous things.

His right hand and his holy arm
have gotten him victory.
The Lord has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.
He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen
the victory of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.
Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who live in it.
Let the floods clap their hands;
let the hills sing together for joy
at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming
to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the people with equity.

SERMON - REV PAUL PEREZ

We have come to the end.
We have worshipped, lamented, and celebrated. We have presented, deliberated, and voted.
Budgets passed. Appointments fixed.
Ones we've lost remembered, new colleagues welcomed.
We've conferenced. And yet the work continues. We are at an end but also at a beginning.

Conference, for me, is always a "BOTH / AND" event. BOTH a time of joyful fellowship AND a time of difficult decision making. BOTH the culmination of a year of ministry AND the launching point for a new one.

After two long days of zoom, we BOTH mark the end of our time together AND look forward to tomorrow, Sunday -- turning our attention back to our local communities and hopefully participating in our virtual 5k and take one step to address child hunger in our state.

This year -- after BOTH an intense AND extreme year -- the Annual Conference planning team turned to the Psalms to ground and guide our time together.

The Psalms are a BOTH ... AND kind of book of the Bible. The Psalms are poems, worship songs, of BOTH lament AND celebration. It is a book that contains the extremes of life -- intense grief, rage, and joy.

The Psalms, as stylized religious poetry, offer a form, a structure, a container — constituted by lines, measures, rhythms, parallel structures, and repeated images and metaphors — into which one can set big epic emotions....

In September of 2020, after a long and full life and completely unrelated to COVID-19, my grandma died. The pandemic makes death and grief difficult. Gone are the usual traditions and practices, of gathering, talking, laughing, eating, hugging in person and together.

I visited my grandma in her memory care facility a few weeks before her death. I had to fully don PPE — mask, face shield, plastic apron, and latex gloves. Covered in plastic, I arrived in my grandma's room. She was unnerved by my "Covid getup." She withdrew slightly as I took my spot next to her. I was unnerved. It took about half of our conversation for her to realize who I was. When she did she smiled, and said "oh, it's you, Paul." I smiled back and fed her an ice cream cup.

It was an intense moment ... full of many emotions, made even more tender, even rawer by the pandemic.

Towards the end of our visit I pulled out her Bible and flipped to the Psalms. Faced with rawness, grief, and an unnerving cocoon of plastic, I instinctively turned to the Psalms.

I discovered the pages full of her personal notations, with certain Psalms underlined. Were these her favorite Psalms? Were they the ones that made her think or that she connected with or that challenged my Grandma? I read some of those underlined Psalms to her. Psalm 77 especially seized me, I choked on its words ...

"Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable?"

"Has his steadfast love ceased forever. And his promises at an end for all time?"

"Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?"

(Psalm 77: 7-9)

What a Psalm to read during a Pandemic while your grandma is dying?!

That's what the Psalms do. They mess with you. They work on you. They grab a hold of you and keep you, if but for a moment, in the uncomfortable, intense feelings. They make you shut your eyes and take a deep long breath. They refuse to shy away from asking the tough unanswerable questions, always nipping at the heels of our minds.

The Psalms are bold Scripture for the bold and overwhelming moments of life, when normal is overturned and the familiar crumbles, when we see for the first time with a ferocious honesty the limits of everything we held sacred, when we seem lost and alone and uncertain of what comes next, when we stand with wondrous exuberance in the midst of mountain experiences where anything seems possible.

They are poetry which does not quite contain, enclose, bottle up, or control the extremes of life but rather holds them in an open-handed gentleness before God. Holds them between the hands of BOTH lament AND celebration.

Prayerful, offering hands that hold at once the broken heartedness of young love, the tender moment at a loved one's death bed, the trauma of a pandemic, the struggle for racial justice, the groans of a broken political system, the physical hunger and mental anguish of a generation, the gratitude for survival, the exuberant joy of hope and new life.

We dare to call the Psalms scripture, the "Word of God," because they reveal to us over and over again the very heart of God. The poetry of the Psalms give witness to a Quotidian Deity, an "Every-Day-God," who cares deeply for the mundane details, who hears and listens and responds to our heart cries, who sits with the uncomfortable, unanswerable questions, who joins us in the struggles and fights, who dances and claps and sings with us in the midst of both triumph and tragedy. A God who is faithful and steadfast, who does not forget promises made, who saves, redeems, and delivers.

