

**Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
1326 South 26 Street  
Omaha, NE 68105-2380

**Return Service Requested**  
**Dated Material**

**Email:** [graceluth@graceluth.com](mailto:graceluth@graceluth.com)  
**Web Site:** [www.graceluth.com](http://www.graceluth.com)

**REGULAR SUNDAY EVENTS**  
**9:00 A.M. Christian Education**  
**10:30 A.M. Worship Service**

**Pastor - Rev. Dr. Damon D. Laaker**  
**Vicar - Angela Khabeb**  
**Editor/Church Secretary – Benhi Khabeb**  
**Youth Ministries - Brenda Spahr**  
**Organist - Cody Talarico**  
**Sexton - Brian Sutej**  
**Interfaith Health Ministries - Virginia McGill**

**Non-Profit Org.**  
**U.S. Postage**  
**PAID**  
**Omaha NE**  
**Permit No. 39**

*Inspired By Christ, it is our mission  
to share God's Word and Love in  
care and in service to all.*

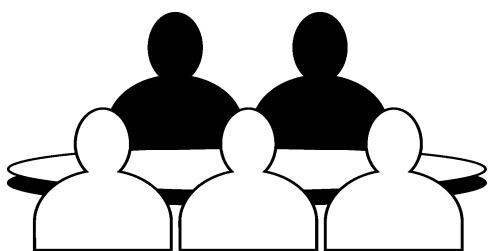


**APRIL**

**2009**

# **THE GRACE MESSENGER**

## 2009 Council Members



### COUNCIL MEETING

Ron Adrian Vicki Cox Andrew Edwards Sarah Emery Arlone  
Farber June Hilmer Vicar Angela Khabeb Gloria Moore  
David Nange Ernie Olson Pastor Laaker

\*\*\*\*\*

Officers Serving the Congregation but not on Council:

Financial Secretary: Janet Hula Treasurer; Margie Sutej

The regular meeting of the Council was held March 10<sup>th</sup>. The Council members shared their prayer concerns: Care for those in need of healing; Wendy Henexson (daughter of Pastora Liz), Ron's neighbor CJ and his neighbor Joyce Thompson, Ernie's friend Terry Bergman; care for those within the Grace family that they continue to heal; Ambros Lado, Arlone Farber, Kris Nelson, Teri Briley, Sandy Fitzgerald that they stay strong during their battle with cancer, Mickey Andersen; Mae Lane that she find peace & comfort; Amanda Vazquez that she get relief from her headaches; we pray for an end to all of the unrest and conflict in the world and that safety surround Ivo Mouto and all refugees as the World Court takes new action against President Omar al-Bashir. Pastor led devotions from Psalm 90:13 and Luke 19:5. The first speaks to us about our common question of "how long must we suffer?," while the second reminds us of the surprising way God reaches out to those least likely to be warmly received by others.

Visions for Ministry: The Council is reading "*Radical Welcome*" by Stephanie Spellers. Please read pages 27-40 in the book by the next meeting.

Reports were received from the Financial Secretary and the Treasurer. Please continue to give generously. Our income is running about \$650 a month behind our expenses.

Christian Education: No new report.

Evangelism/Outreach: 14 came to Angela's first internship project presentation. Wonderful conversation took place. We look forward to the remaining opportunities.

Finance: We need serious thought on how to help finance the remainder of Vicar Angela's stay with us. Fund-raising ideas welcome.

Property: No new report.

Service/Social Ministry: No new report.

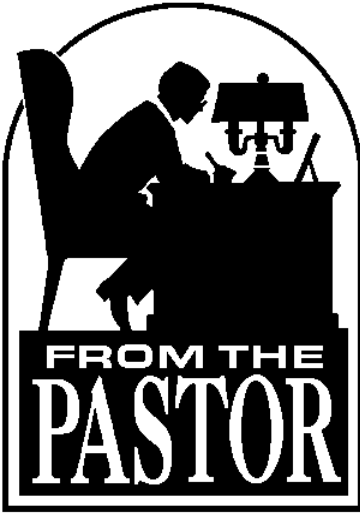
Support/Stewardship: The Sudanese Fellowship Non-profit organization will be a work in progress

Worship: REJOICE will be with us during the last Sunday of March. Council members will help bring treats for fellowship after service.

