

grace notes

May 2017

We're Almost at the Finish Line!

Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Hebrew 12:1

It's hard to believe another ministry year at Grace is rapidly coming to a close! Lent is over and we are deep into our **7 week Easter GOD'S PROMISE UNLEASHED** celebration. Confirmation is just a few weeks away, and there are a few more SONday School sessions left. Like marathon runners coming near the finish line, it's time for a last burst of speed so we can finish well.



We invite you to consider how you might gear up and sprint in these next couple of weeks:

- * Just 1 More Step Race on Saturday, May 6th at Bunker Hills Park to help support World Wide Village's special projects: a house for Grace's Abandoned Children and City on a Hill – medical & education outreach. It doesn't matter if you are a runner or a walker. There's a spot for you! If you're busy that day, you can also support someone by pledging a dollar amount for each kilometer run! Once again, the Just 1 More 5K is a great opportunity for you to sharpen your serving habit as you work on your health.
- * Family Worship on Sunday, May 7th as we welcome our children in worship. There will be a special extended Children's Sermon and then the children will be dismissed to their classes. There will be no Connection Time in the Fellowship Hall after the services.
- * Feed My Starving Children Packing Event on Friday, May 19th at 12 pm (noon) at the FMSC building in Coon Rapids to help starving children throughout our world. What better way to train yourself in your serving ability than taking two hours out of your afternoon to make a difference in the world.
- * Blessing of the Bikes on Sunday, May 21 at 12 pm (noon) in the Parking Lot. Bring your bikes and motorcycles for a special blessing for safety travel and recreation. We'll meet in the Church parking lot.
- * Last Day of SONday School Celebration on Sunday, May 21. We will cheer the 5th graders who will graduate. All the rest of the students will be in their classrooms, saying "see you in the fall" to teacher and friends.
- * Red Cross Blood Drive on Tuesday, May 23 from 12-5pm. You can make an appointment by signing up at www.redcross.org or calling 1(800)REDCROSS.

So, we might be close to this year's ministry finish line, but there's still a lot of opportunity to put on the last burst of speed. Let's keep going!

Pastor Mark's Remarks

Well, I did a first during the baptisms last Sunday. I **tried to give a baby away!** Yes, that's right...I got momentarily confused as I tried to give the infant into the arms of the father, but he refused to accept her! I was shocked, so I tried to put the baby into his arms again, but he refused a second time.

By this time I was totally confused, thinking, "Please help me out here, Dad!" Finally, the father said something like: "Pastor Mark, she isn't mine. I already have three! But if you want, I'll take another." It was then I realized my mistake as I saw the other father anxiously reaching out for the child I had in my arms. I had mixed up the parents!

So, everyone had a good laugh at my mistake, **including me. I have to admit, I've made more than enough mistakes over the years, but this one took the cake!** The good news was no one (including the parents) seemed too concerned and the service went on.

This little (OK...it was a bit bigger than little) mishap reminded once more how good it is to be in a **grace-filled community like our church.** I'm convinced everyone needs a place to be real; everyone needs a place where they can make mistakes and be forgiven; and, I believe everyone needs a place to be able to **forgive others because there just isn't enough forgiveness in our world today.**

This is what the Easter season of God's Promise of New Life unleashed at the Empty Tomb is all about! It is **when God said "Yes!" to all that Jesus had accomplished at the cross.** At the empty tomb, death did not have the final word! Forgiveness did! And just as we celebrate God unleashing new life into his world, we also celebrate his forgiveness that flows out as well.

So, how do we keep this unleashed New Life flowing in our world? Maybe it is starting small by intentionally practicing forgiveness in our own lives! For instance, could we live more in the flow of forgiveness if we:

- * **Write the words "forgive as we have been forgiven" on an index card and tape to the dashboard of our car when we go out driving on a freeway? Would that help us when someone cuts in front of us?**

- * Find a news story in the paper or online where you think forgiveness is especially needed. Keep praying for forgiveness to flow into that situation.
- * Look up some Bible verses about forgiveness and tape one on the bathroom or type it into your screen saver. (Possibilities: Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; Matt. 6:12-15; Prov. 17:9)
- * **Start a "Forgiveness Diary and Prayer Book"** to keep track of the moments when you have experienced forgiveness anew or been able to share it with someone.
- * Pray as you walk across the parking lot to school or work that God would make you an instrument of his peace and forgiveness to those around you.

