

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

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REGULAR SUNDAY EVENTS

9:00 A.M. Christian Education

10:30 A.M. Worship Service

Pastor - Rev. Dr. Damon D. Laaker

Youth Ministries - Brenda Spahr

Organist - Lynda Laird

Sexton - Brian Sutej/Titus Duli

Interfaith Health Ministries - Virginia McGill

Lutheran Volunteer - Anna Ernst

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

January 2011



*Ye shall find the babe
wrapped in swaddling
clothes, lying in a manger.*

Luke 2:12

THE GRACE MESSENGER

Council minutes.....

Anna will be having some conversation with the neighbors to explore some different ideas. The Council will keep the congregation updated as time goes on.

Finance: Pastor Laaker purchased \$50.00 gift certificates for the staff from “Trader Joe’s” for Christmas. We certainly appreciate the entire staff at Grace and feel very blessed to have a great crew. The Council had some discussion on the amount that Grace would commit to Mission Share next year. A decision will be reached at the January 2011 meeting.

Property: There is no new information on the property to the north of the church that is for sale. After the holidays, Pastor Laaker is going to fill out a “preliminary review” form to see if acquiring the property is even feasible.

Service/Social Ministry: The Council voiced their opinions on the Mayoral recall. It was a consensus that too much money would be wasted by the city, when it could be put to use for better things that are needed for the community.

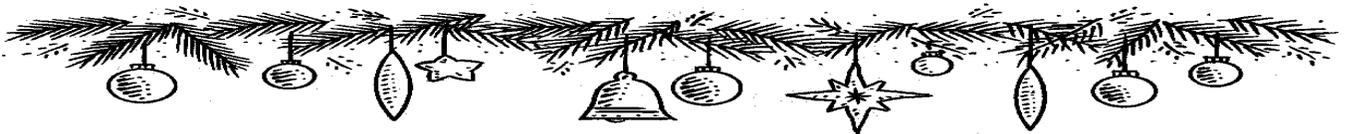
Support/Stewardship: The Fall Stewardship materials have been collected, but no specifics until the January 2011 meeting.

Worship: The one worship service on Christmas Eve at Grace this year will be at 6:00 p.m. on Friday, December 24th. Three of our ministry partners will have a later service if anyone would like to attend.

Unfinished Business: No unfinished business.

New Business: Gloria Moore, Vicki Cox, and David Nange have fulfilled their duties on the Council and we will be looking for nominees. Greg Hula, Vicki Cox, along with one member from the congregation, will be on the Nomination Committee. An Audit Committee will be formed to review books and see that they correctly reflect the actions of the year.

Announcements: Benhi, the present Church Secretary, has given his notice of resignation to Pastor Laaker. The Secretary position has been filled by Brenda Spahr. We thank Benhi for his contributions and we are grateful to have Brenda, with her knowledge and experience, step up and fill this position. Arlone Farber will bring treats and lead the closing pray for our January 2011 Council meeting.





Christmas has so many things to teach us. It occurs to me that we often learn the most from our children. There is an old story about a man who punished his 3-year-old daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper. Money was tight, and he became infuriated when she tried to decorate a box to put under the Christmas tree. Nevertheless, the little girl brought the gift to her father the next morning and said, "This is for you, Daddy."

The father was embarrassed by his earlier overreaction once he realized the gift was for him. He opened the gift, but his anger flared again when he found that the box was empty. He raised his voice at her, "Don't you know that when you give someone a present, there's supposed to be something inside of it?"

The little girl looked up at him with tears in her eyes and said, "Oh, Daddy it's not empty. I blew kisses into the box. All for you, Daddy." The father was crushed. He put his arms around his little girl, and he begged her forgiveness. He kept that gold box by his bed for years. Whenever he was discouraged, he would take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it there.

In a very real sense, each of us has been given a gold container filled with unconditional love and kisses from God. The birth of Christ is a marvelous gift that blesses us each and every day. In addition, through the sacrifice of Jesus, God's "one and only Son," we have the access to eternal life.

