

State of the Bozeman Worship Group

May 2021

To Friends Everywhere:

Unexpected gifts and new challenges sum up the year for the Bozeman Worship Group.

The challenges were the effects of physical distancing, the stress of uncertainty and the huge growth of our migrant family project called Bienvenidos (Welcome).

Members of our worship group experienced the pandemic differently. Some worried about the oldest among us. Others focused on the deprivations the children and teens faced. Some had exacerbation of physical or mental health issues, while others were able to find joys in solitude, outdoor recreation and creativity.

The first hugs of completely vaccinated elders among us reminded us of the sweet gift of human touch, especially after being so deprived. With vaccines available now, we begin to see our way out of this dark time.

One clear joy was the depth of worship and worship sharing in our continuous Sunday Zoom meetings. We have worship sharing two Sundays a month, recognizing that we needed more connection with each other. We have also had several Zoom meetings to honor special moments. We joined together for worship on Thanksgiving morning to share community and gratitude. In December we substituted Zoom worship sharing for our annual Christmas potluck. In the Spring the women of the worship group met to send off a dear college graduate who is moving on to the next step in her life. It has been a particular blessing to have Friends join us from far away. We are reluctant to give up this close contact with them, but we have also missed

those Friends for whom Zoom is not a viable option. We are implementing a hybrid model that allows us to meet both in person and remotely.

Bienvenidos has flourished because of the dedication of its volunteers, despite the limitations on contact imposed by Covid. The program now has 62 community volunteers and 30 families. During the year a visioning process helped formalize the vision, mission and structure of the organization. Bienvenidos coordinates a group of agencies and groups that interact with migrants and has recently become a partner with one of those nonprofits. The organization initiated a summer literacy camp for 30 Spanish-speaking children. The volunteer mentors build relationships with families and help them access community resources. They have felt enriched, and also humbled by closer understanding of the difficulties and anxieties these families face, and by their courage and resilience. Members of the worship group and the MGOF community have provided generous financial support. Other members of the Worship Group seek different ways to participate in the work.

As we move forward, we find that we are changed by living with the pandemic for more than a year now. We hope that change leads us to be better people than we were before, more focused on what really matters: life, love, kindness, welcome to all, and the power to speak truth when injustice afflicts those most in need.