



WHERE THE SPIRIT LEADS, FRUIT GROWS



STORIES FROM OUR
2025-2026 PROGRAM YEAR



FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

BY PASTOR JOANNA MITCHELL, SENIOR PASTOR



We planted a beautiful magnolia tree, in memory of Dean Keller, one of our long-time members who died a few years ago. The tree is small and filled with blossoms and buds. People will walk by this tree for years to come, some will know who it is in memory of, others might pause to read the plaque, and others will just enjoy the beauty of the tree without ever thinking about where it came from.

Our theme for this year is Fruits of the Spirit. We have been given the invitation to let God's spirit of **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control** grow in us. To bear fruits for a world that is hungry to be fed with food that will nourish not only the body but the soul.

Our church was planted by people of faith almost 60 years ago. People who chose to break ground and plant seeds of faith, to serve their neighbors, making the commitment to follow God in **love** and service. Today, our church is who it is because of fruits that were born from that initial ministry. I am so grateful. The Spirit of Grace is one of generous service, a commitment to inclusivity and **love**, and a willingness to live the faith by caring for people from very old to young and everyone in between.

There are three words that continue to rise to the top for me when it comes to the list of fruits that we bear at Grace Lutheran. The first is **faithfulness**. I see this **faithfulness** in your willingness to show up for each other during times of crisis. Your service at the 6 funerals we have already had this year. The dedication of all of our musicians in our choir, praise band, Grace Symphonic Ensemble. Our many volunteers are so faithful they are even worried about how they can show up in the midst of a snowstorm. Thank you for your **faithfulness** in being church together.



There is one person I want to highlight in terms of **faithfulness** this year: Stacy Surratt. Stacy has been teaching Sunday school for 20+ years! Long after her kids, Olivia and Christopher graduated from Sunday School and even after they graduated from High School. Miss Stacy is known and loved by our kids and youth. Her commitment to teaching children about the **love** of God in Jesus is admirable. She brings great attention to detail, a contagious energy, chicken hats, and a deep love for God. After all these years, Stacy is stepping down from her role. I give thanks for her. What a ministry that has endured and will continue on in years to come. Because not only has Miss Stacy taught our children but has been a mentor to our youth who have served alongside her.



The second word I want to highlight is **peace**. It is a fruit our congregation is both growing and hungry for. In our strategic listening sessions, one of the words that kept emerging was sanctuary — a recognition that in a loud world, people need a place of **peace** and **love** that is set apart from the noise. We also acknowledged our own political diversity, especially this past year in a tumultuous year for the state of Minnesota. And yet, over and over again I have witnessed people doing the difficult task of listening to understand, learning from each other and leading with **love**. As I think about the state of our world and the chaos that exists, you, people of Grace, give me hope that when we focus on **love** and understanding that people of diverse opinions and backgrounds can work together for the good of the world. And you do this again and again, supporting youth, giving scholarships, feeding the hungry, donating books for our schools.



And finally, **generosity**. Your **generosity** is contagious and inspirational. This past Sunday, I attended an event for Family Promise, one of our partners in the community. They are opening up an apartment for families experiencing homelessness. *Over the past 15 years, Grace Lutheran has given over \$60,000 to Family Promise.* This does not include individual donations made by you, but from our church. We had the second most volunteers in their data base with over 200 volunteers. Now as they enter this next stage of their work, serving families in this new apartment, we have committed to sponsoring a large apartment. We will give \$10,000 to Family Promise over the next 3 years, care for the room and the families that will live in it.

These stories remind me of that small tree planted today. The possibilities for what God has in store for us seem endless. I am so grateful to you for the ways you live out your faith. Your commitment to care for others and your desire to follow God's Spirit wherever it may lead. What a blessing it is to be your pastor!