Unfinished Business: No new report.

New Business: Youth in Mission, sponsored by the Lutheran School of Theology, is planning a summer experience which includes one week in Chicago, one week in Mexico, and several days in Arizona this summer. Our own Samantha Trejo has been nominated & selected, and Julia Traynor has been chosen as an alternate. What a wonderful opportunity for our youth! The Synod Assembly will be held in Fremont this June. The Council would invite interested persons to speak to Pastor Laaker about attending. New Memorial Cards were created, designed, and printed by Janet Hula. Thank you!

Announcements: Pastor will be in CA from Thursday the 19<sup>th</sup> through Wednesday the 25<sup>th</sup>. Arlone will bring treats and lead prayer for our April meeting.



The Church Council and I have begun reading a book, “Radical Welcome,” by Stephanie Sellers. In the foreword, Rev. Steven Charleston says, “This is not a ‘feel good’ book. It is not about how we should all be nice to strangers at coffee hour. This is a book about the very hard challenges that face any of us when we decided to step outside of our isolation for the sake of the gospel.” Well, I have to admit when I read those words, I thought, oops, I probably should have made a different choice for our reading this year. As we have begun to read the book, I am glad I made the choice. Yes, it will make us step outside of our comfort zones but this is important work as we seek to be the body of Christ in this place.

You may recall that last month I invited you into the journey of Lent. Well, now I’d like to invite you into the Radical Welcome journey. The author asks, “Has God whispered in your ear or tugged your sleeve, urging you to step off the curb and onto this road?” Yes, God has been more than whispering in my ear for some time. In fact, at times, it feels like God is yelling. Some of the author’s descriptions of how you know this communication is from God reinforce my sense that God desires this stepping off. A couple of those clues are 1) the neighborhood has changed 2) you know you want to see your church become radically welcoming 3) you’ve begun the journey toward radical change, but now you need to reckon with your history, fear (your own and the others) complacency or a host of other challenges.

The author asks very probing questions: “What new thing is God calling me to be and to do?” and “What support, education, training and practices would help me to follow through on what I now imagine for myself and my congregation?” I suspect I will wrestle with these questions for some time.

Her description of radical welcome is this: Radical Welcome is a fundamental spiritual practice, one that combines the universal Christian ministry of welcome and hospitality with a clear awareness of power and patterns of inclusion and exclusion. She then describes a church as “radically welcoming” when it means “the community seeks to welcome the voices, presence and power of many groups – especially those who have been defined as The Other, pushed to the margins, cast out, silenced, and closeted – in order to help shape the congregation’s common life and mission.” Wow!

Some marks of the community that seeks to achieve this radical welcome are:

**Hospitable:** They seek to offer a gracious, warm space to all people, especially those who have been defined as “Other,” systematically disempowered and oppressed, pushed to the margins.

**Connected:** They link to their neighbors, to their neighborhood, to brothers and sisters beyond their neighborhood.

**Open to conversation:** They attempt to listen carefully, to make room for, share power with, and learn from groups who’ve been silenced, closeted and disempowered, and they are open to genuine conversation and transformation based on this encounter.

**Intentional:** They engage in training, research, active listening, strategic planning.

**Comprehensive:** They recognize that the work cannot be left to a specialized ministry area, it is a way of being.



**Becoming:** They realize this journey is never finished, so they are always becoming.

**Beyond diversity:** They understand that radical welcome is not merely about diversity, evangelism, multiculturalism, inclusion, or getting it “right.” It is about being faithful disciples of Christ.