Over the past two days, we placed the Psalms at the center of our gathering; more specifically we wrestled with the haunting, mournful question sitting at the center of Psalm 137:

"How could we sing the LORD's song in a [strange] land?" (Psalm 137: 4)

Together we sang the old, "Songs of Zion," the familiar songs to the Lord, in a strange land, in an uncertain time.

As we come to the close of our time together ... as we come to BOTH “the end” AND “the beginning,” I invite us to wonder and wrestle together with another question found in the Psalms ...

When is it time to sing a new song to the LORD ...?

I am reminded that in the earlier days of the pandemic, when much of the world’s population was in lock down, the skies and waterways cleared of harmful pollutants. Creatures long exiled from their natural habitats returned home. Prisoners were released. Debt was forgiven. People cared for each other, offering mutual aid and collective care. Overnight, many of us changed how we lived, worked, played in order to keep each other safe. Even the Church... the CHURCH, that slowest moving of all institutions! The CHURCH changed, pivoted, found itself posting and zooming overnight, re-imagining how to creatively continue essential community ministries, and how to connect and build relationships when you can’t gather together.

The pandemic has indeed been terrible, too many lives were lost. And yet in the midst of it we catch a glimpse of what might be possible. Our eyes see the truth of ourselves, all our “pre-existing” conditions “unmasked.” We also see who we might become.

What have you learned over the course of the past year and half that you don’t want to forget ... that you don’t want to let go of ... that needs to be held.

I pray we are getting closer to the time when humans and the novel coronavirus can live together. I have hope the coronavirus will evolve and change, finding it is more advantageous to give us a nasty cold than to kill us. I pray we, humans, might also change -- I pray we might discover how to better live together and with our world.

That’s why the Psalms admonition, its challenge to “SING A NEW SONG TO THE LORD” echoes in my ears.

Let’s not rush back to normal. Let’s not return too hastily to what is comfortable, known, and familiar. Let’s not be lulled back to “what we have always done”, to “the way we’ve always done it,” to what makes us comfortable because we can control and predict it.

Michigan United Methodists -- I wonder -- Can we sing to the LORD a new song?

Singing a new song is an undertaking that requires BOTH lament AND celebration. BOTH grieving the things that have run their course and come to an end AND, simultaneously, lifting up and embracing the new ways.

To sing a new song is to compose something worthy of the God we worship and God’s promise of abundant, eternal life that we claim ...

Jesus offers a simple answer to this profound question ... “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me ... Truly I tell you, just as you did to one of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25: 35-39, 40b)

Can we Michigan United Methodists show up to each other and our communities as we, each and everyone of us, recover -- mind, body, and spirit -- from this pandemic and enter a new normal?

Can we begin to ask the question of why communities of color were harder hit by the coronavirus, why some people are hungry while others were able to build their savings accounts, and why some countries have stockpiles of vaccine and others struggle to build their supply? Can we find the courage to challenge systems that simply don’t work or deliver on their promises? Can we begin to see each other and our neighbors as family – as kin?

Can Michigan United Methodist yet be a people of BOTH lament AND celebration? A people shaped by the Psalms?

I mean, what would it really mean for the church to be a place of honest, raw emotion ... a place where extreme joy, rage, and despair could be expressed and acknowledged. A place where people discover and develop the language and vocabulary to honestly and openly name the rough, ragged, and tender places of their souls with granular specificity.

What would it mean for us to be a Psalm 98 church ... A church that makes room and sits with the unanswered and unresolved.

What would it mean for the church to be a place where we address God directly and expect to hear and answer ... even if the answer is not what we expected or an answer we did not want or completely overturns our way of life.

What would it mean to be a church who embodies a God who sees our tears, hears our cries, witnesses our anger, delights in our joy ... a holy one who knows we are more than these extreme outbursts and knows we are more than our worst moments.

What would it mean for the church to embody a God who sets an overflowing table in the midst of our enemies?

Can we yet, be a church like this? A church that not only sings the Lord's song in a strange land, but a church that sings to God a brand-new song.

The answer is simple. But it is not easy.

What new song would you sing?