You get the idea. There are multitudes of opportunities for us to grow our habit of forgiveness **in our lives. And, as we do, we get in the Spirit's flow of forgiveness begun at Empty Tomb.**

So, whether you find yourself in a funny situation where you accidentally make a mistake like trying to **give a baby away (I hope that doesn't ever happen again!)** or whether you have truly hurt someone deeply and you need forgiveness, may you find those places of grace-filled forgiveness and acceptance to shape and change you more into the person Jesus wants you to be!

In Him,
Pastor Mark



Blessing of the Bikes

Sunday, May 21, at the conclusion of the 10:30am service (noon) on Grace parking lot. All are welcome to bring their bike, trike, motorcycle or scooter to be blessed for a safe riding season of travel and recreation.

Vision Board Message

Calling all ~~Leaders~~ Christians! Your ideas are wanted! There are leaders, natural born leaders, and there are non-leaders. Wait. What? Is this true? If you are not a leader, then you are a non-leader? **That's like saying if an egg is not round, then it is flat...when actually it is somewhere in between, an ellipse.** Truth is we all have ideas, opinions and interests. You may feel like you are not a leader, but what does that really mean? **I'm not talking about the next CEO of a major corporation, but I guarantee even CEO's have felt unsure along their ascent up the corporate ladder. So what does it take? A step out of one's comfort zone? Perhaps. We all make decisions every day. Logically, it is very simple to at least get involved. It's a simple binary YES or NO. To get involved, or not. But why does it seem so difficult sometimes? There can be so many reasons. But sometimes you just have to say...Okay. Take a risk. Gain a new experience.** That is how we grow, after all, by gaining new experiences. One of the great things we have available to us here at Grace is a wide variety of ministries. There are many different experiences to be made at Grace. Whether you are ready to be a leader or just looking for a new experience, reach out and become involved. Want to find an area within Grace that needs help? Have a suggestion? An idea for a new group? Bring it up to a Vision Board member. You will be heard.

For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13.

Neil Hawkinson Vision Board Member

Vision Board Minutes

The Grace Lutheran Vision Board met at the home of Neil Hawkinson on April 4th, 2017 at 6:30pm. A delicious meal and good conversation was enjoyed. The group then moved on to business of the church.

The board is excited about the future of Grace and embracing the staffing changes. Pastor Hahn has hit the ground running and you will soon see him at the lectern for a sermon. I encourage you to take a moment to introduce yourself. We are excited to see the last VBS from Kim DeVries with Monica Allen. **Though we understand Kim's decision to leave Grace to care for her family, we will miss her smile and enthusiasm! We celebrate the expansion of the band and the hiring of sound technician.**

We are encouraged as we plan for the future projects being headed up by the pending portable and parking lot committee.

The Nominating Committee for the future Vision Board members is in full gear. We will be voting at the Congregational Meeting on May 21st. We ask for your prayers for the potential nominees and for the future Vision Board members that will be on board for the next three years.

The meeting ended in a time of prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessie Crooks Vision Board Secretary



Outreach Ministries

Lenten Outreach Projects Results

Life is not all about 'numbers' – it's about loving God and loving people! But just in case you'd like to know 'the numbers', here's the results from our Lenten outreach projects. Together let's celebrate the tangible ways we love God and His precious people through these outreach ministries!

Sole Hope

325 pairs of shoes were cut from blue jean fabric during our Lenten suppers. Shoemakers in Uganda, Africa sew this fabric to soles made from recycled tires, creating much needed shoes for children.

Grace 4 Rakai

Our Lenten Noisy offerings provided \$3193 to purchase doors and windows for the 'Grace wing' of the School-Home under construction in Rakai, Uganda.

Family Promise

A special thanks to the 65 faithful volunteers who shared God's grace with families experiencing homelessness, during our Family Promise host week in April.

Feed My Starving Children

During Lent, 101 Grace volunteers packed life-saving meals for starving children around the world. And our 'Grace Team' took 1st place in the Competitive Pack for most money raised!



YOU truly make a world of difference, especially in the life of a starving child! Please join other Grace volunteers at FMSC on Fridays during May at the FMSC warehouse in Coon Rapids.

