

The Quiet Invitation Of Advent

It's been a quiet week at Grace. I'm not quite sure why. In fact, it has made me a little nervous. I have wondered: "What am I supposed to be doing?" If I didn't have this pesky cough, I would probably be out visiting people and bringing them Holy Communion. Since I began my time at Grace, I have been busy running from one problem to the next. But right now, I wait. This week has given me the opportunity for some advanced planning. It has also given me a chance to read through policies that I have been too busy to get to. I know that Advent and Christmas are right around the corner. I am bracing myself for all of the activity that will transpire.

Weeks like this are good. In fact, the quiet and peace are a blessing. It is in these moments that creativity happens and new ideas are born. It is also in the quiet moments that I have a chance to listen to God.

Advent is a time of waiting. Although our culture invites us to do more during the month of December, our faith invites us to do the opposite. To slow down, to pay attention, to watch and to wait. We are invited to listen to the voices of the angels who remind us: "Do not be afraid," and who announce blessings and promises for our world.

Over the last few years, I have been reading an Advent Devotional by Tsh Oxenreider entitled "Shadow and Light." I appreciate the shortness of the devotion, and also the invitation to look at art and listen to music as a means to experience the presence of God. I love this awakening of the senses.

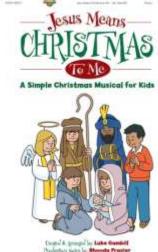
Advent is a time where our senses are usually filled. Filled with the smell of pine, sounds of choirs, glimpses of children playing, and delighting in the magic of Christmas. It is a time to light candles and to ponder in our heart this great love that is born into the world. I hope that you will join us this Advent for worship. On Wednesday evenings we will be using Holden Evening Prayer as our primary liturgy. On Sunday morning we will be gifted with special services from our choirs and our children. Beyond that, I hope that you will open your bible to the book of Luke and enter into the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and of Mary and Joseph, until we finally get to see with our own eyes the gift of this baby, born not just for his family, but for shepherds and for all those who have been cast aside. All of those who have been waiting for the good news to come.

Blessings, *Pastor Joanna Mitchell*









Jesus Means Christmas to Me!

Our Catechism curriculum for the month of November has been about generosity. Our students have looked at the many ways they can be "over the top" in their generosity-giving of their time and talents, giving encouragement to one another, and giving or sharing the good news! In the lesson about sharing the good news, Will asked our students to share about one time this week they shared with someone else about something that had happened to them. I know! Confusing right?! But think about it! What is something that happened to you this past week that you wanted to share with someone else? This is what sharing the good news of the gospel is all about. I have a long list of things that I am excited to share about, starting with our Catechism and Youth programming at Grace! Our youth are learning about the relentless love of God and how they can live out their faith in today's world. Our Catechism youth have been integral in many service projects around Grace this fall, help-

ing the garden ministry with the labyrinth, the congregational art project, Global Health Ministries, and packing Thanksgiving bags for Family Table. Our High School youth have outgrown our youth room and moved out to the portables until the building project is complete. Not only have they outgrown their space, they are growing in faith, asking BIG questions, and growing in relationship with one another and the adult leaders who are volunteering their time to be with them! God is at work here at Grace! This is all good news!

Another thing I cannot wait to tell people about is our **Children's Christmas Program on 12/17** titled "Jesus Means Christmas to Me!" Rehearsals are underway and I cannot wait for our children to tell this story! The Christmas Story is one we hear every year. So much so, we take what it means for granted. So this year, our children ask us to think about what Christmas means. They ponder how to some, Christmas can mean sparkling lights, packages with ribbons and bows, or finding the perfect gift. But without Jesus, there is no Christmas to celebrate.

Then they invite us to follow the different characters in the Bible as they experience what the birth of Jesus means to them.

- To the angels, Jesus was good news for all people!
- To the shepherds, Jesus was the humble child in the manger sent for all humankind!
- To the Magi, Jesus was the King of the Jews!
- And then our children ask: What does Jesus mean to you and me today?