SONG "LOVE HAS MADE US" - REV. CARL GLADSTONE

You were dead
following the world,
the rule of power,
and spirit of the wayward.

Love has made us
for remaking the world.
It is our way to life.

We had passion
for these bodies,
desiring sense,
creating fury.

But God is rich
in mercy, loves us
when we're dead
and when we're gone

So in ages
beyond places
uncountable grace
is now saving us
for love.

LOVE FEAST - PASSING OF THE BREAD AND WATER - REV. CORA GLASS

The Love Feast, or Agape Meal, is a Christian fellowship meal recalling the meals Jesus shared with disciples during his ministry and expressing the community and fellowship enjoyed by the family of Christ.

Although its origins in the early church are closely interconnected with the origins of the Lord's Supper, the two services became quite distinct. John Wesley first experienced it among the Moravians in Savannah, Georgia.

It quickly became a feature of the Evangelical Revival and a regular part of Methodist society meetings in Great Britain and throughout the English-speaking world. As Methodists immigrated to North America they made Love Feasts an important part of early American Methodism.

While Love Feasts became less frequent in the years that followed, they continued to be held in some places; and in recent years the Love Feast has been revived. Love Feasts have often been held at Annual Conferences and Charge Conferences, where persons may report on what God has been doing in their lives and on the hope and trust they place in God for the future.

The Love Feast has often been held on occasions when the celebration of the Lord's Supper would be difficult or inappropriate.

The Love Feast is most naturally held around a table or with persons seated in a circle; and one of the advantages of the Love Feast is that anyone may conduct it.

Most Love Feasts include the sharing of food. It is customary not to use communion bread, wine, or grape juice because to do so might confuse the Love Feast with the Lord's Supper. You have been invited to gather bread or crackers, and water for our time today.

Early Methodists commonly passed a loving cup with two handles from person to person. You can read more about Love Feasts on The UMC discipleship website or in The UMC Book of Worship.

As we continue in worship and as you begin to partake in your bread and water, I will offer you a few reflection prompts as you eat for you to ponder... although we are not together, we are united in one Spirit and in one act.

And so, as we consider what God has been doing in our lives this year, take a moment and reflect on all that has been since we last gathered...pause...

And take a moment to reflect on the hope and trust you place in God for the future...

Join us as Carl leads us in this prayer song originally written by Charles Wesley for the purpose of the love feast.

SONG "FATHER OF EARTH AND HEAVEN" - REV. CARL GLADSTONE

Father of earth and heaven,
Thy hungry children feed,
Thy grace be to our spirits given,
That true immortal bread.
Grant us and all our race

In Jesus Christ to prove
The sweetness of thy pardoning grace,
The manna of thy love.

PASSING THE LOVE CUP INTRODUCTION - REV. CORA GLASS

Some of our conference leaders now offer their own reflections on the questions, "What has God been doing in their lives and in what ways do you place your hope and trust in God for the future?"

PASSING THE BREAD TESTIMONY - REV. KELSEY BURNS-FRENCH

What a year to start my first appointment. Ministry looks a lot different than I imagined my first year as a Pastor to be. Though there has been much to lament, God has been faithful in helping us sing a new song. This year has brought us new traditions and options that we wouldn't have thought to try before. For example, like many of you, to remain safe through the winter spike, my congregations committed to not gathering inside for all of Advent. We very much lamented our usual Christmas traditions. Yet, a new song came along. We came to the idea of hosting a live nativity on Christmas Eve in the town square. I think it was the coldest evening of the year, but we heard all around how meaningful and fun it was for the people that still showed up. It was a resounding agreement that this is a practice to keep around and we will probably do it again next year, indoor service allowed or not! Last summer, after being apart for the whole Spring, our congregations decided to utilize our outdoor space to gather for worship more safely outside. Though it took some getting used to, we heard again and again how much people loved getting to use that space to worship on good weather Sundays. We will be worshipping outside all Summer again and I suspect this may become a tradition. Time and again when we have faced needing to make a change or do things differently than usual, a new opportunity has come. This is God at work! Our God of creation and resurrection always makes it possible for a new song to be sung. God has provided inspiration and bursts of creativity when we have needed to think of something new. God has shown up and been felt in new ways during worship this year. God is among us as we made sure our church family felt love and as we appreciated our time together more profoundly than before. There has been much loss and much to lament and much we are eager to get back to, but this season has given me immense hope for the church. This year has proven that our churches can sing new songs. Our churches can try new things and let go of old traditions and change and shift and learn when the chips are down. Our churches can focus on the true heart of ministry and prioritize what is essential in sharing the Good News with each other and our communities. My hope and prayer is that now that we know these new songs that we will keep them in our repertoire when things return closer to our previous normal and that we will keep our ears, hearts, minds and doors open for when the Holy Spirit draws us toward a new melody.

