

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

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Email: graceluth@graceluth.com

Web Site: www.graceluth.com

REGULAR SUNDAY EVENTS

9:00 A.M. Christian Education

10:30 A.M. Worship Service

Pastor - Rev. Dr. Damon D. Laaker

Editor/Church Secretary – Brenda Spahr

Organist - Colleen Jeffrey

Sexton - Nenchi Ilka

Interfaith Health Ministries - Virginia McGill

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

December

2011



THE
GRACE
MESSENGER



2011 Council Members

Titus Duli	Andrew Edwards	Arlone Farber	Ralph Fitle
David Hufford	Greg Hula	Carolyn Matson	Ernie Olson
Samantha Trejo	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 on November 15. The Council members shared their prayer concerns for the following individuals who are having health issues: Rex Olson, Mary Olson, Sue Rose, Elna Burns, Twyla Winterfeld, and Pastor Judy Gifford. We pray for the families of Karen Leuring, Phil Minino, and John Ptacek, as they grieve the loss of their loved ones. We continue to pray for our shut-ins: Barbara Nelson, Barb Narducci, and Mae Lane; we pray for people across the nation that are unemployed; we pray for justice in immigration reform; we continue to pray for the countries of Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa, where drought, famine, and poverty plague the lands; we pray the positive response to the parking lot project; we pray for leaders to put aside political feelings and unite together in finding solutions to the economic crisis; we pray for more wisdom and less violence in our city; we pray for Penn State University as they deal with abuse allegations and pray for loving support of the victims, families, students, and personnel; we pray for the needs of our Sudanese brothers and sisters; we pray for the people in New South Sudan, who are facing many issues as they start a new country, as well as some violence that has taken place; we are ever so thankful during this Thanksgiving time to have an abundance of food, friends, and blessings; we sing praises of Thanksgiving for the wonderful gift of Gertrude Hufford sharing her 103rd birthday with us at Grace; we pray for the safety of armed service personnel, police and patrol officers.

Devotions were led by Pastor Laaker reading the selected verses of Isaiah 57:18 and James 5:15 from the "Daily Texts." Isaiah lets us know that God's goodness and grace provides comfort, even when pain and suffering takes place. God doesn't give up on us—he heals and restores our "souls", and forgives our sins. James reaffirms what Isaiah is saying. God sees the brokenness in each one of us inside and outside. We are truly forgiven and healed for all of our sins that we have committed. God has a "purposeful" point of healing our sins and illnesses.

Visions for Ministry: The Council continued their discussion on the book titled, "Leadership in Congregations."

Reports were received from the Financial Secretary and the Treasurer. Please continue to give generously.

Christian Education: No new report.

Evangelism/Outreach: Retired Pastor Paul Petersen sent some pictures highlighting the "South Sudan Water Project and Development Organization." This project is able to provide water for twelve different villages.

Continued...

Finance: Grace's giving efforts to World Hunger have been applauded by the Nebraska Synod Hunger Taskforce. We are thankful for the generosity of our congregational giving. The same generous giving shows in Pastor Paul Petersen's water project. To have other people in the world benefit from good water and efforts to alleviate hunger are two of the best gifts we can truly give.

Property: Our parking lot project is moving along nicely. The north side wall should be done this week. The Council would like to mention their sincere thanks to Pastor Laaker for being the "general contractor" on this project. Pastor is working on a "punch list" to make sure that different phases of this project are completed and properly done.

Service/Social Ministry: No new report.

Support/Stewardship: Grace Lutheran's fall stewardship materials on "Investing for Time and Eternity" will be collected on November 20th. Prayerfully consider what God would have you do for the coming New Year.

Worship: A joint Thanksgiving service was held at Iglesia Cristo Rey Lutheran Church, at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, November 23rd. Everyone was encouraged to attend this service. Iglesia Cristo Rey is located at 4440 South 25th Street.

Unfinished Business: No unfinished business.

New Business: The Christmas Eve worship service will be held at Grace at 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 24th.

On the first Saturday in February of 2012, there will be a cluster gathering for the purpose of raising up names in consideration for the election of a new Bishop at the Synod Assembly in June.

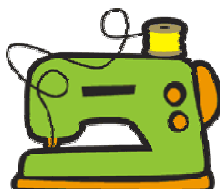
The Council made a recommendation to Pastor Laaker to provide gift certificates for the staff, in appreciation for all the work they do in extending our shared ministry.

Announcements: Brenda Spahr, Vicki Cox, and Pastor Laaker attended a Leadership Conference, which featured Reggie McNeal, a Missional Leadership Specialist. Mr. McNeal enjoys helping people, leaders, and Christian organizations pursue more intentional lives. Beginning this next year, the Council will be reading a book, "Missional Renaissance" written by Reggie McNeal.