While there are those times when it seems as if God has left us to make it on our own, and there are those times when it appears as if we cannot go any further in life, there is no more precious possession anyone could hold than the gold box filled with the love of God.

I invite you to come and experience the wonder and love of God as we celebrate Christmas.

Christmas Eve Worship, Friday, December 24, 6:00 pm

Pastor Laaker

Christmas Prayer

by Johanna Fuchs

Dear Lord, as we celebrate Your birth, let us remember that You are the true reason for Christmas. Let every sparkling light remind us how You illuminate our lives, a shining beacon to guide us in our thoughts and actions each day, and how You light us from within in the knowledge of Your love and truth. Let the Christmas trees, standing straight, tall unbowed, remind us of Your uprightness, Your goodness, Your perfection and Your refusal to bow to worldly temptations, no matter how great the challenge or trouble. Lord, as we feast on Christmas treats, let us remember that You are the sole provider of everything worth having, that all good things come from You. And as we enjoy our gifts, let us never forget that You are the greatest gift of all--our wonderful Savior, Counselor, Giver of an eternal life whose wonders we cannot imagine. So as we delight in Christmas, the happiest and brightest of holidays, let us remember there would be no Christmas without You, Lord, and let us our hearts be filled with joy, and love and thankfulness, this Christmas and the ones to come. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.



Anna Ernst
Community Outreach Associate
Grace Lutheran/ St. Lukes Lutheran Church
Lutheran Volunteer Corps (LVC) Volunteer

I hope your holiday celebrations were as wonderful as I anticipate mine being as I'm sitting here writing this article, just a few days before Christmas. What a joy, blessing, and good thing to relax and spend time with family and old friends! Of course, I am so grateful for my new friends at Grace, as well, and thankful for your donations to the holiday cookie-baking party for our three after-school program girls, who had a blast (turn a few more pages to see a picture!). What a wonderful, generous congregation!

It will continue to be an honor to have the opportunity to serve St. Luke's and Grace as the calendar year rolls into the next decade. This month, I wanted to share a story with you about one of my teachers and mentors to whom I will always be grateful because of the many opportunities he has given me, including one that I was surprised and very happy to receive, because I did not really expect it to come from him.

Dr. Jeffrey Pannebaker, A.I.M., or "JP" to the many high schoolers he has led in choirs, is Director of Music Ministry at my home church, St. Luke Lutheran Church in Silver Spring, MD. He directs the high school choir and bell choir that were a very important part of my high school life. The choirs meet weekly for rehearsal – the high school choir sings every other Sunday and for Christmas and Easter, and the bell choir performs a few times a year for Sunday services and at Christmas. Once a year in the spring, both choirs get time off school for a long weekend tour and travel to churches within a three or four hour radius to perform. JP makes fellowship a crucial part of rehearsal, giving the choir a free pizza dinner once a month and making time for fun on the tour as well, which leads to strong friendships among choir members.

JP gave my friends and I, not always the most well-trained vocalists, opportunities to sing solos, duets, trios, or quartets in choir, to learn new music, to travel, and to learn how much people appreciated our performing. He offered me the chance to be Assisting Minister in my early years of high school, a great leadership development opportunity. I also got to develop my leadership opportunity as a counselor and violin teacher for the Choir Camp that JP runs for a week every summer for elementary school age children. He had me perform on violin for some services, play in small chamber orchestras for special concerts, and even gave me the opportunity to perform a Haydn violin concerto with an orchestra during my senior year of high school. JP also hosts a choir rehearsal and dinner for young adults college-age and older during Thanksgiving and Christmas break, for performances on Christmas and the Sunday after. And I am so grateful that he has written me many a recommendation, including one that helped me get my current position serving you!

Last summer, I was working during some of the days of Choir Camp, so I could not be a counselor, but JP called me the week before and asked me if I wanted to lead morning devotions on the last day of camp. The theme was "musical instruments," and I thought that he wanted me to come in and help teach violin or something like that. But instead, JP asked me if I would talk about my service experiences in high school and college and explain to the kids what I was going to be doing soon as a member of the Lutheran Volunteer Corps. He wanted me to talk about being a human instrument – ways that people can sing God's praises through the instruments of their hearts and minds.