FRUITS OF OUTREACH

BY SCOTT CHRISTENSEN, DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH MINISTRIES

As the Volunteer Director of Outreach at Grace, I am blessed to witness the tremendous outpouring of **generosity** and compassion from our congregation to our community. Whether serving a homeless family, youth, or adult locally, or supporting children and families in places like Belize and Rakai, the people of Grace step up and make a meaningful difference. Fruits of the Spirit are evident in so many ways through our Outreach Ministry at Grace. Here are a few highlights of developments I have witnessed this year:



Family Promise supports homeless families here in Anoka County. Grace has been a partner congregation with Family Promise since they first started more than 15 years ago. Family Promise is in the process of opening a new Guest House in Coon Rapids that will provide temporary housing for up to 8 families and 40+ individuals. For families moving into this new Guest House beginning in July, it will be like moving into a new apartment!

Grace has taken the bold step to sponsor one of the apartments in the new guest house. More than 35 people from the Grace community gathered to tour the new house and learn how our ministry will be transformed in the future. A new family moving

into our sponsored apartment will be welcomed when they arrive with a team from Grace, supported during their stay and then sent off as they secure a new permanent home.



Our volunteers will be cleaning the apartment when a guest leaves and prepare it to welcome another family. Several times during the year, Grace will host a week at the Guest House where we will provide three meals during the week for all the residents. There will be many ways to volunteer to help serve at Family Promise! Please look for future messages from Dave Jenkins and Gayle Pacholl for ways to support this ministry.

Over the past year “Fruits of the Spirit” have been evident in ALL of our Outreach Ministries at Grace! We have supported homeless youth through Hope4Youth in Anoka, who have seen a 70% increase in daily visits of youth to their facility seeking **love**, support and guidance. Grace stepped up last summer to provide critical food and personal items for the youth.



Our Sand Creek Ministry team supports many students and their families at Sand Creek Elementary with weekly food on the weekends, special gifts at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Spring Break, and extra support in emergency situations. From “Packing the Bus” before school starts in the summer to supporting these kids throughout the school year, Grace provides critical support for many students and their families.

International Outreach is a part of our DNA as a congregation: Grace2Belize makes annual mission trips to Belize, to work on special projects and mentor children and families. Grace4Rakai has provided children with a quality, faith-based education for children from pre-school through university.

Our Family Table Ministry provides community meals to people who are hungry in our midst. The need is growing and, with higher prices and changing economy, we are supporting more hungry people than ever.



The “Fruits of the Spirit” is evident and thriving in all areas of our Outreach Ministry at Grace. Heart-felt thanks to everyone who volunteers or who has given so generously of their time and talents. THANK YOU for being the hands and feet of Christ. The Journey continues!

KIDS THESE DAYS

BY DAVE JENKINS, MEMBER OF VISION BOARD

You may have read or heard things people say about youth in America like, “Kids don’t care.” “All they do is play video games,” “Always scrolling on their phones” and “They need to get outside and play and connect with each other.” I want to share with you what I saw at Grace the other evening.

I saw all of the Catechism kids take part in the Easter series skit (Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday all wrapped up in one). The younger kids were led by several high school kids.



I saw youth group kids get up and get soda and candy and throw the football while Will was trying to teach. The kids didn’t miss a beat however and were engaged in conversation about “Dwelling in the Bible” and asked for world peace in their prayer requests. They showed concerns about the political divide in our country. I saw kids playing football in the parking lot at 9:00pm (pitch dark) and running bare foot in 40-degree temperature. The kids were laughing and having a great time. I saw a kid in a wheelchair playing in that same football game, having fun and laughing.

I saw kids drinking pop at 9:00pm on a school night. They were all talking about their track meet, choir concert, AP Testing, Flag Football, and other activities going on in their very busy lives.

I am a former middle school teacher who liked my students to sit in rows and listen to me spout on about Math equations. I left teaching because I thought kids didn’t care, didn’t listen, and didn’t want to learn. After my experience at Grace on that night, I wish I could have learned back then to adapt like these kids have. I encourage all adults any time you are at Grace or out in our community, to look at young people differently. They are different from how we were as young people. They are good and beautiful in their own ways.

