

# CONNECTIONS



## *QUESTIONS TO GROW IN FAITH...*

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*“WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?”  
- MARTIN LUTHER*





## 10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION!

# Grace4Rakai

The Grace4Rakai Ministry Team thanks the Grace community for supporting vulnerable children in Rakai, Uganda, with over 100 children benefiting from ACT Schools and university studies. The Amazing Grace Bakery, since 2015, has created jobs for over 40 people and aids ACT schools financially. Contributions include funding dormitories and over 250 quilts from Grace Quilters, highlighting the community's love and impact recognized by the children and local community.

The Grace congregation has supported ministries in Rakai, Uganda, since 2011, starting with two water tanks for a school. They launched a child sponsorship program in 2014 and funded a bakery's construction in 2015, leading to the formation of the Grace4Rakai Ministry Team to support expanding ACT ministries in the region.

**2014**

Richard & Johnson visit Grace for the first time, share their story.

25 children sponsored.

Grace funds the Amazing Grace Bakery that opens in November – employs 40+.

G4R Ministry Team is formed in August to support the vulnerable women and children in Rakai.

40 more children sponsored at November celebration.

**2015**



Construction begins on the ACT Junior School. Grace dormitory funded, desks & chairs donated.

October Grace Mission Trip to Rakai. Blessing of the school site under construction / celebration with Grace sponsored kids / students receive first quilts!

**2016**

ACT Junior School opens.

November: Grace4Rakai celebration; Richard & Johnson visit Grace for the second time; 20+ more children sponsored.

**2018**



**2020**

COVID 19 Pandemic: Grace funds emergency kits of flour, maize, rice, soap and medicines.

Construction of the ACT High School begins.





ACT High School opens.

Grace Vision Board provides grant from our tithe to fund a girls' dormitory at the ACT High School.

Scott & Lisa Christensen visit Rakai with a team from ACT.

2022



2023

Milling operation and poultry operations begin.

First large group of Grace sponsored students begin university studies.



2024



Grace Vision Board provides grant from our tithe to provide tables and chairs for school dining halls.

2025

Second group of sponsored students from Grace begin university studies.

Child sponsorship program includes 106 students from the Grace community.



*THANK  
YOU!!*

**The Grace4Rakai Ministry Team**

Scott Christensen & Stacy Surratt – Co-Team Leaders  
Colleen Klair, Sally McPhillips, Dale & Mary Kay Ortler,  
Ross Chambers and Beth Schaefer





# CATECHISM FOR LENT: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

By Pastor Joanna Mitchell

Last year, we tried something new. Once a month we invited our kids and our adults to join our catechism kids for an evening of learning together. We investigated the Old Testament by sharing our favorite books and discussing the various types of books we encounter in the library of our faith. We made collages in groups when we explored the 10 commandments. We put together intergenerational tables that learned together. It was fun, chaotic, and challenging. At the end, our lament was that there was too much time in between each meeting and we weren't able to have consistent small groups.

One of the unique aspects of being the church is that we are an intergenerational community. We have babies, and elders worshipping side by side, along with kids and teens and middle-aged people and young adults. Often, we end up in age-segmented small groups like Youth Ministry, or Senior Ministry. But we also recognize the great importance of forming relationship across generations and asking big questions of faith together.

Every Lent we change things up and invite people to participate in a new way. Usually this means a special worship series with unique topics during the service. **This year is different - worship stays the same, but we're doing something special outside of worship. Here's what's changing (and what's not):**

- Our worship schedule and sermon topics will remain the same as always—you'll hear familiar Lenten themes on both Wednesdays and Sundays. **What's different is what happens outside of worship.** We're inviting you to join intergenerational faith formation groups where we'll explore Luther's Catechism together. We will be offering opportunities on Sunday mornings (in addition to worship) and on Wednesday nights (separate from our evening service). Sign-up on Realm and join in the fun!
- We know you won't always be in town (Spring Break and schedules in general) but we don't care, we want all people to sign up and join in the fun. We will be examining the following topics: Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and who is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? If it's been a while since you studied this, me too! I would bet you have different questions than you had when you first studied them. Martin Luther invites us to ask the questions: What does this mean?
- In our world today, as faith communities grow smaller and more and more people don't claim to be of faith, it's important for us to wonder together about what does our faith mean. What does our baptism mean when we encounter hatred and division in the world? What does it mean that we are all are invited to the Communion table and that Jesus fed both Judas and Peter and feeds us just as we are? What does it mean to have a creator God in a world that is hurt by floods and fires? What does it mean that the Holy Spirit gives us faith? And how do we follow Jesus and reflect his life in all that we do.