**Faithful:** They honor radical transformation not as a necessary evil...but because they are saying “yes” to God’s gracious invitation to welcome as Christ welcomes.

**Compassionate:** They prioritize the work of creating “space for grace” where people can develop.

**Real:** They acknowledge they will not be perfect or consistently, radically embracing every group.

Well, this will be an interesting journey. I trust the Holy Spirit will work within us and around us as we seek to embody this radical welcome.

*Pastor Laaker*



## “Helping Hands”

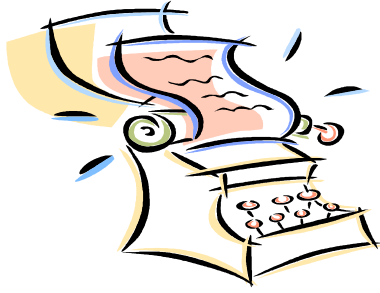
Working Together in God's service

### **Project Hope Again Participating in “Feinstein Opportunity”**

Your donations to Project Hope during March and April will be matched by the Feinstein Foundation. To donate, you may drop an envelope in the offering labeled “Project Hope” on Sunday, give grocery items, or mail a check directly to Project Hope, PO Box 11-1312, Omaha, NE 68111- 1312. On the memo line write “Feinstein.”

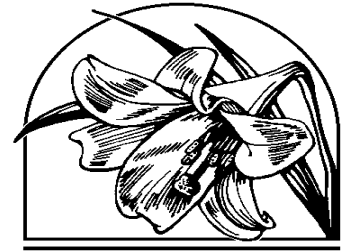
Mr. Alan Shawn Feinstein of Cranston, RI, writes: “For the past 9 years, I have been giving away \$1 million each year to anti-hunger agencies throughout the country. Why am I doing this? Because I believe each of us was put here on earth to do what we can to help those in need. This has become the greatest grass roots campaign ever to fight hunger in our country. Your donation makes you a partner in it with me! My money started this campaign but it is YOU who will help decide how many needy people in your city or town will be fed this year. I’m only here to give you some support and to remind you of this: All that will matter to us someday is what we did while we were here to help those who needed us. ... Please give whatever you can – I will gladly add some of my money to yours. My \$1 million will be divided in full proportionately among the agencies receiving donations toward my offer.”

Project Hope has a 2009 food budget of \$50,000.00. They will get \$1.00 credit for each food item donated and \$1.00 credit for each dollar. Project Hope served an average of 493 families a month or 1,215 individuals. In addition to giving out food, they like to give disposable diapers, donated quilts (both adult and baby), bathroom tissue, and other personal care items when available.



## The Vicars Voice

### Easter Blessings



Spring is here. The days are warmer. The winter chill has begun to dissipate (along with our New Year's resolutions). Even so, a sense of hope is in the air. Easter renewal and rebirth are calling us. More important than chocolate and pretty dresses, is the story of Easter that still speaks to the hearts and minds of Christians everywhere. Each Gospel has a slightly different account of that first Easter morning. I'd like to remind you of John's Gospel...

*John 20:1-19*

*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

*But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.*

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Judeans, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."*

I always get a little choked-up when I read this story. I can't help but think about the stones in my life that need to be rolled away. I can't help but think about the locked doors that I hide behind. Fortunately, the good news for us today and always is that Jesus is greater than large stones and locked doors. In fact Jesus is the rock and for that matter Jesus is the door! This Easter, may we look for the Savior in the places where we hide. May we take comfort as we hear Jesus say to us anew, "Peace be with you!"

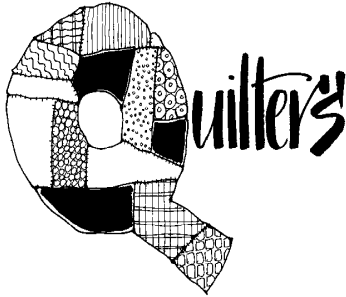
*Vicar Angela Khabeb*

4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.  
Monday thru Thursday

Games, Crafts, and Fun Geared for Elementary Kids!

