

REFLECTIONS



CONNECTIONS
GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

GREATER WORKS THAN THESE

BY NANCY JENKINS



This past spring, Pastor Maria preached on John 14, and Jesus' words in verse 12 have remained with me ever since: *"Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father."* I was astonished. How can we do greater works than Jesus? What does that look like today?

In May, a fellow Grace member and I met with David Frei from Family Promise. David shared that their 24/7 ministry is only possible because multiple churches unite for a common mission. One church alone couldn't sustain this ministry, but together with other congregations, Family Promise thrives. David's message was clear: we accomplish so much more when we work together. Perhaps this collective impact is exactly what Jesus meant by "greater works."

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This belief is why I agreed to co-chair our "Raise the Roof" campaign alongside my husband, Dave, and Scott and Lisa Christensen. While it is unlikely that one person will write a check to cover the entire cost of replacing the flat portion of our church roof, I know that collectively, we can reach—and even surpass—our goal of \$165,000.

Why am I so confident? Because I have witnessed the immense generosity of this faith community.



In 2021, we set an initial goal of \$1.2 million for our Transforming Inside & Out campaign and ultimately raised \$1.7 million. Then, when the City of Andover unexpectedly required us to re-do our parking lot before that campaign even ended, the people of Grace stepped up again, giving nearly \$175,000 to cover the cost.

Recently, some have asked why this roof work wasn't included in our 2024 major remodeling project. At the time, the roof only required standard maintenance and patching; improving it then would have meant cutting other vital projects from the construction budget. This reminds me of my own home—I wanted a new driveway for ten years, but it wasn't until it became a critical necessity this past winter that we finally budgeted for it this spring. Our church roof has now reached this same point of critical necessity.

I SEE THE VIBRANT, GENEROUS SPIRIT OF OUR CHURCH IN ACTION EVERY DAY.



I see the vibrant, generous spirit of our church in action every day. I see it in the abundance of food and supplies you donate to the Food Shelf, Sand Creek Elementary, Family Table, Family Promise, and Hope4Youth. I see it in your gifts of time. This summer, when a member asked Pastor Joanna if volunteers could drive her to visit her husband at a local care facility each weekday, the schedule was completely filled within an hour. We didn't just meet the need; we had an abundance of drivers.

Being a part of Grace, volunteering, and giving financially has deeply changed my life and my relationship with God. Now, I invite you to join us in this next chapter. Please prayerfully consider making a financial gift to the "Raise the Roof" campaign. Together, as a community of faith, we can protect our physical church home so that we can continue doing God's "greater works" in our world.



VBS 2026

BY WILL WEIKLE

What does it look like when God is active in your life? This is a question that often comes up with our high school youth group students. In my experience, recognizing God's presence usually comes through reflection. Oftentimes, when God is active in our lives, it is actually pretty uncomfortable in the moment.

KIRA: "MY FAVORITE PART WAS THE FRIENDS THAT I MADE AT VBS OR THE AMAZING SONGS THAT WE SING."

I think our culture often treats comfort and convenience as the ultimate goals in life. But the purpose of life isn't comfort. Growth can be painful. Seeing things from a different perspective can be challenging. Taking accountability can be scary. Plans going awry can be frustrating. In moments like these, it can be hard to see how God is at work. That is where reflection comes in.

For the past few years at VBS, I have led the science station. I love learning about the world around us and doing science with the kids. This year, one group missed a crucial step while making playdough out of cornstarch and conditioner, and soon all the kids were elbow-deep in a sticky, blue-dyed mess. The small group leader was on her own, the kids were energetic, and the food coloring was not easy to clean. Safe to say, it felt like a disaster.



HANNAH: "DOING THE ACTIVITIES WAS MY FAVORITE PART BECAUSE I SAW GOD IN EVERY SINGLE ONE."

I was able to help while the leader scrubbed everyone's hands as clean as she could. About twenty minutes later, after we had finally finished cleaning up, I asked the kids what their favorite part of the week had been.

"The blue playdough!" all four kids immediately answered.

MYLO: "SOMETHING THAT WAS CHALLENGING WERE THE MOTIONS TO THE SONGS, BUT I WORKED WITH PR. MARIA AND BY THE END OF THE WEEK, I WAS ABLE TO DO THEM AND FELT PROUD."



NORA: "I SAW GOD IN THE FACES OF EVERYONE DURING THE PARACHUTE ACTIVITY. EVERYONE WAS LAUGHING AND SMILING."



From my perspective, the experiment had been a failure. But hearing their joy helped me see how God had been at work through that uncomfortable and challenging situation. Even though the experiment didn't turn out as intended, they loved it. They got to make a big, colorful mess—and when you're a kid, what's better than that? They learned that their small group leader loves them, even when they're messy. They learned that science doesn't always go according to plan, and that's okay. And God is with us even when we go off course (VBS day two theme).

So, I want to thank those kids for giving me the opportunity to reflect on how God was active in my life, even though it wasn't very comfortable in the moment. Here are a few things some of the other kids of Grace had to say about their week at VBS!