I know that I am the person I am because of the various people who influenced my own faith. I remember being brought to church by my mom and grandma. But I also remember Mr. Olson my 7th grade catechism teacher telling me repeatedly that God is the one who makes the first move in a relationship and God comes to me first in love and in care. I know that our kids and youth and yes, our adults will all learn and discover new things together as we wonder and explore our faith asking: What does this mean? I can't wait to begin the journey with you.



# DREAM TEAM

By Lori Ackerson

*Lori Ackerson is a Nurse Manager for the Neurology unit at Mercy Hospital in Coon Rapids since 2006. She is married and has a daughter who just graduated from college. Her hobbies include motorcycle riding, lake outings, and traveling!*

A huge thank you to everyone who completed the Dream Team survey. We had 244 responses and wow, what amazing responses they were!

As a part of our preparation and study for this process, we have been meditating on the woman at the well, John 4: 4-42. When we think about this story, several narratives may come to mind.

- The significance of a Jew talking to a Samaritan,
- A woman talking to a man,
- A woman who seems to be on the margins, “not acceptable”, talking to Jesus.

Jesus chooses this person to reveal himself as the Messiah for the first time. What an awesome responsibility for this woman to share with her Samaritan neighbors! However, as we read more deeply, it is a lesson in how to listen deeply, ask tough questions and have compassion and trust someone who is “other” than us. Jesus takes time to sit with her. She shares concerns about the lines that have been drawn between them and is not afraid to challenge Him. He hears her and doesn’t shy away. He acknowledges the division, hurt, and shares a vision for how their world can be different. We encourage you to read this passage and meditate on it.



Grounded in this idea of deep listening, the team is beginning the process of reviewing the answers to the survey and identify themes to help us process the information we received. Some of the themes that resonated most with me are:

- How Grace has supported you in times of life transition
- The inclusivity and welcome that Grace extends to the community
- The generosity of this congregation
- The struggle we are all feeling in our world today (financial, violence, intolerance, division, etc.)

We will unpack these themes and others, as our next steps include developing some listening sessions. These will be facilitated discussions, and we want as many people to participate as possible. Yes, even if you did not complete the survey, you are welcome!

So, plan to participate, make your voice heard! More information will be coming out soon!



# ALEXANDRA HOUSE

## HOPE GALA

By Nancy Jenkins

*Nancy Jenkins is a volunteer at Grace. She is a grandma and avid walker. She is active in many ministries at Grace Lutheran and a leader of our Mental Health Team .*

Each year, the Alexandra House conducts the Hope Gala as its primary fundraiser. Money raised at this event goes towards paying for the critical services needed by survivors of domestic and sexual violence in our community. This year's event will be held on Saturday, March 28th from 5:30 to 9:00pm at the Courtyards of Andover. Tickets are \$175. The event includes dinner, silent auction, vacation raffle, inspiring speakers, and lots of fun!



Alexandra House is one of Grace's local outreach ministry partners, and Pastor Joanna Mitchell serves on their Board of Directors. The mission of Alexandra House is to empower victims of domestic and sexual violence, and inspire social change through education, support, and advocacy. Alexandra House offers a full continuum of services including an emergency shelter, housing and support services, hospital advocacy, legal advocacy, safety planning and support groups. One of their newer services is "Linus' Pet Haven" for individuals who need housing services and have a pet they do not wish to leave behind.

Dave and I have attended the past three Hope Galas, and each time we have been inspired by the messages shared by the keynote speakers who are victims of domestic violence and by the attendance of so many community members. In the past, participants from Grace have filled one table at the Gala and our hope this year is to fill two tables.

If you are interested in attending and want more information, please reach out to either Pastor Joanna or Nancy Jenkins. You may also visit the Alexandra House website: [alexandrahouse.org/hope-gala/](https://alexandrahouse.org/hope-gala/). To order tickets, you may also use this QR code. Please add in the comment section that you wish to be seated with the group from Grace.