As we prepare, and as we wait expectantly for Christmas this year, I wonder what good news you have to share? And what does Christmas... What does Jesus mean to you? I am so excited to hear what you have to say and to explore these questions with you throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons! On Christmas Eve, I will be singing as a part of my Christmas message. The words are "come and see what God has done!" Come and see what God has done, through Jesus, through Grace, in my life, in our community, and in the world!

Thanks be to God! Happy Advent! And Merry Christmas! Pastor Maria Markman





I have spent the last 25 years raising 3 kids. My volunteering involved coaching basketball, helping in classrooms, and taking kids to Valley Fair. Now in my 50s and an empty nester I ask, "How do I use my extra time and share my skills?" After taking an inventory, my skills are as follows: knowing where every soccer field is in the 7-county area, sleeping on the couch waiting for the phone call to ring, picking up a kid, and listening as a hurt teenager talks about their failed test. It turns out no organization needs these skills.



I have volunteered for Family Promise for about 8 years. This organization that Grace sponsors helps people who are on the edge of homelessness. Due to typically one event (broken down car, sick kid, etc.) they miss work. This spirals down to job loss, unable to pay bills, and ultimately homelessness. Family Promise provides housing, job skills, and some time to get people back on their feet. Recently Family Promise has added Budget Mentor Volunteers to teach basic financial skills to these individuals. Turns out I actually do have skills to offer. I have spent 50 years figuring out ways (legally) to save money and so I signed up to be a mentor. I currently have 3 individuals that I work with. They are all single mothers who are employed. Weekly, I meet 2 of them in person (typically at McDonalds for the free refills) and one on the phone.

What amazes me is how much they want to do the right thing and generally know what they need to do, but they have no support system. Setbacks prevent them from developing a solid financial foundation. When I met them, their situations included: One has 5 kids (ages 4 months to 25 years old), a failing relationship, and being kicked out of her apartment, she works from 3am to 8 am as an Amazon driver. The 2^{hd} lady lives with 2 young children and her handicapped mother in a small apartment. She works the 11 pm to 7 am shift so she can see her oldest daughter get on the bus in the morning. She is paying \$13/Uber ride to and from work for an \$18/hr job. The 3rd woman has 2 kids, works during the day, and has costly dental expenses on the horizon.

At first, they missed meetings. I kept telling them it's OK and we can reschedule. Eventually they showed up as they figured out that I wasn't going away. I am using my parent skills- Don't get frustrated and always show up. We discuss simple math and money topics. Slowly they have opened up. I help them with simple tasks such as printing paper forms because they don't have printers, help reading contracts, discussing better ways to pay for things, driving them to pay bills. I keep nagging them about things they need to do (drivers license, GED). Things every parent does raising teenagers.

We have become friends. The first woman dropped the boyfriend, moved into a new apartment, got the kids in daycare and has a normal 8 am – 3pm shift at Amazon. She is getting sleep. She had a smile on her face for the first time the other day.

The 2nd woman is in the process of getting her driver's license and dealing with housing issues. The 3rd lady is getting her high school diploma in May, increased her credit score, has no debt, and is discussing ways of getting her teeth fixed. She told me one time that I am like talking to the dad she never had.

These people are trying to provide a better life for their families just like all of us. They just need an ear to talk to or a 30 minute break to calm down and think straight.

You don't have to have special skills to do special things. Use your everyday skills to make the world a better place. Find an organization that intrigues you and volunteer. Your skills are needed and wanted and you will be changed in sharing these skills. It turns out you never know how God might use you and transform you in sharing what seems like the simplest skills.

Dave Jenkins, Vision Board Member







Funding Proposal Request Form

Grace Lutheran Church is driven by its mission to assist and serve those who have unmet needs so that they too may experience grace. With that in mind, we are reaching out to our members and asking them to submit requests for funding the various ministries supported by our members. The available funding resources come from the Transforming Inside & Out three-year capital campaign tithe. Please complete form and return to me at wmhentges@comcast.net

or to the church office no later than December 15th 2023.

Requests will be reviewed in prayer to allow for resources to be maximized and help as many people as possible in the communities we serve. Thanks be to God!