When I stood up in front of the campers on that Friday morning, I did have quite a few stories to share from my own life. But it was so cool that JP and the church leadership had given me some other examples of ways to be a human instrument. During the week of camp, JP had the kids bring in school supplies to donate to kids in need for the upcoming fall, and they were piled up in front of the kids on tables in our sanctuary. That was an easy example I could literally point to so the campers could see and think about how their generosity would help serve others. I also talked about the summer worship and block party that my church has held for a few years now for the congregation and community and how that was a great celebration because so many people, all kinds of people, could come together to worship and sing, eat and play. Simply being together at that party and in the sanctuary, the campers could be human instruments of God's word. And my music director wanted me to tell them that!

I will do my best in 2011 to remember that, even when I have tough days, there is always some way that I can be a human instrument of compassion and love towards others, and that opportunities – for community outreach and service - may arise from unexpected places.

Community News

W/ELCA Board
Meeting
January 18th
1:00 p.m.

Hostess: LaVonne Moss



W/ELCA Circle
Meeting

January 18th
1:00 p.m.

Hostess:
Marilyn Van Omer

2011 Flower Chart

The 2011 Flower Chart will be posted on the bulletin board outside the church office.

The Flower Chart sign-up is your opportunity to sponsor flowers for a special Sunday in honor of an important event in your family's life or in memory of someone dear to you. The cost to sponsor flowers for a Sunday is \$12.00.



We need volunteers to sign up each month to pick up the flowers for the altar.

Sign up on the Flower Chart.

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 Joe Narducci for more details.

Our Mitten tree is filling up thanks to the generosity of our church family. Many hand made items have been donated as well as lovely store-bought items. The tree will continue to stand until at least the end of December/early January when the items will be divided among several organizations. Look for more details in the February Newsletter.

If you see a great buy on warm winter accessories after the mitten tree program is over, don't forget our Sudanese friends. Drop off any winter items at the church office and we will see that a needy family gets them. We have been able to give many of them gloves and hats but there is always a need for more.





Grace Church Member, Family and Friend Requests

- ◆ Andrew Edwards - Doing dialysis a couple times a week until a kidney can be found. (member)
- ◆ Mae Lane - Ongoing health issues. (member)
- ◆ Ken Hilmer - As he struggles with health issues. (member)
- ◆ La Vonne Moss - Ongoing health issues. (member)
- ◆ Ferne Matson - Ongoing health issues. (member)
- ◆ Barbara Nelson - as she recovers from a stroke. (member)
- ◆ Barbara Narducci - as she continues to recovers from her fall. (member)
- ◆ Martina Botho - As she recovers from burns and skin grafting surgery.(member)
- ◆ Carolyn Matson - as she recovers from surgery. (member)
- ◆ Brian and Margie Sutej - as he recovers from a broken leg. (member)
- ◆ The Harrahill family as they mourn the loss of Thelma.

Pray for our Shut - ins and Nursing Home residents:

Mae Lane - St Joe Villa.

Barbara Nelson - Life Care Center, Elkhorn.

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

Pray for the Council Members. Ask God to bless their ministry among us.

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 in general. Titus Duli, David Nange and Charles Tuw are the elders for the Sudanese Worshiping Community.

*Let's encourage each other as we see God's hand
in answering our prayers.*



Are You Connected?

News and Ministry at Grace Lutheran Church



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 quilts go to Lutheran World Relief.

Annual Report Time!

All chairpersons from each committee and organization should have their annual report summary in by the first week of January. The treasurer's reports will be due the second week of January. Please try to meet these deadlines so that our report can be put together for distribution on Sunday, January 23.

The Annual Meeting and Potluck is scheduled for January 30.

Please turn your reports in on time!

From the Editor

Sisters and brothers of Grace Lutheran Church,

I write to you with mixed emotions. The time has come that I will be leaving my position at Grace. My family and I will soon be moving away to continue our ministry in the body of Christ. We are saddened that we will no longer be with you on a regular basis but, at the same time, we are excited to begin a new chapter in our lives. At times like these, when we launch out on new adventures, it is important to walk by faith. I am mindful of the hymn *This Far by Faith*.

