



*Dear Friends,*

*At this beautiful time of year we all take moments to stop and reflect. Gratitude lists vary, but typically include the people we love and the blessings we have received. During a welcoming meeting for new employees I recently asked this question – “What is something you are grateful for this year that you did not anticipate being thankful for?” After the meeting I gave more thought to my own question and realized I did not anticipate being grateful for the challenges of the last two years and the myriad opportunities for growth in grace.*

*I took over as Executive Director of Hope in January 2020 looking forward to many opportunities for learning and growth, but I certainly did not anticipate the navigation of a pandemic on my list. One of my favorite “call to action” statements is a quote by Mary Baker Eddy written in the 1860’s. She said, ‘What we most need is the prayer of fervent desire for growth in grace, expressed in patience, meekness, love, and good deeds.’ This statement, so familiar to me, took on deeper meaning as the demands increased.*

*The last two years have given us all ample opportunities to express patience and love in the face of what has seemed unrelenting antagonism. However, a desire to be more tolerant, to express love and kindness in the face of anger and hate, or to be humble enough to listen to someone you don’t agree with, does not always result in the desired outcome. It’s easy to be dismissive, get pulled into the argument, or to look at others with differing opinions with contempt. Growth in grace is hard work and demands the devotion of thought and effort an athlete brings to a goal of making the Olympic team.*

*In her book Saving Grace, Kirsten Powers amplifies this message to present day. She shares that political turbulence has forced her to ground herself more deeply in grace and that “practicing grace can be really hard. It’s something we love to receive, but often the last thing we want to offer.” The pandemic, and all the challenges resulting from or highlighted by it, has been an unexpected training camp for developing a deeper capacity to look for the good and strength in others, one of our agency expectations, especially when it is hard to do so. Ms. Powers describes this type of grace as leaving room for people to not be like you.*

*This Thanksgiving I am unexpectedly grateful for the opportunities presenting a choice to be patient, forgiving, loving without condition, and generous, and the conscious effort it takes to choose the higher road. My choices have not always aligned with my desire, but part of grace is the ability to get up and try again.*

*Wishing for each of you the blessings that come from reflection, gratitude, and the opportunities to grow in grace resulting in actions that heal rather than harm.*

*Happy Thanksgiving!*

*Michele Girault  
Executive Director*