Bill Hentges, Grace Vision Board Member



	_	YTD thru 0/31/2023	<u>Budget</u>
<u>Income</u>			
Grace Contributions	\$	581,507	\$ 628,720
Transforming Receipts	\$	361,017	\$ 416,667
Capital Receipts	\$	73,950	\$ 95,833
Grace Registration Income	\$	23,831	\$ 35,143
Grace Other Income	\$	82,756	\$ 89,633
Seeds of Grace Tuition Income	\$	540,577	\$ 553,000
Total Income	\$	1,663,637	\$ 1,818,997
<u>Expenses</u>			
Operational Ministry Expenses	\$	1,245,832	\$ 1,382,532
Capital Expenses	\$	384,643	\$ 470,759
Total Expenses (includes Seeds of Grace expenses)	\$	1,630,475	\$ 1,853,291
Operating Margin	\$	33,161	\$ (34,294)



Gratitude and Building Task Force

Dear Friends of Grace,

As many of you know, I have been on my cancer journey for 6 months now, and although I'm still in waiting for what may or may not be in my future, it's time to say "Thank



You!" I have been so incredibly blessed by the family of Grace that have provided support, prayers, sent cards, visited me during my hospital stays, filled in for Altar Guild and serving communion, and all who stepped up to lead or co-lead in the Outreach Ministries for Sand Creek, Stepping Stone Homeless, OK@Play, Altar Guild and Funeral Fellowship. A huge thank you to my consistent Grace volunteers that have come to my house to care for my garden, mowed and recently mulched leaves, cared for my cat, picked up groceries for me, and I could go on and on. I thank you for all these blessings, past/present/future, from my heart and soul!

Your friend in Christ, Ann Lange



A special thank you to all the folks from Grace who have given of their time to take me to doctor appointments and therapy appointments. I am forever grateful for the blessings you all are in my life.

Linda Breyette

To Our Grace Lutheran Church Family:

We want to express our gratitude to all of you for helping make my Harland's service beautiful and a wonderful hon-

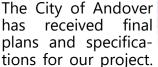


or to him. The whole service, the food, set up and welcome that was extended to our family and friends was so heartfelt. I am happy and proud to be a part of the "Grace Family".

Anne Marie Johnson & Family

Building Task Force

All the diligence the BTF demonstrated in developing the exciting plan of renewal and renovation for Grace has now been traded in for patience.





They are combing through the details with expectations of release and building permit any day now. Our contractor, subcontractors, architect, and Tracie Russell with Greg Ackerson have gone the extra distance to modify the plans to meet the needs of the City staff for the minutia of code compliance.

Our financing is in-place and as a matter of fact, we have purchased some of the long lead time supplies. We just need the permit from the City to show physical progress. Once the permit is in hand, the plan is to begin on those new building extensions- the entry and the day care expansion. Effort will then be focused on closing in the new expansions, possibly including temporary shelters and constructing within them. Interior changes will be conducted in close coordination with the day care and church staff so as to minimize disturbances to regular church programming. The finish line for all of this building effort is now Advent 2024.

With your continuing prayers, Charlie Wold





Faith Practices and Neighboring Practices Report

Our Faith Practice and Neighboring Practices Team: Nancy Jenkins, Anne Weikle, Tyler Gustafson, Mike Schaaf, Kylie Sand, and Pastor Maria, gathered in November to learn with other congregations in our cohort. The night's theme was understanding culture, especially as we prepare to engage with our neighbors. We began by reflecting on the Pentecost story from Acts 2! What a celebration of differences! It can be helpful to

learn about different cultures but even more we learned the importance of cultural self-awareness. We started by asking questions, to get curious: What is our culture at Grace? How do we express welcome, safety, and belonging to our members, guests, and neighbors? Are we saying what we think we are saying? What story do you hear yourself telling most often about your congregation? One person in my group shared about Christmas in her community in India. The whole community gathers to prepare the food early in the morning, each bringing a serving of rice for each family member and adding it to the whole as well as bringing a donation per person for the whole cow and pig that are purchased for the event. She describes multiple church services, meals, and youth responsible for kitchen clean-up. She beamed as she shared about all the songs they sing throughout the day too! I was amazed at how a community could pull off such an event. It seemed both wonderful and strange because of America's individualistic culture and I started to sweat thinking of who was responsible for making it all happen. And yet what a wonderful way to celebrate Christ's birth!