David Hufford will bring treats and lead the closing prayer for the December Council Meeting, which is on Tuesday, December 13th.

Gifts to Remember - From the December 2011 edition of The Lutheran Magazine...

A mother's love...When I was 6 or 7 years old, my parents were just starting farming and had very little money. However, I had big wishes. When the Christmas catalog came out, I found a beautiful bride doll that I wanted for my Christmas gift. I asked Santa for nothing else. On Christmas morning my old doll was under the tree dressed in a beautiful bride outfit. My mother, who hated to sew, had made this outfit for my old doll. It wasn't until I was older that I realized just what a precious gift that really was.



Linda Bothwell
Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Dubuque, Iowa



Advent? Christmas? Which is it? I find myself in a state of quandary. My spirit says that it is Advent and time to prepare. My culture says it is Christmas and time to buy, shop, and prepare. Only this preparation has nothing to do with spiritual matters.

On Sunday, the first Sunday of Advent, we heard the prophet Isaiah: “Oh that you would tear open the heavens and come down...” Sometimes, I, too, wish that God would tear open the heavens and come down. I listen to the stories of people longing for meaningful work, families separated by archaic immigration policies, health issues that leave some struggling to survive. I listen to stories about military policies that allow for unmanned drones to bomb villages killing women and children without any sense of horror or dread. I read stories about politicians unwilling to work together to offer solutions to our economic stalemate. Maybe God could sort this all out, just tear open the heavens and come down.

How do I prepare to observe this holy time when there seems to be so many unholy things that demand God’s intervention in order to set things right?

I am grateful for the prophet’s later response: “Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.” This response gives me hope. God is still forming and forgiving.

I was intrigued by a daily devotion that I receive from Fr. Richard Rohr. He writes: Jesus identified his own message with what he called the coming of the “reign of God” or the “kingdom of God,” whereas we have often settled for the sweet coming of a baby who asked little of us in terms of *surrender, encounter, mutuality or any studying of the Scriptures or the actual teaching of Jesus.*

“This is what I am inviting you to this Advent. But be forewarned: the Word of God *confronts, converts, and consoles* us—in that order. The suffering, injustice and devastation on this planet are too great now to settle for any infantile gospel or any infantile Jesus.”

I invite you to find a place for some holy time this Advent. May you experience the real presence of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. May we all surrender to the one who confronts, converts and consoles us.

I invite you to worship on the Sundays of Advent, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. May the presence of Christ bless you and yours.

Pastor Laaker



Property Update

The parking lot project is almost complete. We await the installation of the light poles to complete the new lot. Praise be to God!



Friendly reminder, if you haven't returned your Fall Stewardship information like the Time and Talent form or your Pledge card, you still have time to turn those in! Please mail to the church office or place them in the offering plate on Sunday mornings.

It's that time of year, if you are thinking about making your year end reports for the big annual report, please hesitate no longer! You can certainly send those in early. Save the secretary and act now! Thank you!



Help Marilyn Van Ormer celebrate her 80th birthday! Sunday, December 18, 2011 following the 10:30 a.m. worship service, birthday cake will be served with this joyous celebration!

Merry Christmas
From the Grace Lutheran Staff

Brenda Spahr

Colleen Jeffrey



Pastor Laaker

Nenchi Ilka



Prayer Concerns from Family and Friends

*"We always thank God for all of you and continually
mention you in our prayers. "*

1 Thessalonians 1:2

Those we pray for named below are members unless otherwise specified:

- ◆ Andrew Edwards - Doing dialysis a couple times a week until a kidney can be found.
- ◆ Mae Lane - Ongoing health issues.
- ◆ Ken Hilmer - Ongoing health issues.
- ◆ La Vonne Moss - Ongoing health issues.
- ◆ Barbara Nelson - Ongoing health issues.
- ◆ Barbara Narducci - Ongoing health issues.
- ◆ Jack Williams - Recovery from a fall.
- ◆ Rose Heesacker - as she receives chemotherapy for cancer treatment. (June Hilmer's sister.)
- ◆ Rex Olson - healing during his cancer treatment. (Don Olson's brother.)
- ◆ Elna Burns - healing during chemotherapy. (Don Olson's sister.)
- ◆ Bradley Collett - healing during his treatment for blood clots. (Kids At Work Alumni.)
- ◆ Wanda Black - skin grafting surgery on her legs. (Ernie Olson's Aunt.)
- ◆ Scott Moore - recovery from surgery. (Gloria Moore's son.)
- ◆ Pastor Judy Gifford - recovery from surgery. (Assistant to the Bishop.)
- ◆ Norma Courtney - recovery from surgery. (Arlone Farber's Mom.)
- ◆ Mary Jane King - recovery from stroke. (Donna Adrian's Mom.)
- ◆ Jean Matson - Spiritual healing during stage 4 lung cancer. (Brenda Spahr's Mother-in-Law.)
- ◆ Elaine McKenzie - Strength, healing and recovery during cancer treatments. (Dorothy Novak and Ferne Matson's niece.)

