

# FaithBIT



## Welcoming Newcomers

*By Betsy & Greg Hedding*

“Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” Romans 15:7

This past year has been a time of disconnectedness from our families, friends, and various communities, including our church families. It was during this time, that Greg and I decided to explore finding a new church community after being members of another Lutheran church for 38 years. We had heard about Immanuel Lutheran Church from a couple of people and decided to “start attending” Immanuel online in March 2020. Along the way, we learned that Immanuel Lutheran Church has a long history of organizing outdoor adventures, particularly hiking trips in the Bighorn Mountains. Since Greg and I love the outdoors, particularly hiking, we decided to sign up for Immanuel’s 2021 Bighorn Mountains adventure.

After we signed up, we got included in the initial planning for the trip including a couple of Zoom meetings where we began to “meet” some of the trip leaders and other participants. From the onset, we were so impressed with the thorough communication about the trip and the welcome we received when we showed up in our first Zoom meeting. As you can imagine, it is hard to move to a new church in the midst of a pandemic, particularly when you aren’t actually meeting anyone in person. However, both Martin and Pastor Paul were extremely welcoming letting us know they were glad we were going to be joining the summer trip. We also had the chance to participate in several “practice hikes” in the late spring where we got a chance to meet some other people who were traveling to Wyoming.

Once we arrived in Buffalo to join the week #1 group, there were other ways so many people extended a warm welcome to us. We got to hear stories about the long history of bringing all kinds of people to the Bighorn Mountains and giving many of them, their first experience of hiking in the mountains. Because so many of the people we met have been on this trip for multiple years, it would have been easy to feel like outsiders. But that was not the case at all - in fact, everyone went out of their way to be friendly and help us feel accepted. We experienced firsthand what Paul said in Romans about “welcoming one another just as Christ has welcomed us.”

Our experience on the Bighorns Mountain trip helped us feel both connected to our new church community as well as excited about how we might reciprocate the warm welcome we received! And for those of you who are long-time members of Immanuel and have never gone on the trip, we would highly encourage you to consider it in a coming year. The chance to participate in an “inter-generational” trip is so fun. There were options for all ages and experience levels with hiking. As each of us evaluates the value of community in our lives, there is a richness in an opportunity to gather with all ages. After our experience, we guarantee you will feel welcomed!