New! Culture Reflection: National and religious holidays are excellent times to pay attention to the way culture shows up in our communities. Between now and the New Year, pay attention to the stories, symbols, behaviors, and leadership in your church, your family, and your neighborhood. Use these questions for your own reflection:

What **stories** do you encounter during these holidays? How are these stories told? Read aloud? Performed? Sung? Who tells these stories? What function do these stories play? Are they intended to inspire, bring people together, codify beliefs? We all know the big stories (Luke 2, TV specials, but don't forget the story your uncle tells every year).

What **symbols** do you notice during the holidays in your church, your family, and your neighborhood? What do these symbols represent? Are there any symbols you notice that are unfamiliar to you? Are there symbols that are unique to your church or family? How did you learn what these symbols represent?

What are the **rituals or traditions** that your church, family or neighborhood practice during this holiday? Are these rituals unique to my family or community? How did you learn about these rituals or traditions? Do you notice any rituals or traditions that are unfamiliar to you? What do you notice?

Who are the people who have **leadership** responsibilities during this holiday in your church, your family, and your neighborhood? What responsibilities do they have? Who gets the good chair at the church, family, or neighborhood gathering? Why?

Imagine a friend visiting your congregation or your home for the first time. What would you tell them in advance to do or not do? Where do these do's and don'ts come from? How did you learn them?

If all else fails, a simple way to practice this awareness is to ask a single question after a holiday gathering or event: Where did I see culture at work in that experience? Each month FPNP will report back what we are learning and invite you to try a new practice or engage in this learning too. If ever you have any questions or if you have any interest in our work beyond what is reported do not hesitate to reach out to any of us! We would love to share with you!







Fan the flame Within

2024 Women's Retreat

Women of Grace! This Amazing, Relaxing, Fun - Filled Event is happening on February 23-25, 2024 at Luther Point Bible Camp in Grantsburg, WI. This event, entitled "Fan the Flame Within", is our annual over-night weekend Winter Women's Retreat where we invite ALL Grace women and their friends to come.

Our goal for this retreat is to grow in relationship with one another and God; provide tangible spiritual take-aways to apply to your daily life and have LOTS OF FUN AND LAUGHTER. This Women's Retreat is also a safe and encouraging environment where EVERYONE is invited to come.

Space is limited so registration will be required for this event- Go to Realm NOW to register. **The Early Bird cost thru Dec 31st is only \$120** which includes 3 meals and snacks, 2 overnight lodging and carpooling cost. Packing list and additional details will be sent to you once you register! Reach out to Stacy Surratt for any questions – stacysurratt@yahoo.com

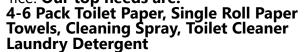


Empty Nesters / Parents of Independent Children

Our next Empty Nester event will be at 6 pm on Monday, January 8 at Esmeralda's in Riverdale. Their address is 12759 Riverdale Boulevard in Coon Rapids. Esmeralda's is in the former location of the CR Acapulco's. As usual, you don't have to arrive right at 6 pm to join us. All are welcome! If you have any questions, please reach out to Julie Erickson or Nancy Jenkins.

Family Promise Wish List

You can drop your donations off at the Church Office. **Our top needs are:**



We are also in need of: Body Wash, Hand Soap, Dish Soap, Dish Washer Pods, Wipes Diapers Size 4-6, Pull Ups Size 5 & 6, Nighttime Pull Ups Size S/M and L/XL



Bring holiday joy to the residents at Stepping Stone. They have a group of Santa's helpers sewing up a storm so each resident will have a special bag for their holiday gifts. What we need is your help with filling the 66 bags with gift cards and a few special items. We ask that all items collected are new and unwrapped. Your donations make their Holidays a little brighter!



in Anoka County

Choose from the list as you wish. Bring your items back to Grace, taking gift cards and checks to the church office labeled "Stepping Stone Holiday Gift" and put other gift items in the **tote labeled for** "**Stepping Stone Holiday Gifts**" by **Monday, December 11th.** We will then get all items to Stepping Stone for their packing into the handmade gift bags.

