

FALL 2024

CONNECTIONS
GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

ISSUE 1



Reimagined

Reimagined Grace

Where do we go from here?

grace-andover.org

REIMAGINED GRACE

Written by
Pastor Joanna Mitchell



**“I realized quickly my
imagination had been
too small.”**

I have a fairly good imagination. As a child, I never lacked for games to play or stories that could occupy my mind and my time. However, I have had the hardest time imagining what life will be like when our building project is complete. As someone who has stared at the blueprints and plans for months, you would think I would know better than anyone. But when our construction company ripped down the walls of our main hallway and started opening up the space that will soon be our “expanded hallway,” I realized quickly my imagination had been too small. The space is going to be bigger than I could have anticipated and still I have a hard time imagining where to put things or what it will be like. This is a good thing.

As a person who is type A and a planner, I like to know the details and how things will be. I want to make sure everything will fit. However, I have had to let go of that during this project. I have had to trust the team has made the right decisions and trust that God has guided the process. It's hard sometimes to do this. I want control things. I want to plan. I want to have a layout and assurance of everything. Our faith invites us to live in the mystery. It invites us to re-imagine the ways we interact with each other, the ways we do ministry, the ways we show up. I think of Abraham in Genesis 12 who was told to leave what was familiar and trust God to lead him into a new land. And I think of the first Apostles in Acts 1 who were waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Both of these biblical stories point to ways God invites us to let go of what is familiar and to trust and move into a new time and place.

I believe this is what God is doing with us here at Grace. Inviting us to let go of the familiar and leading us into a new reality. I am mindful that both Abraham and the Apostles continued to practice their faith in the ways they understood. They prayed, they listened, they gathered as a community. But when Abraham would have an experience of God out in the world, he started to make new altars in all these places. Recognizing that God is in this new territory and God doesn't reside in the past but is leading him into the future.

“God is doing that for us too. Leading us into the future.”

God is doing that for us too. Leading us into the future. Along with a new building project, we have a new format for a newsletter and a new title. These letters are not intended to tell you everything that is going on at Grace; we have bulletins, e-blasts, and our website for that, but instead to tell stories of faith. Our theme for this first edition is re-imagine. I am writing before the project is completed because I want to stay in this place of surprise and unknown. I think this is a good place to be. There is a reason the people wandered in the wilderness for so long before they got to the promised land. Because in the wilderness they learned to trust God, they learned they didn't need to know everything, and they learned how to be a community in a new way. I believe this is true for us too. These past few years have been a wilderness wandering and I am not ready to let go of that quite yet because I want us to keep our minds open to reimagine what God is inviting us to do and who God is inviting us to be in this next new step in our ministry together.

“Our faith invites us to live in the mystery. It invites us to reimagine the ways we interact with each other, the ways we do ministry, the ways we show up.”

Written by
Pastor
Maria
Markman

Faith Fundamentals



**“I wish I could take
the First Communion
class!”**



I love First Communion class! Parents and their third graders eagerly join to learn about the sacrament of Holy Communion. We learn together what this meal means, where it is in the Bible, who is invited, who is at work in the meal. We take a tour of the sacristy, set a table and the altar table, we taste the bread and the wine, we even glaze and fire a wine chalice for our students to take home with them. I was describing this class to an adult member of Grace and in response she exclaimed, “I wish I could take the First Communion class!”

This comment rumbled around in my head for weeks and eventually inspired me, why can't we offer a first communion class to others? For many First Communion, Sunday School, and Confirmation were years ago. We know we learned about these aspects of faith at one time but can't really remember anymore. Some have been lucky enough to learn again as parents, mentors, or volunteers. But why not offer a Faith Fundamentals program where all are welcome. Where generations can learn or re-learn together. Where insights and connections can happen across families and generations! Where we can imagine and re-imagine what these faith tenants and rituals mean for us today and in our daily lives.

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Who: Catechism, Bible Study, Kids Night Out, Own Your Faith and Mentors. Young and old, married, or single, kids or no kids, ALL ARE WELCOME!

When: First Wednesday of the Month (or close to) 6:00-6:55pm, then join us for worship!

What: Intergenerational large group (30 minutes); individual age group small group discussions (30 minutes).

October 2, 2024 -Bible Old Testament

November 6, 2024 -10 Commandments- God

December 11, 2024 -10 Commandments- Us

January 8, 2025 -Bible New Testament

February 12, 2025 -Lord's Prayer

March 5, 2025 -Prayer/ Spiritual practices

April 2, 2025 -Generosity

(Don't worry 1st Communion comes in 2025-2026)



“Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” - Deuteronomy 11:18-19

LETTER FROM THE President

Written by
**Chrissy
Gast**

“I can feel God’s transforming presence here at Grace – in the messages, in the music, in the prayers, in the work, and in the PEOPLE... all of you!”



Hello Grace family! Can you feel the transformation?