As a volunteer for both catechism and high school youth group, I leave Grace thinking, “Wow! These kids are so good, so busy, so kind.” They act differently than generations before them, but they are talented and up for the task of leading the future.

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FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT: JOY

BY WILL WEIKLE, CYF DIRECTOR

Working with the children, youth and families of Grace continues to be an absolute **joy** for me. This community is filled with passionate people who are committed to building up Christ-centered community, where each individual is cared for and loved, and can find belonging, knowing that they are a beloved child of God. This is my goal for CYF ministry here at Grace. Dave's anecdote in the previous passage highlights this beautifully.



Studio 45 continues to thrive, as these 4th and 5th graders find their voice and create their own space, and take ownership over the program alongside their leaders, Kennedy and Sophie. Catechism has been going well with our middle school students. We are preparing to end the year with a small group night to Urban Air! I think next year is going to be a particularly fun year in Youth Group, because two of our biggest age groups are our current 8th graders and our current 11th graders - so next year, Youth Group will be filled with energetic 9th graders looking up to and being mentored by a phenomenal group of enthusiastic 12th graders!



Events have been going splendidly this year, such as the Eggstravaganza, where we had around 100 children running around, finding Easter eggs, playing games, and eating so much candy! I am excited to see what next year has in store for us.

Looking forward to next year, we already know about a few big changes that are coming our way! One big change will be in Sunday School. You may have read in a previous article that Ms. Stacy will be stepping down from teaching Sunday School after 20+ years. I have so much thanks to give for her and all of her hard work, leadership, **love** and care that she has given to our young people. She will still be leading the Children's ministry team and heading up the events, but she will be dearly missed in Sunday School! We are still faithfully discerning what Sunday School might look like next year, but we will certainly continue to **love** and support our youngest members on Sunday mornings.

This will also be the first year with our current Own Your Faith (OYF) students getting confirmed in October instead of May! We have made this shift for several reasons. One reason is we wanted more time for community building with these students. So, they have been meeting for once a month all together with one of the pastors to talk and learn about the core tenets of our faith. They will be working with a mentor through the summer, and will get confirmed on Reformation Sunday!

We have such an incredible group of children and youth here at Grace, and I feel truly blessed to have the opportunity to work with them. Thank you so much to all of the incredible volunteers who show up, create a space where our students feel loved and supported, and help make this all possible!

A TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY

BY DEB COREY, VISION BOARD PRESIDENT

Over the past three years, I have served on the Vision Board. I'm so proud of our congregation and what the Lord has built through us and around us. As I consider the theme of 2025 - Fruits of the Spirit - I see several fruits evident in our journey. As I reflect on this transformative journey, it's undeniable that our building and congregation have undergone profound changes.



Construction and remodeling are rarely straightforward processes. There were moments when the dust persisted, familiar spaces were unavailable, and even simple gatherings demanded extra effort and adaptability. Meetings were relocated or reimagined, funeral luncheons were prepared under challenging circumstances, and the rhythms of church life were frequently disrupted. Yet, amidst these challenges, the congregation demonstrated remarkable **patience**. They shared a common understanding that the inconveniences were temporary but the purpose behind them was enduring.

What truly sets this transformation apart is the spirit with which it was met. It wasn't merely a time of endurance; it was a time of unwavering **faithfulness**. People stepped in where needed, adapted without complaint, and continued to serve the community with **generosity** and care. Even amidst the noise and disruption, the church's mission remained steadfast.

At the same time, a growing sense of anticipation permeated the air. With each stage of progress, excitement built and **joy** was expressed. Walls changed, spaces opened, and light entered in new ways—and slowly, the vision began to take shape. What once required imagination could now be seen and experienced.



In many ways, this transformation mirrors the metamorphosis of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. The process itself may seem slow and even uncomfortable, but it is essential for the beauty that follows. Today, we are beginning to witness that beauty realized in a space that feels more welcoming, more functional, and more reflective of our true selves.