Friday, May 5 12 – 2 pm

Friday, May 12 12 – 2 pm

Friday, May 19 12 – 2 pm

Many ways to register: fmsc.org

Click Volunteer, Join a Group, type Grace Lutheran

Call the church office or contact Jeannie at

jeannieh@graceandover.org

Grace's Winter 2017 FMSC

Competitive Pack Team Wins!

Congratulations to the Grace's Feed My Starving Children Competitive Pack Team which was awarded the Food Heroes Fundraising Champions Award for raising the most financial support at the recent competition on Friday, March 24th! Competing against four other teams, Grace collected the most money to help shoulder the cost of supplies for the Competitive Pack. As a result, we received a beautiful trophy-plate that is currently displayed on the narthex shelving until the next Competitive Pack when it will be given to the next winning team.



Perhaps you're wondering what a Competitive Pack is all about...it's an invitation only event held two times a year among those agencies and churches which are most active in Feed My Starving Children. It is a high-energy and intensive event where teams are timed and encouraged to pack as many meals as possible. Spills, incorrect packing, and waste are all judged and subtracted from the total number of boxes each team packs. It's a wild frenzy night of packing and it's a lot of fun, too!

We were excited that 20 members and friends of Grace participated in the packing event. Together with the other teams, we packed a total of 160 boxes which is more than has ever been packed at the Coon Rapids facility in such an event! As a result, 95 children will be fed for a year.

If you are interested in being considered for the next competitive pack, please contact Jeannie Hellmann. In the meantime, we celebrate how Grace is making a difference in Andover and beyond!

Outreach Ministries

THANKS to all our faithful volunteers! We welcome new volunteers to join us in these outreach opportunities, both local & global, as we strive to be *'a ministry of grace in the heart of Andover. . . and beyond!'* ~ Contact Jeannie for more information.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Faith & Community Partnership with Sand Creek
 - Donate supplies for children and encourage school staff at Sand Creek Elementary.
- Family Promise
 - Provide safe lodging and caring hospitality for local families experiencing homelessness.
- Family Table Meal
 - Serve complimentary dinner to local community on the third Sunday of each month.
- Feed My Starving Children
 - Pack life-saving meals that will be shipped to starving children around the world.
- Global Health Ministries
 - Sort medical items and roll bandages which are sent to hospitals around the world.
- Grace Quilters
 - Build friendships while making beautiful quilts each Wednesday morning, 9 to noon.
- Grace2Haiti
 - A Grace mission team will build a home for 10 abandoned children in Haiti this June.
- Grace4Rakai
 - Support children in Uganda through child sponsorship and funding special projects.
- Habitat for Humanity
 - Volunteer at local home construction site this summer to provide affordable housing.
- Hospitality for Funerals
 - Bake bars and serve meals for funeral luncheons at Grace.
- HOPE 4 Youth
 - Donate supplies and volunteer at the center for local youth experiencing homelessness.
- May All Be Fed Food Shelf
 - Contribute food and organize groceries as we offer assistance to local families.
- Our Savior's Shelter**
 - Serve dinner at this Minneapolis homeless shelter on the first Monday of month.
- Prayer Shawl Ministry
 - Knit or crochet comforting shawls and lap blankets for the ill or home bound.



Grace4Rakai Update

A heartfelt thank you for ALL your generous support of our outreach ministry to Rakai, Uganda, as we **share God's love with vulnerable children in central Africa.**

All the Noisy Offerings during Lent (totaling \$3193) were designated to purchase doors and windows for the School-Dormitory under-construction in Rakai. Our church voted to send funds from the 2016 Free2Be Grace tithe to this school in Uganda also. So these combined funds will provide ALL the doors and windows at the Grace wing of Rakai School-Dormitory... **plus other needed supplies too! AND** more good news – a generous family from Grace donated funds to furnish an entire dormitory room for 48 students (all the beds and bedding). We are so grateful for all these generous donations!

As you may remember, we literally stood on this piece of land in Uganda last October, as Pastor Mark poured a bottle of water over the ground, asking for **God's blessing of GRACE to rain down upon this School-Dormitory and all the students.** Now this dream and prayer are becoming a reality! What JOY to share God's gifts of grace in this tangible and significant way!

Thank you again to our Grace family and friends for your generosity! Praise God for his goodness and grace that tugs at our hearts here in Andover and blesses His precious children across the globe in Uganda!