# LEGACY

By Greg Ackerson

*Greg Ackerson was co-chair of Transforming Inside & Out capital campaign and a part of the building committee. He continues to serve on the Generosity Team. He also is active in Grace to Belize. Greg is married to Lori and they have an adult daughter.*

*"O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all generations to come." - Psalm 71:17-18*

Every year that goes by, I get a little older. Some days I really notice it—when my joints creak, when tying my shoes feels like a bigger production than it used to be, or when I wake up stiff for no obvious reason. And don't even get me started on how long it takes to heal from a "small" injury these days. I'll be honest... I don't love that part of aging.

But getting older also has a way of changing how I think. Retirement planning suddenly feels more urgent. I find myself worrying a little more about my mom and my aunts and uncles. And it's a strange moment when you realize your age is creeping closer to what you once thought of as "old."

Along with all that comes some deeper questions. Am I using my time well? Am I focusing on the things that really matter? What will people say about me someday? How will I be remembered? In other words—what will my legacy be?

Those questions have been nudging me to pause and take a closer look at my life. Am I on the right track? Am I living in a way that reflects my faith and the impact I hope to have? Am I intentionally building the kind of legacy I want to leave behind?

If you've ever found yourself asking similar questions, I'd love for you to join me for a journey of discovery around the idea of legacy. What does "legacy" really mean? What do we want ours to be? And as Christians, what should our legacy look like? Most importantly, what steps can we take now to live that out?

We'll be meeting Thursday evenings at 6:30pm at a local restaurant for conversation, connection, and thoughtful discussion. The dates are February 12, February 19, March 5, March 12, and March 19. It will be a relaxed, welcoming space to share ideas, listen, and reflect together on what truly matters. I hope you'll come join me on this journey.





# STRENGTHENING WORSHIP THROUGH INTENTIONAL CHANGES

By Deb Corey, Vision Board President

Have you noticed the changes? Whether you attend Sunday morning or Wednesday evening worship, you may have sensed something a little different. Throughout 2025, our music director, David Phelps, has been working with our staff to thoughtfully enhance our worship experience. These changes are not about doing something new for the sake of change, but about deepening our shared worship—creating services that flow more naturally, feel more welcoming, and invite fuller participation from everyone. Below is a brief overview of what has been implemented and the heart behind these decisions.

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flow more naturally, feel  
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## **8:30am Service: Rooted and Reflective**

At the 8:30am service, we have been intentionally reconnecting with elements of historic liturgy while maintaining a warm and accessible worship experience. Portions of the liturgy, including the Kyrie, Hymn of Praise, and familiar service music, help ground our worship in a shared rhythm of confession, praise, and thanksgiving.

When Communion is celebrated, the generosity moment now follows Communion, allowing the sacrament to remain uninterrupted. Announcements have been moved to the end of the service so important information is not missed, and additional musical generosity moments invite reflection on God's abundant grace.

## **10:15am Service: Flow and Invitation**

The 10:15am service has also seen intentional changes to improve flow and create a more immersive worship experience. Music now begins before the formal call to worship, helping set a prayerful tone, and the worship leader guides the opening welcome and prayer for smoother transitions.

Following the sermon, a pastoral prayer is offered as the band prepares, maintaining a reflective atmosphere. Every fourth Sunday, Hear Our Prayer is sung during the Prayers of the Church, inviting musical participation. As with the 8:30am service, generosity moments are supported by music, announcements come at the end, and the blessing is shared during the final song as a sending into the world.

## **Wednesday Worship: Creative and Communal**

Wednesday worship mirrors the flow of the 10:15am service while allowing space for creativity and participation. Each week features a different form of the Prayers of the Church, including spoken, sung, and interactive prayer, inviting meaningful congregational engagement.

Every second Wednesday, we sing a Song of Confession written by Pastor Joanna Mitchell and David Phelps, and each week we sing the Lord's Prayer—an intentional distinction from Sunday worship that reinforces our unity in prayer.

## **Moving Forward Together**

All of these changes reflect a shared desire to be more intentional in our worship—attending to flow, participation, and the ways music and prayer shape our experience of God. We are grateful for the leadership of our pastors and David Phelps, and for a congregation that remains open and engaged as we continue to grow together in worship, grounded in tradition and attentive to the Spirit's leading.