EVE: "MY FAVORITE PART OF VBS WAS SINGING IN THE SANCTUARY. I LOVE TO SING!"



ALEXIS (YOUTH LEADER): "MY FAVORITE PART WAS THE KIDS IN MY GROUP AND HOW FUN THEY WERE."



BAPTISM

BY PASTOR JOANNA MITCHELL

I love using parts of the Lion King when I teach about baptism. The opening scene is a fabulous entry point as all the animals gather from far and wide in anticipation and celebration of the birth of this child. When my kids were little and watched this movie, they would declare, "Look mom! Simba is getting baptized." I had to agree with them — although there wasn't water used, this clearly was an anointing, and a beginning point in Simba's journey. Without doing anything, he is marked as set-apart, special, claimed as a beloved child. For them, he is the future king. And for us, when we are baptized, we are marked, set apart, as beloved children, God's people, God's chosen. We may not be kings, but we are claimed — set on a certain pathway, with people who have made promises to help us follow God and God's ways.



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GOD'S CHOSEN.

But following God is not easy. The second scene I use in my baptism class comes much later in the story. After Simba's father has died and he has lived in the wilderness (The Lion King is very biblical!), Simba carries shame and guilt and has left his community. He has learned from new friends to embrace the idea of no worries, and he is trying his best to do that. Until he encounters an old friend, Nala, and Rafiki — the wise one who anointed him at birth. When he confesses that his father is dead, Rafiki brings Simba down to the waters to look at his reflection and to remember that his father lives in him. It's one of my favorite scenes because you can feel Simba's hopefulness and disappointment as he looks into the waters. He wants something more. But all he sees is himself. The same guy who has left behind his family, the same guy living in grief, the same guy carrying guilt and shame.

Rafiki tells Simba to look harder into the waters, and when he does the skies open and he hears the voice of his father, inviting him to remember. Remembering his identity. Remembering his place. Remembering the path he is on. It is not to live in the wilderness with no worries, but to get back on the path, to learn from his sorrow, and to reclaim his place in his family. And so, he does — he goes back.



This is true for us too. As Lutherans who are often baptized as children, we are invited to remember our baptism. We do this often in January on Baptism of our Lord Sunday. But in the land of 10,000 lakes, I think summer is a good time for this as well. To spend time on the water and look at your reflection. To dip your hand in and see the ways your one disruption creates circles and waves. To put water on your forehead and remind yourself: I am a child of God, beloved and chosen.

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I often feel like Simba when I look at my reflection — longing to see something more, or something different. But remembering our baptism invites us to remember that we are God's, and that is our first and most important identity. We are not the worst mistake we've ever made. We are not less than. We are beloved and anointed and claimed and called. And like Simba, we are invited to go back — back to the path, back to our people, back to who we were always meant to be.

I invite you to splash in the waters of that promise, to immerse yourself in that truth, to look at your reflection with the love and grace of God who sees you as beautiful just as you are.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND HATE BOOK DISCUSSION

BY PASTOR MARIA MARKMAN

"...bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." -Ephesians 4:2-3

In high school, while discerning a call to ministry, I resisted becoming a pastor because I feared friends would think I was weird. For years, I introduced my faith with a disclaimer: "I promise I'm cool." I defined my Christian identity against the Christians I disagreed with publicly.

It's not about being cool anymore. But even now, when I say I'm a pastor, I feel I need a disclaimer: I am a Christian. I'm a pastor. But I'm not like them.

Maybe you've felt this too—watching Christians portrayed in the media and thinking, that isn't what I was taught or what I believe.

I've heard it's impolite to discuss faith or politics. But faith isn't just my job—it's what following Jesus means, shaping my daily life. And politics is simply how groups make decisions and share power. Avoiding these conversations does us a disservice; without practice, we'll never learn to talk honestly about what matters most. Right now, a loud Christian voice in our nation opposes the gospel, and because so few have learned to talk about faith, we let that voice dominate.

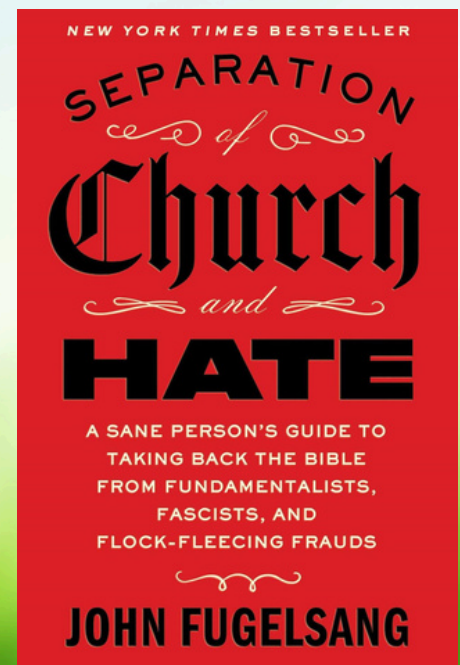
Join me this summer reading comedian John Fugelsang's *Separation of Church and Hate: A Sane Person's Guide to Taking Back the Bible from Fundamentalists, Fascists, and Flock-Fleeing Frauds*. ***If the title gives you pause—good, it did me too.*** I don't agree with everything he writes, but that's the point: he's unapologetic about biblical literalism, feminism, homophobia, abortion, poverty, racism, guns, sex, white supremacy, and following Jesus. We're sure to have a great discussion!