But perhaps the most significant transformation hasn't occurred within the physical structure of the building—it's been within the congregation itself. Through unwavering **patience**, perseverance, and shared **hope**, the church community has grown stronger. The past three years have reminded us that the church's identity lies not in its walls, but in the people who come together with purpose and **faith**.

As we move forward, we do so with **gratitude**—for the journey we've shared, for each other, and for the vision that continues to guide us. While the work may have focused on a building, the true renewal has been in the very fabric of the church itself. It has been a blessing to part of this journey.

BEARING FRUIT THAT WILL LAST: FAITH FORMATION AT GRACE

BY PASTOR MARIA MARKMAN, ASSOCIATE PASTOR

You can often find a Granny Smith apple in my lunch box. I love them because they are hardy, long-lasting, and trustworthy. There is nothing worse than biting into a mealy or bruised apple. Other varieties might be more exciting, but Granny Smiths are consistently good — and that consistency matters.

I don't mention my lunch to bore you, but to help us think together about faith formation at Grace. In John 15, Jesus tells his disciples: "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." Our theme this year is Fruits of the Spirit — **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**. Like the Granny Smith, we aren't chasing the newest or flashiest variety. We aren't even chasing perfection, because even perfect apples can go mealy and bruised. We want to be hardy, long-lasting, and trustworthy in our faith — grab-and-go nourishment, good for the journey of a lifelong faith.



This doesn't mean stagnant. Fruit-bearing faith begins young at Grace with **kindness** as our guide, we meet our children right where they are though. Sunday School and Kids Night Out and Catechism offering age-appropriate, engaging spaces to learn the Bible and grow in faith. This Lent, a new catechism series on Luther's Catechism brought all ages together around the foundations of our faith — a beautiful reminder that formation is for everyone. And our newest Wednesday night offering, Studio 45, gives 4th and 5th graders their own creative space to dig deeper into Scripture with **gentleness** and curiosity that good learning requires.



Adults aren't standing still either. We launched a DEIA Building Belonging Team, asking how belonging is central to our faith. We started a Young Adult Bible Study after Sunday worship. Women of the Word added evening sessions for those who can't make Wednesday mornings. And our **faithful** ongoing ministries — Graceful Seniors, Ruth Circle, Wednesday night Bible study, Thursday morning Zoom study — continue week after week with quiet **self-control** and steadiness that is itself a spiritual practice. Their leaders embody the fruits of the spirit in ways that humble and inspire me. Thank you.

As Paul reminds us in Galatians, we are freed not for ourselves, but to **love** our neighbors. Faith formation doesn't only happen in a classroom or a study — it happens every time we show up for one another. That is the fruit that lasts. That is Grace at its best.

WITHOUT HEART, MUSIC (AND WORSHIP) IS SIMPLY NOISE.

BY DAVID PHELPS, DIRECTOR OF WORSHIP & MUSIC

There is no “noise” happening here at Grace, because we choose to show up with an open heart, and willing voices. The music and worship ministry at Grace continues to be a source of great **joy** not just for the congregation and church community, but to those who make it what it is. We are blessed to have so many talented, dedicated people sharing their gifts and talents. Grace would not be what it is without the ministries they provide for us. 2025 continued to prove that and only affirmed the mission of Grace to share God’s **love**.



Our contemporary worship teams, both on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings continue to show up and are growing! Week after week they lead us in worship in the best ways. Some have been giving to Grace in this way for many years, and we give thanks for their dedication and desire to create such meaningful music for our services. We have also seen new voices and new instrumentalists join the group, only bringing more **joy** and **love** to the ministry that is our Praise Team.

The Grace Choir continues their tradition of excellence, taking on a bigger role in worship when they are present. Leading the congregation in liturgy, singing in harmony with the congregation, and presenting joyful anthems to enhance the services. This year we invited additional singers to join us for service of music and readings on Palm Sunday, bringing the congregation through the story of the Passion, and sending us into Holy Week. Once again in advent, we joined hearts and voices with Lord of Life to present “Sing Christmas,” the fifth annual Cantata together.