Free!

Director, Brenda Spahr



### Quilting on Mondays! at 9:00 a.m.

If you have the morning free, drop by and help cut squares and tie quilt tops on to the backs.

Coffee break is at 10:00 a.m.

*The 2009 Flower Chart has been posted on the bulletin board outside the church office.*

### • FLOWER CHART •



We **still** need volunteers to sign up each month to pick up the flowers for the altar. Sign up on the Flower Chart if you are willing to help with this task. The flowers need to be picked up before 10:00 a.m. each Sunday morning at the Hy-Vee at 50th and Center. The church is billed so you will not need to pay for them at the time of pick up. Contact Marilyn Van Ormer or Barb Narducci for more details.

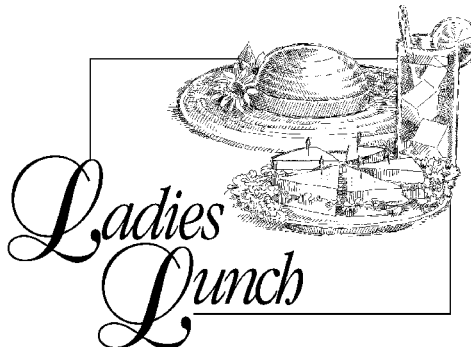
### W/ELCA Board Meeting & W/ELCA Circle Meeting

**April 21<sup>st</sup> 1:00 p.m.**

*Hostess and Bible Study Leader: Gertrude Hufford*



*Women of the Evangelical  
Lutheran Church in America*



### Lutheran Women of Omaha Luncheon

**Program:** "Lauritzen Gardens"-Duane Iwen  
**Project:** Lutheran Outdoor Ministry

**Reservation Required by Sunday, April 12**  
**Contact Mardell Gocek, 292-1328**  
Cost is \$6.00 per person



# LENTEN CALENDAR

Wednesday Nights

6:00 p.m. Lenten Supper

7:00 p.m. Lenten Service

March 25

Dinner Hostesses

Grace Women of  
the ELCA

Speaker

Pastor Nate Houfek  
on Psalm 46

April 1

Dinner Hostess

*Volunteer Needed*

Speaker

Pastor Judith Rain-  
forth on 2 Kings

17:7 - 23



Sunday, March 29

9:00 a.m. Adult Sunday School

10:30 a.m. Worship Service

Choral Presentation by the Rejoice Lutheran Choir



**Palm Sunday, April 5**

9:00 a.m. Adult Sunday School.

10:30 Palm Sunday Worship Service.



**Maundy Thursday, April 9**

6:00 p.m. Lenten Supper.

7:00 p.m. Maundy Thursday Service.



**Good Friday, April 10**

No Supper.

7:00 p.m. Good Friday Service.



**Easter, April 12**

6:30 a.m. Easter Sunrise Service

7:30 a.m. Breakfast served by the Moyer/Hula families.

9:00 a.m. Adult Sunday School Class.

10:30 a.m. Easter Worship with Communion.



## Prayer Concerns from Family and Friends

- ♥ Elna Burns - Suffered a stroke. (Sister of Don Olson, member)
- ♥ Andrew Edwards - Doing dialysis a couple times a week until a kidney can be found. (member)
- ♥ Teri Briley - Cancer treatments continue. (daughter of Gloria and Richard Moore)
- ♥ Sandy Fitzgerald - Cancer treatment continues. (member)
- ♥ London Colstan - tiny infant struggling with liver problems. (Friend of Morlan/Olson family)
- ♥ David Nange - Healing for regulation of blood pressure and headaches. (Council Member)
- ♥ Fern Matson - Ongoing Health issues. (member)
- ♥ Allisia Fredrickson -Had surgery to repair shattered ankle & torn ligaments. (KAW Alumni)
- ♥ Ambros Lado - Ongoing Health issues as a result of his cancer. (member)
- ♥ Kristine (Nelson) Mauler -Treatment for her cancer. (former member and daughter of Barb Nelson )
- ♥ Arlone Farber - Treatment for her cancer. (member)
- ♥ Wendy Henexson - Recovery from transplant surgery. (daughter of Pastor Liz Conner)

Can We Pray for you?