Scott Christensen and Stacy Surratt
Co-leaders of the Grace4Rakai Ministry Team

Children's Ministries

Baptism Workshop

Saturday, May 6, at 9 am

Baptism is an important step in the life of a family. During the workshop, we learn how God is at work in baptism. Baptism is welcoming your child into the family of faith. We will also share insights to help you as you raise your child to know and love God by creating habits, traditions, and making God a part of everyday life.

Upcoming Baptism Sundays are May 14, June 11, and July 16. Families can schedule baptisms at either the 9am or 10:30am Worship Services in May or at the 8:30 or 10 am services in June and July. Baptisms can also be scheduled for most Saturday 5 pm Worship services as well. The next baptism class will be July 8, at 9am. You may register on line through Gracelink or contact Monica Allen or the church office to sign up for the workshop. monicaa@graceandover.org

SONday School in May!

Preschool – Grade One:

Our May theme is "Come to the Castle, not because we love castles but because we want to help kids know the King that lives in the castle – our good, good Father!"

As we travel through the stories of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – Hagar, and Gideon – our children will learn that God is always with me, hears me and gives me what I need, teaches me the way to go, and protects me!

Grade 2-5: Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to help us have determination.

When Jesus gave His disciples the incredible mission of spreading the message of the Gospel

throughout the world, He didn't make them do it alone. Instead, He sent the Holy Spirit to empower them to show faith and determination in the face of whatever might happen along the way. When we put our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit empowers us to finish what we start.

It's important for us to help our kids and families discover more about determination—deciding it's worth it to finish what you started.



Welcome to the Lord's Table

Jake Arnold, Alayna Dauman, Meredith Garvey, Dominic Hoeft, Emily Morgan, Kenzie Morgan, Sadie Norman, Ben Nordin, Sophie Nordin, Mackenzie Uecker, Zackery Uecker, Jackson Wampole, Harrison Wampole

Family Worship ~ May 7th

Children will begin in Worship Services with their families and then be dismissed to SONday School.

Birthday Offerings

– We have 4 Flocks - \$85.10

During each large group session we will recognize the **month's birthdays**. Children are encouraged to bring a coin for each year to put in the Birthday Bank. Kids will be recognized, receive a sticker, a birthday pencil, and get **their name put on the "Birthday Door"** (Kim and Monica's office door). This offering goes towards buying flocks of chicks donated to Heifer International. Summer Birthdays will be recognized in April and May. Want to learn more about chicks – check out this video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcAzPC57_PE

Children's Summer Worship

Bible Time

While we enjoy the sunny days of summer, it is also an opportunity to worship with the children of Grace. Beginning June 4, children will be in church with their families, come forward for the Children's Message and then they will be dismissed for a lesson in the Fellowship Hall. Children will return to worship after the Sermon. We need many enthusiastic, willing hearts and hands to help with this adventure. If you can help, contact Monica Allen. We will not have Summer Bible Time on Memorial Day Weekend, July 2, and Labor Day Weekend.

Children's Ministries



VBS 2017

June 12th - 16th, 9:30am - Noon

For ages 3 years - 5th Grade (completed)

\$25.00 per child

We'll be learning about how God made each of us in HIS image and unique at the same time! Kids will also discover how the Creator of all things created us to know and love Him, and that we are uniquely wired for one reason -- we were wonderfully made in the image of God!

Register on *GraceLink*. If you need assistance, please call the church office.



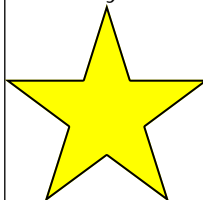
Join us July 24 – July 30 for a 7-Day Adventure as we prepare the musical, *Once Upon a Parable*. Together, we explore and present our favorite Bible parables ending with Jesus's death and resurrection. This musical is designed to be presented by an ensemble cast, so there are opportunities for EVERYONE!

Musical Adventure Camp is for kids and youth, who will enter 3rd – 9th Grade, fall of 2017. We will meet M-F: 9-12:30 pm, Saturday, July 29, 9-11 am, and perform at the Saturday night 5pm worship / Sunday at 8:30 & 10 am.