Pray for our Shut - ins and Nursing Home residents:

Mae Lane - St Joe Villa.

Barbara Nelson - Life Care Center, Elkhorn.

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

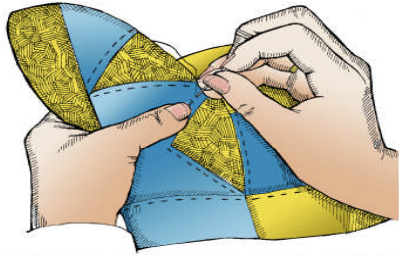
Bishop David deFreese, Nebraska Synod

Bishop Mark Hanson, ELCA Bishop, United States

- ◆ Pray for the Sudanese community in general. 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.*





QUILTING GROUP

Quilting for Lutheran World Relief 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 and joke time is at 10:00 a.m.



Candle light Prayer Service
for Confession,
Meditation and Healing
at Grace Lutheran Church.

People of all faiths are welcome!

The Prayer Meeting has been postponed for December and will be held again on January 18, 2012.



*Women of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America*

Lutheran Women of Omaha
will meet December 13, 2011
for a 12:00 Luncheon at
Rejoice Lutheran Church
2550 South 138th Street
(138th & Center)

Program: Immanuel Village Choir

Project: Monetary-Salvation Army (flood relief).

Reservations By: December 11, 2011
To

Mardelle Gocek - 402-292-1328
Luncheon: \$6.00 COME JOIN US

Each year, people from Grace Lutheran Church bring donations of mittens, gloves, scarves, and other warm items and place them on the tree. These gifts of warmth are donated to area shelters.

The Christmas Mitten Tree will stand in the upper fellowship hall in December.



*Grace Lutheran Church
Christmas Luncheon at
Piccolo Pete's
Monday, December 19, 2011
1:00 p.m.
Everyone Welcome!*

There is a sign-up sheet on the bulleting board, or you can call the church office, 402-341-7730, with your planned reservation.

Community News

The 100th St. Olaf Christmas Festival

Simulcast Live in Movie Theaters Across the Nation

Sunday, December 4, 2011

Preview at 2:30 p.m.

Performance at 3:00 p.m. CST

Check your local theater listings



Buy Your 2012
God's Creation Calendar Today!
Supplies are Limited.

Fundraiser for the
Grace Lutheran Church Library.

Only \$5.00!



PROJECT

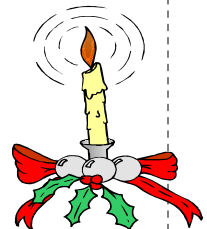
The Theme for December is:
Hats, Mittens, Scarves/Coffee
Tea/Cocoa

HOPE

**These are things our clients can not purchase
with their food stamps and are always appreciated.**

Deodorant	Dish soap
Can Openers	Toothbrush and toothpaste
Shaving Cream	Mouthwash (without alcohol)
Razors	Feminine hygiene products
Kleenex	Hair products (combs, brushes, picks)
Bar Soap	Dry Laundry Soap
Bathroom tissue	
Diapers, especially sizes 4, 5, 6 and pullups	

We always need paper or plastic bags.





The first Christmas form letter (from Egypt)

Dear Friends:

We're sorry to resort to this form letter, especially since we are sending it after the holidays, but this has been a busy year; it is amazing how parenthood takes away free time. That's right, parenthood. Joe and I are the proud parents of a beautiful baby boy, a gift from God. Literally.

Now, I know that you're good at mathematics, and I know you don't remember a wedding invitation, just that we were engaged, but it is not what you think. It is a little hard to explain, however. You also will notice that the postmark is not Nazareth, but Egypt. No, we did not move, at least not permanently. No, Joe did not get transferred, just transplanted.

You remember that census thing? Joe and I had to go to Bethlehem – Joe is a Davidson, after all – and wouldn't you know it, my time came while we were there. Everything was full up. Bethlehem was a madhouse. Holiday Inn was packed for the holidays. Red Roof not only had no frills but no vacancies, and Motel Six turned the light off for us.