Contact the church office or one of the staff with your prayer concerns.

### **Pray for our Shut - ins and Nursing Home residents:**

Mae Lane

Richard Moore

Thelma Harrahill - (In Kansas with her children)

Pray for wisdom for your Church Council here at Grace Church.

Pray for our Vicar, Angela and her family..

Pray for strength and spiritual wisdom for the leaders in the local church and the Nebraska Synod:

Pastor Laaker

Bishop David deFreese, Nebraska Synod

Bishop Mark Hanson, ELCA Bishop, United States

- ♥ Pray for the Sudanese community. Titus Duli, David Nange and Charles Tuw are the elders for the Sudanese Worshiping Community.
- ♥ Pray for Jadin Kora. Jadin Kora was born with a disabling birth injury to his arm and shoulder.
- ♥ John Ivo Mounto - As commissioner of Mabaan, Ivo has many responsibilities both to his province and to Southern Sudan as he does representative and ambassador work in various refugee camps to raise support for important elections in 2011. His work makes him a target. Pray for his safety!
- ♥ Pray for peace to prevail in the Middle East.

"Grant that I may not pray alone with the mouth;  
help me that I may pray from the depths of my heart."

Martin Luther

# Kids At Work 2009



Above is a picture from a special day; it is the Kids At Work Awards Ceremony this past August.

The youth that participated during the summer of 2008 had fun making new friends even forming friendships with team leaders and members here at Grace Lutheran Church.

The Kids At Work Program, a program that links elementary and middle school aged youth to faithful worship, learning responsibility and saving their earnings, needs people to volunteer to be team leaders on Tuesday or Wednesday mornings from 9:45 a.m. to 12:00 noon during June and July.

We hear “step out of your comfort zone” frequently throughout the year; this is the best time of the year to consider stepping out. It’s spring; summer is just around the corner. Most of us are making summer plans with the intention of those plans to be enjoyable and memorable.

You do not need to commit the whole summer to helping out, there are options available; you can work once or twice during the summer or weekly, your help would be welcomed. Accordingly, I will not turn away anyone who insists on helping everyday with the program.

Team Leaders make a difference; leaders are there to encourage the youth to complete job tasks correctly. Youth may discover job skills they enjoy completing or job skills they know will not be in their future. This program brings an increasing awareness in different activities in the workplace in the surrounding neighborhood for the youth.

Being a team leader is not the only way to help with Kids At Work. When the youth return to church after completing their daily job tasks at various work sites, they are hungry and thirsty. Please consider providing a simple snack or beverage.

If you have a project idea that you think the Kids At Work could do for the church or for someone in the area, give me a call at church, 341-7730 or at home, 551-4347.

**Brenda Spahr**  
*Kids At Work, Director*

# Community News



Anxious? Sad? Stressed? Marriage difficulties? Family Troubles?  
Free or reduced rate Counseling is Available.

If you would like more information or to set up an appointment, please call Allyson *Campbell* at South High at 557-3675 or St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church at 733-0172.

Allyson is the counselor for the South Omaha area. The service is made available to members of the community through the support from the Nebraska Methodist Hospital Foundation.



**Habitat for Humanity Coalition Orientation, Saturday, April 4, 8:30 am-12:00 pm.**

What Does Poverty Housing Look Like in Omaha? Find out during Habitat for Humanity's Coalition Orientation. You'll learn what poverty housing really looks like in our city. We'll share not only the number of Omaha families living in poverty but some of their amazing stories as well. You'll also learn about how to further engage your church in the ministry of Habitat and hear the story of how one family's life was changed by homeownership.