Registration on *Gracelink*. Please check our website for more information, www.graceandover.org/get-connected/childrens-ministries/musical-adventure-camp/

Summer Nursery Help is Needed

Nursery this summer, will be offered at all services, 5pm on Saturday, 8:30 and 10am on Sunday. We have a fantastic group of volunteers who have served so faithfully all school year. Please show your appreciation of our volunteers by signing up for a service. If families could sign up for one worship service, what a blessing that would be! To be a blessing, sign up on the blue sheets, or the signup sheet outside the Nursery.



May 21st

5th Grade Graduation – at 9 & 10:30
Last day of SONday School
Bring your bikes to be blessed

Follow us at [graceandoverkids](https://www.facebook.com/graceandoverkids), on facebook for more great ways to connect our Bible Stories with your kids, children's ministry updates, and of course, True Tom Tales.



Youth News

Own Your Faith Confirmands

Confirmation rehearsal and dinner is May 20th.
Confirmation Sunday is May 21st.
2pm and 4pm

Luther Point Bible Camp

Only 1 ½ hours from Andover and has lots of options for everyone. The week of July 16-21st camps offered:

- ½ Week 3rd & 4th Grade Camp
- 5th & 6th Grade Camp
- Jr. High Camp (7th – 9th graders)

NOW is the time to start making your summer plans. To find out more about Camp go to: graceandover.org



Calling all 5th-8th grade students!!!! Worried you might be bored this summer? Worry no more! Summer stretch is a dynamic summer program for students who have completed 5th-8th grade! Summer stretch runs every Thursday (June 29th – August 10th) from 9:00 am – 5:00 pm. Participants will be dropped off and picked up from Grace Lutheran.

The mornings are spent doing a fun service project (Feed My Starving Children, Global Health Ministries, helping the environment etc.) and the afternoons are spent doing a fun recreational activity (Grand Slam, Bunker Beach Water Park, Zero Gravity and more!) August 10th we will spend the entire day at Valleyfair! **This year's theme is *Let God's Light Shine!*** Students will learn how people in our world today are shining **God's light on others. At the end of the day we will** end with a Bible Study. Students not only will spend time serving our world but will also learn about key social justice issues facing our city, state, and world, such as clean water, teen homelessness, global health issues, global and local hunger, and the environment. The fee for summer stretch is \$200 and includes 6 weeks of service/recreation PLUS an additional day at Valleyfair on Thursday, Aug. 10th.

Transportation to events, admission to all service and recreational activities, guest speakers, admission to Valleyfair, snacks, and a tee shirt are included in the fee. www.graceandover.org

And of course we will have High School Leaders this summer! If you are interested in being a High School Leader (current 9th-12th graders) and participate in Summer Stretch at a reduced rate contact Kristi at KristiL@graceandover.org. High School Leaders help to lead games, hang out with participants, lead small groups and spend time getting to know our awesome middle schoolers! We also NEED adult leaders to make this a reality. Contact Kristi if you are interested in hanging out with some cool kids for a day or two this summer!

For more information, registration, details on pricing, and FAQ, please go to our youth page www.graceandoveryouth.com or please contact Kristi Larson at KristiL@graceandover.org or call/text her at 651.230.6057.

What is Going On at Grace

In addition to the many outreach opportunities listed on pages 4 & 5, here are a few more...

Farmers Market



The Farmer's Market will be back at Grace again this spring/summer. They will open in the Grace parking lot beginning Tuesday, May 2 and continue through the month of October. Hours

are 2:00pm-6:00pm every Tuesday during the growing season, May through October. Come out and support our local farmers by purchasing their very fresh vegetables and products.

Red Cross Blood Drive

is coming to Grace on Tuesday, May 23rd, Noon to 5pm. The Red Cross is in desperate need for blood. Mark your calendars to give blood and save a life. To make an appointment to give blood go to www.redcross.org or call 1-800REDCROSS



Annual Grace Garage Sale



Mark your calendars for June 8-10 for our Annual Youth Garage Sale. All proceeds will help Grace youth in going to Bible Camp and Mission Trips this summer.