My life has been transforming ever since our family stepped foot into Grace Lutheran Church eight years ago, and my faith has been renewed thanks to the people of Grace. When our kids were little and hesitant to go to Sunday school, you took them by the hand and helped them feel safe. When my daughter’s daycare shutdown with only 9 months to go until kindergarten, you opened your arms and welcomed her to Seeds of Grace. When this mama needed a break to focus on self-care, you invited me to a women’s retreat and filled me with love, peace, and joy. When our family experienced loss and grief, you lifted us up in prayer and cared for us. And even when I wasn’t in need, God showed up through our youth and opened my eyes in new ways as I worked alongside them to care for the people of Appalachia, VA. I can feel God’s transforming presence here at Grace – in the messages, in the music, in the prayers, in the work, and in the PEOPLE... all of you!

“I’ve now accepted that it’s ok not to have all the answers! We simply have to be open to the conversation...”

Friends, we are at an inflection point – do we do things at Grace the way we always have...or do we reimagine what Grace could be? The Vision Board recently started reading the book *Leading Faithful Innovation*, by Zscheile, Binder & Pinkstaff, and the introduction invites us to move from “church questions” (How do we fix our church?) to “God questions” (Where do we notice God in our everyday lives?). I would invite you to contemplate these “God questions” with us:

- What might God be up to in the lives of our neighbors?
- How might the Spirit be moving in the lives of our members or calling us to join the work God is already doing in the neighborhood?
- What difference does Jesus make to you personally, to the life of Grace, and to our world?
- What are our neighbors looking for and how might the gospel of Jesus speak to those longings?

As I begin my presidency, I’ve been pondering these questions myself. And do you know what – I don’t have all the answers! Throughout my faith journey I have wrestled with this concept, afraid to talk to people about my faith because they might ask me a question that I don’t have the answer to. I’ve now accepted that it’s ok not to have all the answers! We simply have to be open to the conversation, seek to understand and be willing to share our story of how God has touched our lives.

I’m not sure what God is up to in the lives of our neighbors, but there are several ways I see God working in my life and the lives of those around me – through the people God has placed in our lives at unique times, through the challenges we’ve faced (that I can now look back on and see God at work), through our roles as a parent/spouse/child/sibling, through our career journeys, and even through what might feel like insignificant interactions with strangers. And that is just in the lives close to me! God is weaving these stories across the world.

So how do we discover what God is up to in the lives of our neighbors? We start by showing up – going to festivals, school events, theater shows, sporting events, coffee shops, the library, and other places in the community (many of which we’re already visiting anyway) and engaging with our neighbors. We can show God’s love simply through the way we interact with our neighbors, the questions we ask, the interest we show in them, and our compassion. And through those conversations, we can learn more about what our neighbors are looking for and how Grace can meet them where they are at.

God is at work here at Grace and outside our walls. Are you open to transformation?

“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT

REIMAGINING

Written by
**Pastor Maria
Markman**

TOGETHER

Anyone stepping into Grace lately has noticed the transformation, a transformation that in many ways exceeds our imaginations. There is a lot to get used to and even more to give thanks for! Over the last month, I interviewed a few folks, asked them about their experience of our building project and invited them to reimagine our future together at Grace! Check out some of their responses below!

Charlie Wold: A 40-year member of Grace and currently, our building project volunteer owner's representative. In this role, Charlie monitors the work being done, answers questions the contractors might have, coordinates their building efforts with the church and preschool, runs errands, and he writes on the progress for Grace at a Glance.

Anny Howard: Anny and her husband Nick distinctly remember their first Sunday at Grace because it was our Transforming Inside and Out Sunday. Members apologized saying, "this might not be the best Sunday to test out our church," but Anny disagrees! She felt it was so GREAT to see a congregation starting something. All three of the Howard kids are Seeds of Grace kids, although their oldest is in elementary school now!

Anne Marie Johnson: Anne Marie and her late husband Harland live in the neighborhood behind Grace. They did not always attend Grace but since attending for a few years have found a wonderful church home and community. Anne Marie likes to use the term family.

"My life has been turned upside down since losing Harland. But I am grateful to Grace, my church family,..."

Maria: What difference will this make for you, for your family, for Grace, for the community?

Anny: I feel more comfortable being able to go to work. I really like my job. I am a teacher. It is a huge part of my identity. I can continue to work because I feel so comfortable where they are at.

Anne Marie: My life has been turned upside down since losing Harland. But I am grateful to Grace, my church family, to our pastors for their spiritual direction, and all the ministries that support our community, especially the kids! I like the ministry we provide at Grace. If someone says, "It's not for me." you aren't looking hard enough. The building project will allow us to give so much more to each other and our community.

Charlie: It's going to be a wonderful legacy we are leaving for those that follow. I think the congregation will find what has been done here to be really workable. As people come in for church on Sunday or Wednesday there will be so much more space for gathering. It is going to be remarkable! We will really be able to bring the neighborhood in too.

Maria: What should we be thinking about in terms of reimagination as our outer transformation gets closer to completion?

Charlie: We have a new space, which is physical. But how do we use this new physical space to broaden our ministries? The building is the bones. And now we can start to enhance it to fit the programs and culture we want to exhibit here.