**Your attendance could help your coalition win \$1,000 toward your 2009 house sponsorship!**

Register by contacting Nina Graziano, Faith Relations Coordinator, at 457-5657, ext. 109 or by email at [ngraziano@habitatomaha.org](mailto:ngraziano@habitatomaha.org).

Tracie McPerson Faith Relations Director

*Happening in the Library!  
Lent Book Sale is still continues  
A sale table has been set up in  
the  
Upper Fellowship Hall.  
Please place your donations in  
the  
box on the sale table.*



**DON'T  
FORGET  
TO VOTE**

**Primary Election at Grace**

April 07, 2009  
8:30 AM - 5:00 PM

# News from the Families of Grace Lutheran Church



Dear friends at Grace,

I would like to sincerely thank you for your cards, support and continued prayers during my daughters ongoing treatment and recovery process. I certainly find great comfort in my "church family".

Thanks once again and God's Blessings!

*Barbara Nelson*

Dear friends at Grace,

Thank you so much for coming to my 80th birthday celebration on March 15. It was a very happy and joyous time for me and I hope it was for you as well. Thank you, very much, friends and family at Grace Lutheran Church.

Again, thank you, and may God bless each and everyone of you.

*Ken Hilmer*

## Faith Quest

**Seek ye first the kingdom of God**

Grace will resume its Faith Quest outreach program that equipped the saints with the Word of God, on April 29. It starts at 5:30 PM with dinner, provided by volunteers, please feel free to sign up. God's Blessings and Peace!

Join Us On  
Sunday, March 29  
10:30 a.m.

The Rejoice Lutheran Choir of Omaha, NE, under the direction of Ray Swart, will present an Easter Musical Program during our worship hour.

A cookie reception is planned after the service. Volunteers are needed to sign up and bring baked treats for the event. A sign up sheet has been posted on the bulletin board.



## Columbus Park Neighborhood Meeting

April 16, at Grace Lutheran Church  
7:00 PM  
(LFH)





Virginia McGill  
Director, 660-6689

Gema Wolde  
616-4721

Se habla español.

### Interfaith Health Service Offering Youth Art Program

In February, Interfaith began a Pilot Art Program, Artists in Action, for the children of Latinas In Action participants. The Artists in Action project is funded by Thrivent for Lutherans and Arts for All and utilizes the talents of Maria Palma, a certified art instructor with the Omaha Public School System. Maria's work as an artist is impressive. Her mediums include murals, oil paintings, watercolors, and ceramics. She also is certified as a dual language instructor within OPS.

Since Maria's talents are so artistically diverse, I held several focus groups with our participants and their children to determine the type of art participants wanted incorporate into our pilot program. Requests centered on offering an opportunity to make crafts, paint, and make ceramics. Thus far, Maria's classes have been designed to focus on each of these topics for several weeks. The remaining structure of the program will be reviewed and adjusted to accommodate the broad age range of youth that attend class each week. Classes have averaged 15 students, ranging in age from 5 to 16 years old.

So much hinges on any pilot program, it seems. Before Interfaith moves forward with any program, we attempt to "set ourselves up for success" in finding the right class to offer, the right teacher, and introducing something that will meet the needs of our participants. The foundation developed in a pilot program can influence the word of mouth about the program, enthusiasm for continuing it, program demand, grant funder review and satisfaction, and participant attendance. Maria has proved to be an outstanding leader who brings many gifts to Interfaith in helping us organize this type of program.

It has been so exciting to see our youth responsive and excited in making art and designing their very own creations! It is my goal to have a simple exhibit of all of their artwork set up for display at a few different sites in Omaha. In the meantime, please feel free to check out a couple of pictures of the students and their completed work at our website: ["http://www.interfaithhealth.org"](http://www.interfaithhealth.org)

Many thanks for your prayers and support as we move forward with Artists in Action.

*Virginia McGill, Interfaith*