*"Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him.*

*Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre." - Psalms 33:1-2*





# THE GOODNESS OF GOD

By Pastor Joanna Mitchell

*"All my life You have been faithful; All my life You have been so, so good; With every breath that I am able; Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God." - Goodness of God by Bethel Music & Jen Johnson*

I've been singing these words a lot lately as I reflect on the ministry and life of Grace Lutheran Church in 2025. This year has been one of living into a new space. Construction was over. Our Transforming Inside and Out Appeal ended in March. For the first time in 3 years our Bazaar was back in November, and our ministries got to operate as usual.

We had a lot of fear when we put together our budget for 2025. For 3 years we had an elevated giving because of a special campaign. That campaign was now over, and we weren't sure what would happen. I had gotten used to regular volunteers painting and helping out at Grace and with our building being used and filled with members and visitors alike. I worried that this increase in involvement all around would diminish.

A beautiful thing happened, none of that changed. We had less construction noise, and dust and dirt. But the faithfulness, involvement and generosity of our people continued. The ownership and love for this church remained steadfast. And our ministries held strong.

I am so thankful for my incredible staff and have been delighted to welcome Tracie Russell back part-time as Financial Administrator, and Kristi Evanger to Administrative Assistant. People are receiving care and a friendly voice when they call Grace as Kristi tends to questions and our food shelf. Tracie makes sure our finances are in order, well-managed and that we are invested in the best ways possible. Our youth group has continued to grow with Will Weikle our CYF Director at the helm. Our building is being well-maintained, and we were able to finish a number of important projects. We have now hired Dave Kolar as a Facilities Manager who is doing an amazing job, and I am spending way less of my time talking about HVACs (Thanks be to God!).

Daily our halls are filled with people from our quilters to our GRAMPS, to musicians, and leaders, our scouts, food-shelf and Sand Creek Volunteers. The ministry of Grace continues to flow beyond our doors and out into the world. What a gift it is.

One of my favorite moments of this past year is when a member, emailed me after Christmas 2024 and shared his new hobby of stained glass with me. Before long, we had put together a plan, and we now have 5 beautiful windows reflecting color and light into the church. Or when Harold Zupon in a joke dropped a plant stand that was worn out. Harold laughed because he had already constructed a new one. Or when we had so much donated food in our narthex, we had to build a new shelf in the food shelf. I guess, I have more than just a few favorite moments.

Because I haven't even mentioned the love and laughter shared in Bible Studies or the care provided at the funerals, we have held for members and friends alike. Grace Lutheran it is a gift to be your Pastor, to serve a dedicated and committed staff. I rejoice every day that we are called to do this faithful work of God together and so I hope you will join me in singing of the goodness of God, because God has been faithful indeed.





# CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILY 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

By Will Weikle



## January

Our very first time going on retreat with 4th and 5th graders to Luther Crest!

## February

Valentine's Day Movie Night at the church hosted 30 children with 6 youth helpers. There was also a High School retreat that included an epic snow tubing hill.

## March

Annual ski/snowboard trip to Wild Mountain was postponed to March, but had such a blast teaching some new friends how to ski.



## April

Egg-My-Yard was a highlight fundraiser last year, where we helped the Easter Bunny hide eggs at people's homes with the youth. Eggstravaganza was also a lot of fun.



## May

Confirmation was a special time, with an amazing group of kids who showed up to vote in congregational meetings!



## June

VBS at Lord of Life was an absolute blast, and a tiny but mighty group of high schoolers went to Chicago on a mission trip.



## July

Summer Festival Camp is so much fun with the middle schoolers! This takes place at my alma mater, Gustavus. Soft serve ice cream for every meal? Yes please!



## August

Summer Stretch visited the Personal Care Facility with great energy and concluded with their annual trip to Valley Fair, although my favorite ride was removed.



## September

It's always a special time seeing all the kids back from summer when we kick off the programming year.



## October

Trunk-or-Treat was a success, with increasing participation from youth, and high schoolers bringing their own cars for trunks!



## November

The Love of Grace Bazaar returned, allowing us to sell more beautiful mosaic crosses donated by a local artist. Our youth look forward to participating again next year!



## December

Christmas parties coming out of the wazoo! We had so much fun. The Children's Christmas Program was also a huge highlight.