Our Treble Makers continue to bring joyous voices and wide smiles to worship, blessing us with their angelic sounds each time. They show up on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings excited to sing, and sing their hearts out every time.

The Grace Symphonic Ensemble continues to be a bright spot. Bringing together generations and providing Grace with wonderful music, and powerful accompaniments on the hymns. We have seen great growth in their numbers, and give thanks to Joe Jackson, for his invitations, and encouragement.



As we continued to settle in to our remodeled sanctuary, more opportunities arose. We knew there would be some acoustical treatment needed, and so we were able to install paneling along the ceiling in the back, and on the walls, allowing everyone to hear the sermons, scripture, music, and prayers with ease.



Our online worship got a major upgrade in late 2025, as we purchased and installed a new camera system, along with additional microphones to allow our online worshippers to better feel a part of the Grace community. We give thanks to our small, but dedicated worship tech team that brings worship together both in the sanctuary, and online.

I give thanks for the Heart of Grace, and the way everyone shows up bringing their talents and gifts, and freely sharing them for the betterment of us all.

CELEBRATING THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-control



Patience

- **24 High School** graduates.
- **9 students** affirmed their baptism at confirmation.
- **7 First Communion** participants took the next step in their faith journey.
- Seeds of Grace **playground** renovation completed.

Love

- Love and cared for **19 families** as they celebrated the lives of their loved ones.
- **10** Outside partnerships.
- **155 visits** with people who were hospitalized or homebound.
- **3 new staff** members were hired at Seeds of Grace Childcare.



Joy

- Celebrated events such as **Trunk-or-treat**, **Eggstravaganza**, and **Christmas Campout**.
- **94 new songs** performed.
- **7 new voices** joined music ministry.
- **17 members** of the Grace Symphonic Ensemble.
- Partnered with Lord of Life for **VBS**.



Peace

- **Blessed** dozens of **pets**.
- **7 people** in Centering Prayer weekly.
- **10 new families** joined Seeds of Grace.
- Formed **DEIA** group to assess the building for inclusion.
- Developed **Refuge Room** a quiet space.
- **52 Saturday Zoom Prayer** gatherings.



Generosity

- Collected **hundreds of school supplies** for Sand Creek Elementary.
- Gave out **\$5,857 in scholarships**.
- Gave out **\$93,808 in benevolence**.
- Since partnering with Family Promise many years ago, donations have surpassed **\$65,000**.
- **Men's Ministry** gave 16 hours to provide BBQs to Stepping Stone.

Kindness

- **Packed 1,000s of meals** at Feed My Starving Children in 3 events.
- **464 people** were given love and warmth with quilts, pillowcases, and prayer shawls.
- **9 outside groups** used space in the church.
- Completed a DEIA: Building Belonging **enviornmental audit**.



Self-Control

- Traveled **19,594 miles** in faith.
- **35** off-site events.
- **174** music practices.
- **62** scout meetings.
- **Tithed 10%** of 2025 income.
- Spent **256 hours** learning about God.



Faithfulness

- Welcomed **28 new members** into the Grace family.
- Heard about God's love in **161 worship services**.
- **Catechism** for Lent.
- Joyfully performed **13 Baptisms**.
- Started **Studio 45**.
- **Faith & Neighboring Practices**.



Gentleness

- **31 women** went on retreat.
- **16,319 people** fed.
- **2 conversations** about aging with the Graceful Seniors.
- **20 of the Grace community** went on a mission trip to Belize.
- **15 feet washed** on Maundy Thursday worship.
- **20 loved ones** remembered on All Saints Sunday.
- **85 of grief packets** sent out.



Grace Lutheran Church

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Spring Annual Meeting

**Wed. May 13, 2026
7:45pm**

**Sun. May 17, 2026
9:30am & 11:15am**