Specific Items Requested (NEW AND UNWRAPPED PLEASE)

- \$25 gift cards to Kwik Trip, Walmart, or Target (plastic, not electronic cards bring to office)
- Hats, mittens, gloves (adult sizes) and Hand warmers
- Monetary donations for Santa Helpers to do the shopping.

Thank you for your loving and generous gifts to those in need within our community! If you have any questions, please contact Ann Lange at 763-438-5623.





Graceful Seniors

We will have a special Christmas performance on Dec. 12th you will not want to miss! This performance will be accompanied by a Christmas lesson!



- 8:30-9:00am Donuts and Coffee
- 9:00-10:00am Pastor Maria led Bible Study Come and join the fun! If you would like to join Graceful Seniors please call the Church Office.



Ruth Circle

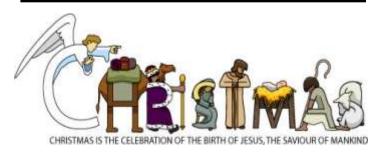
Ruth Circle will meet on December 4th at 12:30-2:00pm. Ruth Circle is a group of mostly retired women who meet the first Mon-

day of each month following guilters. Our study together follows the monthly ELCA Gather Magazine Bible Study. Please contact the Church Office or Low Jackson to participate.

Advent Cantata "The Jesus Gift"



Join us on Sunday December 10th as the Grace choir is joined by the Lord of Life Music Family, and singers from Cross of Hope to present "The Jesus Gift." We will be presenting the cantata at both services. If you are unable to attend Worship on Sunday December 10th, it will also be presented at Lord of Life on Sunday December 17th at 3pm, as part of their advent celebration of music.



Healthy Relationships Workshop



January 24 & 31, 2024 Free Workshop!

Healthy Screen Relationships Workshop



Is tech enhancing or taking away from your family life? Do you crave a deeper connection with your loved ones free from device interruptions? Current reports show mental health impacts of stress and anxiety linked to screen use. Learn the process for making a family media plan that brings balance, peace, and connection.

Inviting all Youth & Caring Adults

January 24, 2024

- - 5:15pm Dinner
 5:45pm-6:15pm Workshop for All
 6:20-6:50- Youth Small Group | Parent together
 - 7pm Worship

January 31, 2024

- 5:15pm Dinner
 5:45-6:45pm Youth Small Group | Parents Together
 7pm Worship



Presenter:





New Hymnals

In 2006 the ELCA published a new hymnal called "Evangelical Lutheran Worship" (or ELW). It combined both the green LBW, and the blue "With One Voice," updated language to be more inclusive, and omitted some that were not a part of the Lutheran tradiwere not a part of the Lutheran tradi-

tion anymore.

We have invested in these hymnals, and now you have an opportunity to help. A gift of \$25 will provide one hymnal with a dedication on the inside cover. The dedication event is currently live in Realm and will be through the end of Decem-







Christmas Camp Out!

The 2nd Annual Christmas Camp Out Event is happening Sunday, December 3rd 2023 in the Fellowship Hall from 5:00PM-7:00PM. Gather around the "campfire," friends! It's time to celebrate the season with a fun camping trip. The best part is . . . you don't have to go anywhere! We are bringing the great outdoors to you with a cozy, indoor Christmas Campout. Twinkling lights, popup tents, camp-themed snacks, fun new crafts, and exciting new games and activities help families spend time together learning about the gift of Jesus. No need to sign up! We can't wait to see you there! This is a family event so all ages are invited. Like at any good campout, hotdogs will be served for dinner and we ask that you bring a pot luck "side item" to share. Reach out to Stacy Surratt for any guestions – stacysurratt@yahoo.com

Green Ribbon Is Back! December 6th 6-6:50 PM

Do you have a child who struggles with mental health? Are you feeling isolated as a parent and in need of support? Come join Green Ribbon group. A group of supportive and

confidential parents supporting other parents raising their children. Our December meeting is Wednesday, December 6th in Pastor Maria's office during Wednesday night programming from 6:00-6:50pm. Meetings are led by Jeff Anderson and Dan Brasgalla. If you are curious or have questions please reach out to Pastor Maria and she will help get you connected!