Grace Lutheran Church 2026 Itemized Operational Budget			
RECEIPTS	2025 BUDGET	2025 ACTUAL	2026 BUDGET
Current Offerings (Grace Ministry Operations)	\$860,000.00	\$891,362.02	\$1,048,000.00
Sunday School Offerings	\$300.00	\$223.38	\$250.00
Noisy Offerings	\$2,300.00	\$2,212.37	\$2,500.00
Dedicated Offerings	\$20,000.00	\$44,101.26	\$34,000.00
Capital Offerings	\$87,770.00	\$58,849.00	\$20,000.00
Transforming Inside & Out (Building Project)	\$135,500.00	\$144,262.00	\$0.00
Gifts of Grace *Moving to dedicated offering for 2026	\$2,500.00	\$2,738.00	\$0.00
Grace to Belize Fundraising	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$10,000.00
Miscellaneous Income/Other Receipts	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$100.00
<b>Sub Total - Contributions</b>	<b>\$1,108,470.00</b>	<b>\$1,143,748.03</b>	<b>\$1,115,450.00</b>
Use of Facilities	\$1,000.00	\$1,583.60	\$5,000.00
Seeds of Grace Receipts	\$883,655.00	\$772,551.35	\$792,481.00
Registration Fees/Books	\$36,475.00	\$25,202.24	\$27,010.00
Other Receipts	\$47,800.00	\$70,093.02	\$50,000.00
<b>TOTAL RECEIPTS</b>	<b>\$2,027,400.00</b>	<b>\$2,013,178.24</b>	<b>\$1,989,941.00</b>
COST OF MINISTRY	2025 BUDGET	2025 ACTUAL	2026 BUDGET
Seeds of Grace Investments	\$92,335.00	\$115,876.77	\$94,775.00
Administrative Expenses	\$75,952.00	\$70,229.28	\$72,600.00
Worship Investments	\$9,500.00	\$7,741.06	\$8,900.00
Strategic Planning Investments	\$20,000.00	\$18,000.00	\$600.00
Christian Education Investments	\$6,775.00	\$7,202.17	\$10,615.00
Music Investments	\$2,600.00	\$3,399.79	\$4,150.00
Social Ministry Investments	\$2,500.00	\$1,647.37	\$2,500.00
Parish Life/Fellowship Investments	\$11,000.00	\$8,423.40	\$11,600.00
Property Investments	\$278,400.00	\$266,700.59	\$255,703.00
Youth Investments	\$39,680.00	\$23,560.98	\$33,950.00
Benevolence	\$60,500.00	\$84,186.60*	\$72,160.00
Additional Expenses	\$98,050.00	\$110,887.36**	\$41,500.00
<b>TOTAL COST OF MINISTRY</b>	<b>\$697,292.00</b>	<b>\$717,855.37</b>	<b>\$609,053.00</b>
PERSONNEL INVESTMENTS - SALARIES & BENEFITS			
Pastors	\$253,228.96	\$251,641.59	\$267,702.48
Grace Staff	\$396,735.80	\$346,172.63	\$409,928.72
Other Personnel Investments	\$32,053.41	\$32,126.09	\$36,369.51
Seeds of Grace	\$652,776.12	\$665,382.56	\$666,868.66
<b>TOTAL PERSONNEL INVESTMENTS</b>	<b>\$1,334,794.35</b>	<b>\$1,295,322.87</b>	<b>\$1,380,869.37</b>
<b>TOTAL RECEIPTS</b>	<b>\$2,027,400.00</b>	<b>\$2,013,178.24</b>	<b>\$1,989,941.00</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$2,032,086.35</b>	<b>\$2,013,178.24</b>	<b>\$1,989,922.37</b>
<b>MARGIN</b>	<b>(\$4,986.35)</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$18.63</b>

\*\$23,636.60 in Benevolence was moved into a "to be designated" dedicated account, determined by Vision Board.

\*\* \$28,577.00 of additional "Other Expenses" was taken out and transferred to capital surplus to be used to pay part of mortgage and interest payments in 2026.



*Grace Lutheran Church*

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*Grace Lutheran Church*

# ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL FINANCE MEETING



**Sunday 02.01.26 at 9:45AM**

[grace-andover.org](http://grace-andover.org)