Anne Marie: My hope is that we will keep on going. Let us not get stale, thinking, that is enough. But to keep going. Can we find more opportunities to serve together?

Anny: I feel like kids are a priority here. Through the project that priority is still very strong. As my kids grow, my hope is that there will be a space for them then too. A space for strong connections with kids that may or may not go to their school but who also have a shared love and faith.

Maria: Has anything surprised you?

Anny: I was a little surprised at how much relief. I felt about knowing the entrance to Seeds of Grace is its own entrance. It feels more secure as far as who is coming and going. I don't like that I feel relieved by that, so it surprised me. I like that it was prioritized in our project.

Anne Marie: Since I spend my summers at the lake, it's not fair. I am not seeing the daily and weekly transformations! I appreciate every time new pictures are shared about the progress. It is coming together, that doesn't surprise me, but it's exciting.

“The building is the bones. And now we can start to enhance it to fit the programs and culture we want to exhibit here.”

Maria: Where have you seen God at work?

Charlie: That is a good question. It is something I have thought of more than I ever have. (*Maria: Why do you think that is?*) Cuz, I am working in His house. We are doing something big here. Are we doing it right? Am I doing it right? I have been praying about that.

Anny: Just bringing us here was pretty awesome. We tried a bunch of places and then Covid and when we were looking for a daycare, we came here. Sandy, the Director asked if we had a church. If not to check out a service. It seemed like everything was aligning. We liked the daycare. We felt welcomed at church. We came back. It wasn't a question; it was just placed before us. Here is where you will send your kids. Here is where you will go to church. Here is your new community of people. And here it is close to home, bonus! And it all happened at once.

Anne Marie: In everything, definitely in Harland in his last days. Up here at the lake. At Seeds of Grace, daily as those kids are surrounded by people who care! Through our pastors and the people sharing God's love!

Maria: Anything else?

Charlie: I have seen a great deal of transformation in those I have been working with and those that come into our facility. I have to believe that they believe the dollars they contributed to this project are doing something, not just to the building but to themselves. I am not alone in feeling transformed. It goes through all the people that enter this building. We should see a real renaissance in all that attend, and in all that walk through these doors.

“We liked the daycare. We felt welcomed at church. We came back. It wasn't a question; it was just placed before us.”

BRICKS OF OUR MINISTRY

CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILY

Written by
Will Weikle

As the Children, Youth and Family Director, it felt good when I started seeing youth group attendance rise. I felt cool when the youth started to bring their friends to Youth Group. That must mean I am doing a good job. Because that's supposed to be the point, right? The more people you get into those church doors, the better job you're doing. The more you get kids to think Jesus is hip and cool and fun, the better Youth Director you are. Right?

I started Seminary last January. This summer, I had the privilege of taking a class in Berlin about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an influential German theologian who grew up and began his ministry amidst the rise of the Nazi party in the 1920s and 30s. He was particularly focused on children and youth ministry during his ministerial years. He resisted Adolf Hitler, was involved in a conspiracy against the Nazi government, and was eventually killed in a concentration camp.

“The more that you get kids to think Jesus is hip and cool and fun, the better Youth Director you are. Right?”

Bonhoeffer would argue getting more kids to Youth Group or getting kids to think Jesus is cool isn't the point. We often get so hung up on numbers and attendance. We feel scared about the future of the church when we see attendance decline, or when VBS doesn't look the same as it did 10 years ago. We feel our egos boosted when we fill up the pews on a Sunday morning, or when the kids at Youth Group bring their friends.

Rather, Bonhoeffer would challenge us to think about community in a different light. His first doctoral thesis, *Sanctorum Communio* (Communion of the Saints), claims that every aspect of “community” is essentially related to the concept of personhood. So, rather than focusing on the size of the community, or the shared interests of the community, or even what is being taught in the community, Bonhoeffer lifts up a community of personalism. This is a community where the individual is lifted up and is known by and through the community, of which is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.

“This is a community where the individual is lifted up and is known by and through the community, of which is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.”

I look forward to the new program year. I look forward to building the new Youth Room with the high schoolers. I look forward to our partnerships with other churches. I look forward to seeing the new and the returning adult volunteers work with love and care with our youth. I look forward to seeing the new friendships blossom and old friendships strengthen. I look forward to being a part of this community that is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ's love for us.



Events

Beginning
Sept. 4th



W.O.W.
Women On
Wednesdays
9:30am

Wednesday Nights at Grace

- 5:15pm Family Pizza
- 6:00pm Catechism
- 6:00pm Kids Night Out
- 6:00pm Bible Study
- 7:00pm Worship

Beginning Sept. 11th



**Volunteer Trainings for Sunday School
Teachers & Catechism Leaders are
8/25 @ 12pm and 8/28 @5:30pm**

**GOD'S WORK.
OUR HANDS.**



**Sunday, Sept. 29th
One Worship @ 8:30am
Service Projects @ 9:30am**



**SUNDAY SCHOOL
BEGINS OCT. 6TH**



Grace Lutheran Church

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**come
& see**

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

**You're Invited
to our Grand
Opening!**

**September 8, 2024
9:00am-12:30pm**