You can drop off your gently used items beginning May 8 in Portable 2. ***NO electronics/TV's/computers/monitors/exercise equipment.** Large items will need to be approved by Tom Baker prior to drop off. tomb@graceandover.org 763-421-6520 ***No drop off on Memorial Day**

Thank You

- * Thank you to the staff and families of Grace for all your prayers, cards, and phone calls at the time of my heart attack in March. Your thoughtfulness, kindness and support is greatly appreciated. ~ Norm Kroeger
- * Thank you, on behalf of our daughter-in-law Lindsay and Kevin in Kansas, for the continued prayers for Lindsay in her fight against triple negative breast cancer. She has endured many surgeries and chemo/radiation since her diagnosis in February of 2014. We are happy to report that her cancer continues to stay in remission. Thanks be to God! ~ Norm & Gloria Kroeger
- * Thank you to they many volunteers that helped make this years lent, Holy week, and Easter a wonderful success. You are all greatly appreciated!
- * Thank you to all our Small Group Leaders for what you do for children on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings, we love and appreciate all that you do! ~ Kim DeVries & Monica Allen
Hebrews 6:10 says, "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them." God sees your service in Children's Ministry. He remembers it, and your service here is showing Him love.



Part-time Communications Coordinator

We are seeking someone who is skilled in print, website and video production. If you are interested, please contact Kate Morphew at 763-421-6520 or e-mail your resume to katem@graceandover.org

Grace Lutheran Church Staff

Senior Pastor.....Mark Hellmann
Ext. 110.....markh@graceandover.org

Visitation Pastor.....Delwayne Hahn
Ext. 105...delwayneh@graceandover.org

Dir. of Outreach & Women Ministries
.....**Jeannie Hellmann**
Ext. 109.....jeannieh@graceandover.org

Dir. of Youth Ministry.....**Kristi Larson**
Ext. 100.....kristi@graceandover.org

Coord. of Youth Ministries.....Tom Baker
Ext. 123tomb@graceandover.org

Co-Directors of Children's Ministries....Monica Allen
Ext. 116...monicaa@graceandover.org
.....**Kim DeVries**
Ext. 112kimd@graceandover.org

Dir. of Worship & Music.....Jonathan Orwig
Ext. 113.....jonathano@graceandover.org

Church Administrator.....Kate Morphew
Ext. 102.....katem@graceandover.org

Dir. of Grace Choir.....Doreen Hutchings
doreenh@graceandover.org

Secretary.....**Kris Miller**
Ext. 101.....krism@graceandover.org

Bookkeeper.....Beth Clarstrom
Ext. 111.....bethc@graceandover.org

Parish Nurse.....Lily Tunby/ Lori Ackerson
Ext. 100.parishnurse@graceandover.org

Head Custodian.....Mark Kempenich
Ext. 117.....mark@graceandover.org

Custodian.....**Cheri Schaaf**

Dir. Of Golden Rule Child Care Center. ...Tami Mielke
421-1996 tamim@graceandover.org

Vision Board Members

Greg Ackerson (Pres.)	Deb Stang
Doug Hanson (V.P.)	Scott Christensen
Jessie Crooks (Sec.)	Deb Shepard
Neil Hawkinson	Pastor Mark Hellmann

If you would like to contact any of the Vision Board members, please visit graceandover.org and click on leaders

Blessings to Kim DeVries



It is with sadness that we announce Kim DeVries has resigned her position as **Co-Director of Children's Ministries** effective on June 18th (after VBS).

For many, Kim has been a constant loving and grace-filled **presence in our children's ministries since 2007** when she joined our church staff. Her smile and love for children has poured out to many in these last ten years as she led VBS and SONday School, First Communion, and Nursery ministries, first with Lisa Norbeck and then with Monica Allen.

It is challenging to estimate the number of children she has touched over the years. There have been hundreds upon hundreds of children whose faith has been fostered and grown through the Bible stories, skits, classes, and special events she had designed. In addition, Kim has also been a great instrument of discipleship and encouragement for **adults and teens who have served in our children's ministries!**

As much as Kim has given to us here at Grace, she has also received a great amount of love and support. She has been loved by many and we are sorry to see her leave.

We wish her the very best as she prepares to be a grandmother for the first time. We know she will love up the child a whole lot – **for she's gotten lots of practice with the kids of Grace!**

Blessings on the next part of your ministry Kim! You have made an incredible difference in our lives!

Goodbye Kim, May God bless you!

A Reality Far from “My Normal” ~ by Kurt Hellmann

Kurt is presently serving in Cambodia under the auspices of the ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission. He will be returning to the United States in late August. This is an excerpt from Kurt's blog on 12/10/16. For more, follow him on keepingwithkurt.wordpress.com

The December air is cool, relatively speaking. The weather peaks around 85 during midday and a constant breeze encourages many to wear heavier clothing. The trees are losing their bright color as the rains have lessened. The rice fields are nearing their second harvest while the canal waters disappear.