You're invited to a discussion:

Wednesday, August 12th, 5:00–6:30 PM

OR

Sunday, August 23rd, 11:30 AM–1:00 PM



A QUILTER'S STORY

BY MARY DANIELSON

I am Mary Danielson and am writing on behalf of the Quilters group. I began quilting with the group after a very difficult time in my life and because of Gloria. Gloria Kroeger taught piano to all three of my children at her house and my husband Mitch sang in the choir that she led here at Grace.

I WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER THE JOY ON HIS FACE AND THE KINDNESS OF GLORIA WHEN SHE DELIVERED THE QUILT TO OUR HOME.

At 12 years old, our son Hunter was diagnosed with ALL (Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia). Gloria brought to our house a quilt after his diagnosis. It was a baseball themed quilt and he was so excited to receive it. He gave her a big hug. He fought the cancer for 6.5 years and relapsed several times and even had a bone marrow transplant. After a brave fight and graduating high school, Hunter passed. I will always remember the joy on his face and the kindness of Gloria when she delivered the quilt to our home.

I was not a person who sewed but joined the quilting group after his passing. It was a way for me to get back to a normal life and to pass the joy he received to another person in need. Gloria and Norm Kroeger have been a blessing to my family through the years. This year, Norm and Gloria will celebrate 50 years of marriage and Gloria celebrates 80 years of life! Happy Anniversary Norm and Gloria! Happy Birthday Gloria. Although they have moved away, these faithful members of Grace continue to bless many with their kindness and beautiful hearts. Gloria couldn't have known; I certainly didn't know; how receiving Hunter's quilt from Gloria would change my life, but after years of practice in the quilters group at Grace, I am grateful and continue to give back.

If you have ever wondered about quilting, or are simply looking for some community, come and join us! You don't need to know anything to begin. All ages and abilities are welcome. We quilt on Mondays from 9:00am-12:00pm. The quilts we work on are gifted to the newly baptized, teen moms in Anoka county, to African Children Today in Rakai, Uganda and to any in need!



SEEDS OF GRACE

BY CHRISTINE KLEISY

Hello from Seeds of Grace Preschool and Childcare Center! As Rachel, my Assistant Director, and I reflect on the past year, we can confidently say it has been a highly successful year, filled with both new faces and familiar ones.

We are always thankful for our incredible staff. This summer, we've experienced several changes as two of our employees welcomed new babies and are on leave: Grace has a baby boy named Bowyn, and Kayla has a baby girl named Maisie Jo. Additionally, we've brought on a new Toddler teacher, Nicole, who is fantastic, and we feel truly fortunate to have her on our team. With everything happening at once, we are especially grateful for our summer staff—Dani, Morgan, Helena, Kennedy, and Laura—who are here to lend a helping hand during this busy time. Their hard work is truly appreciated!

We successfully completed our licensing inspections this year, with only a few minor paperwork violations. Each classroom passed its individual inspection. We are incredibly grateful that our playground was finished this year, allowing us to enjoy the outdoors in a safer environment. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to this project!

We are truly grateful for the incredible support we receive from our parents, alongside our dedicated staff. We feel fortunate to have such involvement! Many parents assist with field trips and volunteer efforts, and we have received numerous generous donations, including money, toys, and clothing for our classrooms. They have always been there for us when we needed help. Additionally, parents have visited to share insights about their professions, enriching our curriculum. This year, we have also been able to support four families facing challenges through our scholarship program. This spirit of generosity is just one of the many reasons we cherish our ministry at Seeds of Grace.

As of June 2026, Seeds of Grace proudly serves 53 enrolled children. Many families return to Seeds of Grace with younger siblings, choosing to enroll multiple children over the years. We believe this continued trust reflects the exceptional quality of care and education we provide. Our toddler and infant rooms are currently at full capacity, while our preschool rooms have a few openings reserved for our existing children who will be advancing.

In closing, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the entire Seeds of Grace staff, Grace Lutheran Church Vision Board, Seeds of Grace Board, Grace Lutheran Staff and all our families for their unwavering support and understanding.

"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances." – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

SEEDS OF GRACE

2025-2026 PRESCHOOL GRADUATES



Grace Lutheran Church

13655 Round Lake Blvd. NW
Andover, MN 55304

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US Postage PAID
Permit #118
Anoka, MN 55303

**“If you sit down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be
sweet.” - Proverbs 3:24**