SINGING - REV. CARL GLADSTONE

Father of earth and heaven,
Thy hungry children feed,
Thy grace be to our spirits given,
That true immortal bread.

PASSING THE BREAD TESTIMONY 2 - AUDRA HUDSON

This last year was full of upheaval—both collectively and in my own life. This last summer, after several years away, I returned to Michigan, following a divine call that was beckoning me back to my home state. But in order to respond to that call and re-root myself here in the soils of Michigan, I had to do some up-rooting. I had to leave the communities, relationships, and places that had held me to follow this call to something new.

Those of you who are gardeners, like me, know that the work of uprooting and transplanting comes with a bit of shock. If even necessary, this change leads to some wilting, and a few dropped leaves before new roots branch out beneath the soil. And let me tell you, moving in a pandemic was certainly a shock! But us gardeners also know that, if done with attention and care, disturbances like these are ultimately generative. The change leads to growth, life—and if you're lucky—fruit!

And my return to Michigan has been just that—fruitful. My uprooting, albeit painful at times, has led to growth. And I've been blessed to re-root myself in a community on the growing edge of our church.

As a Wesley Foundation Director, I work alongside young people who are vibrant, creative, and prophetic leaders. They are leaders who have a profound hope in the future and are imagining new ways for us to be the community of God in it.

And part of their imaginative work has been noticing and naming parts of our life as a church that need a bit of disturbance—things that need uprooting because they are out of place, dying, invasive, or shading out new life. They, like me, hope to tend this church for many years to come and are noticing that change is necessary for our community of faith to survive and, hopefully, thrive.

We know that this is challenging work—any uprooting will offer us a fair amount of shock and will leave us with sore backs and dirt under our fingernails. But this work of disturbance is also a hopeful work. It is a work that believes in God's promise of new life in the midst of chaos, upheaval, and death. It is a work that has faith in the power and promise of resurrection.

And this new life is already emerging. I am seeing signs of resurrection at these growing edges of our church—among young people who are daring to disrupt, uproot, and do something new. And each of us is invited and challenged to join in this work—to co-labor with these young people and with God for the sake of growth and life abundant in our church. Let us trust in God's beckoning to new things. Let us trust in God's ever-unfolding promise to new life. After all, it worked for me.

SINGING - REV. CARL GLADSTONE

Grant us and all our race
In Jesus Christ to prove
The sweetness of thy pardoning grace,
The manna of thy love.

PASSING THE BREAD TESTIMONY 3 - REV. JAMES COGMAN

Isaiah 43: 19a says “Behold I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it?” The last year or so has seen a lot of new things take place in my life. From seminarian to associate pastor. From associate to senior pastor. Moving from MD to MI to embark on a journey that I never would have expected thus far. And in the midst of all of this, I have experienced the most joyful of all new things, pastoring virtually. I have truly only known pastoring during a pandemic, and I am thankful for the new thing that God has been doing in the midst of COVID-19.

Our church doors continue to remain open despite not having Sunday worship. We see over 600 people a week between our water giveaway and our COVID-19 testing site. We have taken in new members, engaged deeper in the community, and most importantly the pandemic has caused our congregation to fall deeper in love with God. My hope is that this just be the tip of the iceberg and that God continues to use us to be a light in the darkness, further reflecting the standard given to us by our radical rabbi from Nazareth, Jesus the Christ.

The last sentence I read of Isaiah 43:19s simply asked the question “Shall you not know it?” I hope this testimony challenges us to remember that even in the midst of darkness, God is light. In the midst of racism, sexism, and oppression, God is justice. And in the midst of pandemonium and pandemic, God is peace. So “Shall we not know it?” Shall we not know that God is everlasting to everlasting? Shall we not know that God still makes ways in the desert? Shall we not know that nothing is impossible with God?