We've come this far by faith
Leaning on the Lord.
Trusting in His holy word
He's never failed me yet.
Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh
Can't turn around
We've come this far by faith!

Hopefully we will stay connected as God's will for our lives continue to unfold. It is our prayer that you all have a joyous Holiday Season and a prosperous New Year!

In Peace,
Benhi Khabeb

"Helping Hands"

Working Together in God's service



Project Hope
4205 Boyd St
Omaha, NE 68111

Project Hope The Theme for January is **Baking Supplies**

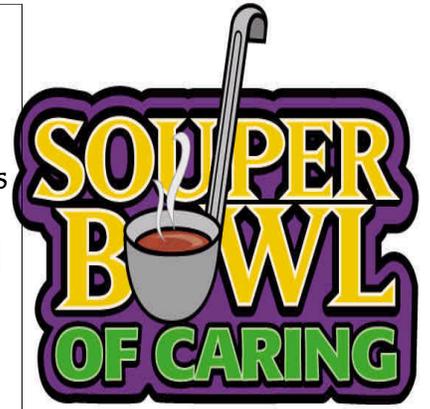
Flour, Sugar, Brown Sugar,
Cooking Oil, Baking Powder,
Baking Soda, Shortening, Bisquick



Project Hope always needs boxes of zip lock bags in quart or gallon size, soup, peanut butter, macaroni, pasta, rice, diapers, bathroom tissue and Toiletries, feminine hygiene items, soap and paper products.



Your Pre-Game Plan
Have everyone save the date-
Sunday, February 6, 2011
Set a goal for the number of dollars
to be collected/or food items.
Decide which local charity you will
be collecting for.
Visit www.souperbowl.org



Our youth will hold soup pots at church doors on Souper Bowl Sunday, February 6th. They will join young people in churches all across the country to collect money for those who are hungry and hurting.

In 2010, youth groups in all 50 states and outside the United States participated in the Souper Bowl of Caring generating \$5,010,510.66. All of the money collected is donated to a charity selected by the participant. None of the money is sent to Souper Bowl headquarters.

Organizers only ask that each participant report their collection so national totals can be determined and announced. Our church will donate the Souper Bowl collection to the Lutheran Pantry. Since the Souper Bowl of Caring became a national grassroots event in 1993, more than \$29 million has gone to help those in need. Please support the youth of our church in this effort to "love our neighbors" by dropping your dollar in the soup pot on February 6, 2011.

Happenin' in the Grace Lutheran Church Library

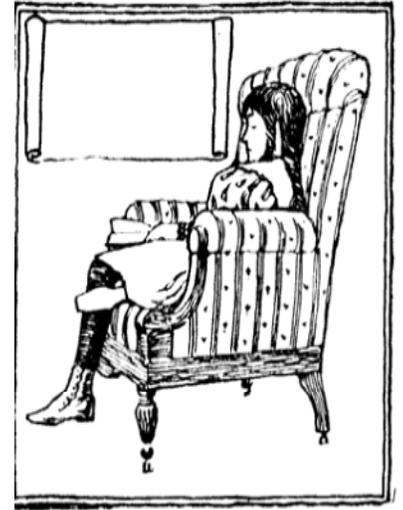
Picture This!

Feet up with a warm blanket around your shoulders, a cup of tea or cocoa and a good book on a cold winter evening.

Your church library is a great place to find something good to read.

More new books have been added to complete several series.

Check it Out!!



Got Your 2011 Scripture Calendar Yet?

This is a beautiful, high quality calendar with scripture verses and wonderful scenes.

Similar calendars at the mall and stationary shops sell for up to \$12.00!

Buy Them for Gifts or for Yourself.

Only \$5.00 each

Hurry! Quantities are Limited!



Back By Popular Demand! 4th Annual Used book Sale

Book Shelves at Home Too Full?
Donate a few for the Used Book Sale!

In late-January, the Library Board will set out a box and will be collecting your book donations in preparation for the book sale beginning on Ash Wednesday.