Today we are in the Sam Lot district, in southwestern Battambang, near the Thai border. We are teaching fifteen community members how to raise and vaccinate **chickens**. I've found that chicken-raising is quite the undertaking as growing and selling healthy/profitable chickens is a very meticulous process. The hope is that each chicken farmer will improve their raising techniques and empower others. Having cascading livelihood effects across entire communities.

During the training, I sit and listen. I also take pictures to help my coworkers document this community-empowerment activity. As I sit, observe, and click with **the camera, I write down questions that I'll be sure to ask** my coworkers later for further clarification and understanding.

Suddenly an explosion sounds off and shakes the ground beneath me. In nanoseconds my body jolts out of its sitting position prepared to run away from danger. I look to my coworkers and class participants for emergency instruction, but they remain in their seats completely unfazed and look at me with confusion. Then laughter spills into the air at my blatant fear and alarm. A coworker, while still chuckling, explains that the explosion was only a mine that detonated. How is that supposed to make me feel better?! He went on to say that it was a planned detonation, perhaps a few hundred meters away. I sigh with (little) relief and try to calm myself down to bring my mind back to chickens. Unfortunately, I had no such luck. The rest of the day all I could think about were mines. The loud explosion was too powerful to disregard, and the distress that followed, too persistent.

Later in the afternoon I learned that mine sweeping operations got underway in the late 1990's and has primarily prioritized clearing immediate public and household areas. This strategy has unintentionally yielded fragmented plots of safe land, sometimes with mines and other UXO potentially lying only hundreds of meters from a school, health center, or major roadway. In the face of poverty, farmers turn to cultivating the fertile land, sometimes taking the opportunity in uncleared areas to build up a livelihood amidst the danger of serious injury or death beneath the soil.

Cambodia Mine Action Centre (CMAC) is a leader in mine clearing operations. Signs similar to this one can be found all over the Battambang province.



Even after roughly two decades of mine clearing operations, hidden and misplaced UXO still provide massive obstacles to economic development in parts of Cambodia. To address this issue, LWD partners with mine-clearing organizations and local governments. De-mining operations are conducted by various groups while LWD staff work with community leaders to catalyze development projects and activities in the recently cleared areas. Chicken-raising is just one of many community-based projects that attempts to strengthen livelihood through diversified income and sustainable practice.

Before departing for the day, several coworkers and I soaked in the picturesque landscape one last time. The mountains, hills, and trees seemed endless. An individual walked up behind us and asked if I wanted to race up a hill in the (not so far) distance. “Whoever makes it alive to the top wins”, he joked. I initially took the man's remark as an insensitive joke, but after further thought I believe it was instead a reflection of normalcy to a reality I can't begin to fully understand. UXO have been a part of life in this area for decades, the presence of UXO are indeed ‘normal’, as disturbing as that may sound. By that, I am far from attempting to insinuate a sense of complacency among the people here—in fact, community members work tirelessly to improve their lives through de-mining campaigns despite their limited resources. Rather, I am genuinely and utterly stupefied in the realization of what ‘normal’ can mean. My privileged upbringing cannot possibly understand the term in this part of Cambodia. The unnerved reaction of people hearing a mine suddenly explode or casual joke about a deadly footrace are proof of that.

As I continue to live and learn in western Cambodia, I may never fully comprehend the reality of the war remnants continuing to plague livelihood and safety. But my hope is to not only learn more about the historical context of this country, but to bear witness to the inspiring community-focused coalition that continues to persevere and work towards a more safe and sustainable livelihood for Cambodian people. Lastly, I hope to constantly wrestle with how the word ‘normal’ is used and what it means for different regions of the world. In Peace, Kurt



Grace Lutheran Church

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A Ministry of Grace in the heart of Andover and beyond!

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Summer Worship Times begin May 28th

Saturday - 5pm Contemporary

Sunday - 8:30am Traditional/Blended

Sunday - 10:00am Blended/Contemporary (ASL Interpreter)

Nursery and *Children's Bible Time is offered at all services

*no Bible Time on Memorial Day Weekend