Shall we be reminded, this day, that the best is truly yet to come for us individually and collectively.

SINGING - REV. CARL GLADSTONE

Father of earth and heaven,
Thy hungry children feed,
Thy grace be to our spirits given,
That true immortal bread.

PASSING THE BREAD TESTIMONY 4 - REV. ELIZABEH HURD

In Psalm 137, the Psalmist asks this question: “How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?” I think this is a question much asked throughout the pandemic. I've asked it, certainly. As Normal has been interrupted, Familiar, disrupted, there have been plenty of moments where I have thrown my hands up in despair and asked, “How can I sing the Lord's song?”

Sometimes those moments lead to God speaking to me—through scripture, through conversations with friends, through a poignant moment on whatever show I happen to be streaming—and I'm reminded that what's getting in the way of God's song...is me. God is still offering the music, the accompaniment. I just have

to keep singing. Even if God has changed the tempo. The lyrics. The key. The style. I just have to keep singing. God never stops offering the music.

Friends, we've certainly gone through a time of upheaval. There's a lot of dissonant chords jarring us right now. But music is still being offered. It sounds a bit new. Feels a bit different. But there is still music. The Lord's song has changed a bit. But let's keep singing.

SINGING - REV. CARL GLADSTONE

Grant us and all our race
In Jesus Christ to prove
The sweetness of thy pardoning grace,
The manna of thy love.

PASSING THE BREAD TESTIMONY 5 - REV. ZACK DUNLAP

Fellow children of God, it has been a year. Yet, through it all, God has been faithful. God has been with us. God is calling us closer to himself. I've witnessed it at gravesides and in backyard wedding celebrations. I've seen it as new life has been birthed – literally, in the sense of a baby boom our church is having as we move slowly out of the shadowy tomb of the pandemic – as well as new birth in Christ.

Someone who has been a church member for over a decade messaged me recently, asking for “help with building a better relationship with God. God is around me,” he said, “mainly through my spouse, the kids, and my association with the Church but I have never really had an individual relationship with God. How do I do this?”

As we sat down and talked together, he went on, saying, “I can love with the love that I have, but I can't yet love with God's love because I haven't experienced it.” This man prayed to begin a relationship that day with the God who has been lovingly pursuing him his whole life.

Church, I have hope for the future because I see God at work. We're in a new land. We have new songs to sing. But may our new songs tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love. May they speak of justice and hope to a world that is hurting.

The Holy Spirit is on the move, friends, and God is up to good things – even now.

If our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, let's let go of the stuff that no longer helps us accomplish our mission. And let us boldly, creatively, and compassionately meet people where they are, offering the chance for them and for us to be part of something greater than ourselves – to be part of God's continually unfolding work in the world.

SINGING - REV. CARL GLADSTONE

The sweetness of thy pardoning grace,
The manna of thy love.

DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING - REV. PAUL PEREZ

We are at both an END and a BEGINNING.

All that has been presented, prayed, preached ... discussed, deliberated, decided ... sung, shared, and streamed across the state... We hold and offer to you, God.

We keep our hands open ... to receive All that is to be dreamed, to be called forth and called out ... all that is to be found, healed, forgiven, liberated ... all that is to be celebrated and lamented ... all the striving and the struggle ... all that is to come in the year ahead ...

Bless and keep us, God, in the tender embrace of your gracious love ... until we gather again.
Amen.

CLOSING SONG - "MULTIPLIED" - REV. CARL GLADSTONE

You have multiplied, O Love
your wondrous deeds and thoughts toward us
If we proclaim and tell of them
They'd be more than can be counted
Sacrifice and offering you do not desire
You give us open ears, no burnt offerings required

Multiply your love
that we may magnify for others
and be amplified together
in delight and kindly favor.

We find ourselves within your book
your law of love where 'ere we look
Telling of glad countenance
You know our unfettered lips
We'll not hide your saving, Love, away within our hearts
We'll not conceal your steadfastness, full faithfulness you are

Multiply your love
that we may magnify for others
and be amplified together
in delight and kindly favor.