On March 9th, a table displaying the books for sale will be set up in the Upper Fellowship Hall. Most books are priced inexpensively so be sure to stop by and take a look.

All types of books, fiction and non-fiction, adult and children's are welcome as long as they promote good moral values and are in fair condition.

All the money raised go for Library books and Library Projects.



Virginia McGill,
Director (402) 660-6689
Gema Wolde, Assistant
(402) 616-4721
Se habla español .

Interfaith Health Service Participants and Programs Celebrate Christmas!

This month has been busy with many celebrations together in our different IHS programs. Celebrations for Christmas began at Latina Resource Center, home to our Latinas in Micro Business sewing and educational classes. I asked our participants for ideas in celebrating our first Christmas together and they were unanimous in sharing that they wanted a “working” Christmas party. Our women didn’t want to miss a class in lieu of a party, rather, they asked if we could combine a party with their classes. This highlights that our micro-business classes have garnered a committed and eager group of students! Our women have learned a lot this past semester, from how to use a machine to how to sew zippers on skirts. I suggested that our party include all of us bringing in items that needed sewing from our families. Did this idea ever take off! All participants brought in multiple items, including school outfits, party dresses and work pants. Much of the fun of the day surrounded making these items useful again. As Anabel, a student who has not missed a single class summed it up: “We don’t have much money for gifts this year in my family, but since I have learned how to fix up clothes that are still so beautiful, my children can wear them again! I’m proud I can do this for them!” The party wasn’t all work, we each brought in some desserts and shared stories about Christmas traditions.

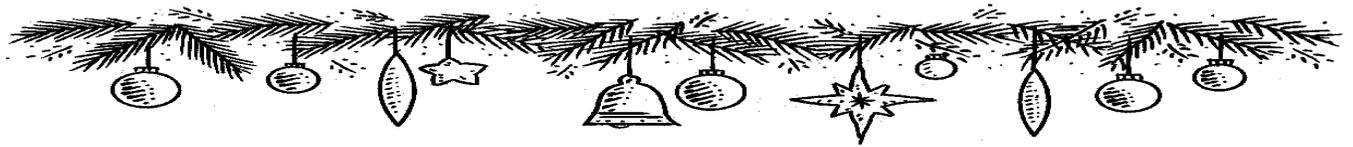
Our Latinas in Action classes also celebrated Christmas with a Zumbathon and potluck held at Grace Lutheran Church. As always, Gema did a tremendous job in decorating and thinking of many creative, low budget special ideas to make the day memorable. For Gema and me, it was amazing to see our different participants lead the entire group in various songs and dance steps. Many of our participants were new to dance completely, so seeing them have the confidence to lead and engage the other participants was tremendous. Two of our South High School students, Maria and Michelle, surprised everyone in leading for two different songs, and did so with poise and maturity. Other leaders included Olivia, Norma, Dora, Maria, Ilda, Gema, Maria Y and Aricela. Games included a Christmas gift exchange. Participants and all staff each shared a bit about what we are grateful for this holiday. First and foremost, all of us shared that we are grateful for our children and families. Participants and instructors also shared that they are grateful for having time to celebrate together and shared that Latinas in Action has helped improve self-esteem, fitness and health and that the group is like a 2nd family.

Our Amigos in Action Youth Program also celebrated Christmas with an evening devoted to making crafts for family members. Many of our younger participants go to different schools, but make time to get together each Wednesday and Friday evening to see one another, compare notes about school, talk about books and catch up. This sense of community is one that makes our celebrations together much more connected and special. The ease with which the youth interact with one another and share their stories is a true blessing to behold.

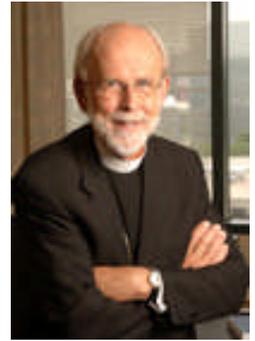
Our Latinas Unidas program, reaching survivors of domestic violence, also got together at our usual Monday time to celebrate Christmas with an afternoon of dancing. Maria, our instructor, compiled a special mix of tunes for the day. We were pleased to be joined by several students from UNO who have been meeting with me to discern volunteering within our programs. The best summary of the day came from Martha, one of our participants who attended with her 3 children and shared: “I’m going to miss this group over the holidays! I am very motivated to return in 2011 because I will miss seeing everyone!”