December Youth and Children's Programming Schedules

Sunday, December 3rd	•Regular Sunday School & Nursery at 8:45am and 10:30am •Treblemakers 9:50-10:20am •Christmas Program Rehearsals 11:30am-12:15pm •Christmas Campout 5-7pm
Sunday, December 10th	 No Regular Sunday School -Kids Time during worship they will re- turn before the end of worship. Treblemakers 9:50-10:20am Christmas Program Rehearsals 11:30am-12:15pm
Saturday Dec. 16th	Christmas Program Dress Rehearsal 10:00am-12:00pm
Sunday, December 17th	•No Sunday School •Children arrive 8:15am for Christ- mas Program •Performances at both 8:45am and 10:30am
Sunday, December 24th	•Advent 4/ Christmas Eve •No Sunday School; Nursery at 10:30am, 3:00pm and 4:30pm worship services
Monday, December 25th	Christmas DayNo Sunday SchoolNo NurseryWorship 9:00 am
Wednesday, Dec. 27th	No Wednesday Night Programming
Sunday, December 31st	No Sunday School No Treblemakers Nursery at 8:45am and 10:30am
Wednesday, January 3rd	Regular Wednesday Night Programming Resumes
Sunday, January 7th	Regular Sunday School, Nursery and Treblemakers Resumes





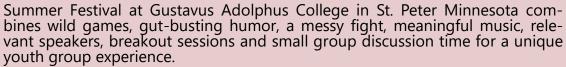
Mouth Summer Trips

REGISTRATIONS ARE NOW LIVE! \$100 deposit due upon registration. Fundraising and scholarships available! Scholarship Deadline March 1st. **REGISTRATION DEADLINE APRIL 15TH!**



Summer Festival Camp (Middle School Camp/ High School Leadership Camp)

July 14th- July 17th Cost \$350.





Summer Stretch

June 27th - August 8th - from 9:00am - 5:00pm. (No Summer Stretch on July 4th) Cost \$325 (\$375 after May15th)

Summer Stretch is a dynamic summer ministry for students who have completed 4th-8th grade! Summer stretch runs every Thursday. Participants will need to be dropped off and picked up from Grace Lutheran Church. Each Thursday, we will travel to various service projects and recreational activities around the area.

Summer Stretch Single Day Registration \$70

Summer Stretch Junior Leaders (High School only) \$100 full summer session 6 weeks/ \$40 single day



Summer Stretch Full Registration

HRISTIKON



Summer Stretch Single Day Registration



Summer Stretch Jr Leader Registration

Christikon Montana Trip (High School Only)

July 26th 6AM- August 3rd 9PM Cost \$850

A week at Christikon Lutheran Bible Camp in the beautiful Montana mountains for all current 9th -12th grade students (students must have completed 9th grade by July 2024.) You spend your first

and last nights at the main camp. The rest of the time you are hiking through our mountain wilderness. Limited spots available so register SOON!









CYF Director's Message

Great things continue to happen with the youth here at Grace. We had a highly successful Trunk-or-Treat night at the end of October, with around 500 participants who came through! In catechism and youth group, we have been learning what it means to be



generous with our time, talents, and by sharing the good news and being caring. Now that registrations are live for all the summer trips, I am looking forward to the energy that will come next summer! I hope you will encourage the youth in your life to join us on the travels. In Sunday School, parents and guardians have been joining us each week, to help and lead activities, and it has been lovely getting to know these parents in a different way.



This month, I would like to give a volunteer shout out to Stacy Surratt. Stacy has been an incredible leader in the Children's Ministry Team here at Grace, and Sunday School teacher extraordinaire. She is pivotal in making so many of the fun family events at church possible. I am looking forward to seeing Ranger Stacy in action at the Christmas Camp Out! Stacy, I am grateful for all that you do to support the Children's Ministry here at Grace. Thank you! Will Weikle, CYF Director







Grace Lutheran Church

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