During this Christmas season, we remain grateful for your prayers and support. Without you, our work in the community would not be possible.

Virginia McGill, IHS
Gema Wolde, IHS



2010 Christmas Message from Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson



Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation!” (Isaiah 52:7)

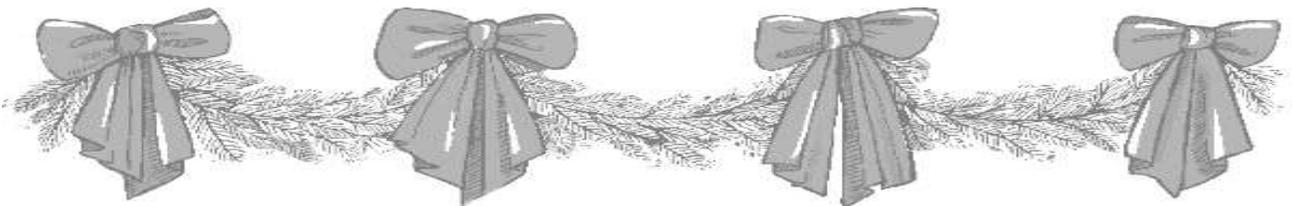
When Jesus was born, angelic messengers broke the still calm of a Galilean night to sing joyously and proclaim, “This very day in David’s city a Savior is born for you — God’s Promised One, your Lord.” Glad tidings of great joy! Common shepherds were the first and heartiest heralds of the promised Savior’s arrival then, and today the joy in Jesus’ birth fills every corner of this season.

Admittedly sometimes in modern America the commercial clatter and cultural clutter of the season seem to overtake the angels’ song and the shepherds’ joyous news. But such a majestic message of God’s salvation cannot be silenced. Some loudly lament that the world will not listen to the Gospel message, but in this season so many beckon.

“Christians, sing with us. Bring your songs of Christmas, of Jesus.” A few may shush you, just as there were those who would later attempt to silence Jesus and his message of God’s remarkable, revolutionary mercy, even to the point of crucifixion.

If so, then that is all the more reason to enter into the commotion and clutter, to let go of your inhibitions, to join the angels in singing and the shepherds in exulting with unashamed joy: Jesus, the Savior is born!

“Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy.” “See, your salvation comes.” (Isaiah 52:8; 62:11)





- ◆ January is named after Janus, the Roman god of doorways and of beginnings and endings. He is represented with a two sided head, one looking ahead and the other always looking behind
- ◆ January has 31 days.
- ◆ January's birthstone is garnet.
- ◆ January's flower is the carnation or snowdrop.
- ◆ January is National Soup Month in the United States.

Special Days in January

- ◆ 1 - Happy New Year
- ◆ 11 - Church Council Meets.
- ◆ 14- ALL Annual Report Submissions MUST be in.
- ◆ 18 - Womens Circle Meeting
- ◆ 19 - Prayer Service of Quiet Meditation
- ◆ 30 - Annual Meeting & Potluck Dinner

The seasons according to a French Revolutionary calendar:

Autumn - wheezy, sneezy, freezy
Winter - slippy, drippy, nippy
Spring - showery, flowery, bowery
Summer - hoppy, croppy, poppy

TRUE Questions
as heard at the
information kiosks manned by
Parks Canada staff:

Tourist: "How do you get your lakes so blue?"

Park staff: "We take the water out in the winter and paint the bottom."

Tourist: "Oh!"

How do the elk know they're supposed to cross at the "Elk Crossing" signs?

Where can I get my husband really, REALLY, lost??



OH.....
We purchased an old home in Northern New York State from two elderly sisters. Winter was fast approaching and I was concerned about the house's lack of insulation. "If they could live here all those years, so can we!" my husband confidently declared.

One November night the temperature plunged to below zero, and we woke up to find interior walls covered with frost. My husband called the sisters to ask how they had kept the house warm. After a rather brief conversation, he hung up. "For the past 30 years," he muttered, "they've gone to Florida for the winter."



An elderly couple was watching television one evening. "I am going to get a dish of ice cream now," the wife said.

Kindly, the husband offered to get the ice cream for his wife. "I'll write it down so you don't forget," she said." "I won't forget," the old gent said. "But, I want chocolate syrup and nuts on it. So, I'll write it down," she replied. "I will get you the ice cream. Don't you worry," replied the husband.

A few minutes later, the old man returned with bacon and eggs. His wife said, "See, I should have written it down because you forgot the toast."



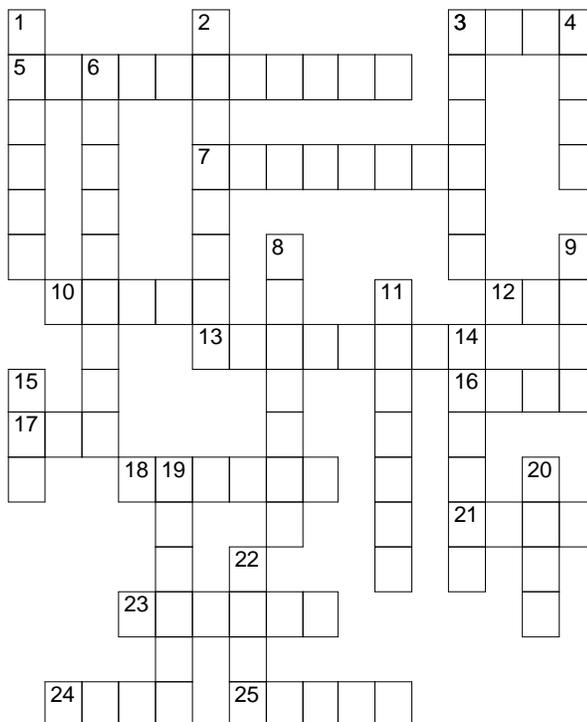
Laughter is a smile with the volume turned up.

What does an atheist do when he drives up behind a car with a "Honk if you love Jesus" bumper sticker and that car doesn't move when the traffic light turns green?

Matthew, Chapter 11, Puzzle 1

Across

3. hearing impaired
5. training, educating
7. speak against
10. high-pitched
woodwind instrument
12. misery resulting from
affliction
13. one who drinks too
much
15. used for hearing
17. residue from burning
18. jail
21. listen intently
23. give account
24. state of inaction
25. rhythmical steps in
time to music



Down

1. kept from view
2. weighed down, troubled
3. a dry place
4. superior to the average
6. coarse garment worn to
show remorse
8. one who eats too much
9. information, report
11. loud utterance
14. deepest and most
remote part
15. take in solid food
19. turn from wicked ways
20. unable to walk
22. pleasant, enjoyable

WORD LIST

ash	deaf	drunkard	flute	hidden	prison	sackcloth
burdened	denounce	ears	glutton	instructing	repent	woe
calling	depths	eat	good	lame	report	
dance	desert	fine	hear	news	rest	

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All I Need to Know About Life I Learned from a Snowman

- ◆ It's okay if you're a little bottom heavy.
- ◆ Hold your ground, even when the heat is on.
- ◆ Wearing white is always appropriate.
- ◆ Winter is the best of the four seasons.
- ◆ It takes a few extra rolls to make a good midsection.
- ◆ There's nothing better than a foul weather friend.
- ◆ The key to life is to be a jolly, happy soul.
- ◆ We're all made up of mostly water.
- ◆ You know you've made it when they write a song about you.
- ◆ Accessorize! Accessorize! Accessorize!
- ◆ Avoid yellow snow.
- ◆ Don't get too much sun.
- ◆ It's embarrassing when you can't look down and see your feet.
- ◆ It's fun to hang out in your front yard.
- ◆ Always put your best foot forward.
- ◆ There's no stopping you once you're on a roll.