We ended up going to, of all places, a cave. While it wasn't a picnic, it was a miracle. As we wrapped him up, Joe and I just marveled at this new little life. We named him Jesus. Actually, an angel named him. I told you it was a busy year. Anyway, we had just the best Christmas together – that's what we're calling it, Christmas. We even had a surprise visit from some shepherds; I won't tell you how they knew, because I know this already is quite a stretch for you.

So why are we in Egypt? Well, at one point, some astrology professors from Eastern University suddenly showed up at our door, to worship Jesus as the new king, according to some star they saw. And while it was nice of them to give us gifts, they also gave us away – to that wicked King Herod, who tried to kill Jesus. That is why we took a flight into Egypt.

So please forgive us if we are a little out of touch with things for now. We hope everything will get back to normal soon, so we can move back to Nazareth. Meanwhile, keep us in your prayers, don't tell Herod where we are, and have a Merry Christmas.

Love,

Mary, Joe and baby Jesus

Reprinted with permission from *Christmas Paulpourri* by Paul Lintern.





Virginia McGill, MA
Executive Director

Gema C. Wolde
Community Health Worker
Se habla español.

“My husband works construction and his work is very slow. I am happy that I can bring items to class to fix for him or my sons. I don’t have to buy him new work pants because I have learned to replace zippers and patch clothes. This saves my family money. Thank you for this class and getting the supplies and machines and guest speakers so that we can have these classes together.” AG, 35, Latinas in Business

Our Families in Action Sewing and Micro-Business classes began nearly two years ago with a donation of high-end wedding dresses from Wells Fargo Bank. Thanks to a \$1,000 grant from Countryside Community Church, we were able to continue classes this Fall.

Because Families in Action is a trusted organization, classes continue to be filled to capacity. There are currently several dozen women enrolled, none of whom had taken a sewing class prior to attending classes. On average, each women involved in the program has 3 children. Classes are held once a week and last for 2.5 hours.

Community-wide fashion shows continue to be hosted at Grace Lutheran Church in conjunction with our micro-business program. Over 100 community members and leaders attend the shows, including students from South High School, faculty members from Creighton University and Methodist college, and directors of small non-profits in the community. A unique thing about our fashion shows is that participants volunteer as models for the show and contribute products which are sold afterwards. Proceeds go directly to funding for additional classes. Participants share that they are proud of being able to model the products they make in class and that it is a big event for them to model in front of an audience of all women. This illustrates pride in craft, as well as self-esteem imitative.

Ramona, a Families in Action exercise participant, continues serving as our Latinas in Business Instructor. She brings a wealth of skill and the ability to instruct on several different level simultaneously.

The reputation Families in Action has worked tirelessly to build in the community has been the key to our success in our sewing and micro-business programs. Many organizations attempt new projects, few have success from inception like Interfaith. This is largely because of the investment, trust and leadership participants have in the organization, and because of the dedication of staff who intentionally live and work in South Omaha.

For participants, classes have become a special time to learn together and support one another in something tangible: making clothing for selves, family or to sell in fashion shows or at churches or farmer’s markets. Classes have become an outlet to explore participant creativity while using the time wisely to develop plans for the future. Local Latina business leaders have spoke to classes about self-employment options, price points, vending options, creativity in advertising.

Participants in Latinas in Business have asked for additional classes, guest speakers and expansion. Families in Action is limited by funding dollars in ability to offer on-going services, thus, we are actively seeking support for the future. Your support and prayers are appreciated. We remain grateful for all of our partners in ministry, and we look forward to providing additional programs in the future.



And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:8

- ◆ Thank you to Marilyn and Jerry Van Ormer for their dedication in tending to the plants in the entry way, they continue to look welcoming.
- ◆ Thank you to Donna Adrian, Mary Laaker, Tom and Sarah Emery, Arlone Farber and Vicki Cox for their ongoing care in the nursery during Sunday morning worship service.
- ◆ Thank you to Bob Moss, Jerry Van Ormer, and Ernie Olson for their continuing efforts to maintain the church with any projects that need to be completed.
- ◆ Thank you to Marilyn, LaVonne, June, and Eva, with your dedication in quilting for the Lutheran World Relief.
- ◆ Thank you to Nenchi Ilka, you are doing such a great job cleaning the church building!
- ◆ Thank you to Jerry and Marilyn Van Ormer, Joe Narducci, Greg and Janet Hula, and Eva Martin who pick up altar flowers every Sunday morning.
- ◆ Thank you to Ron and Donna Adrian, and Brenda Spahr who take care of the altar, set up and take down communion.

POINSETTIAS

Cost:

\$8.00 each

A Sign Up sheet
has been posted on the Bulletin Board

The Deadline for Ordering is December 4th

Be sure to designate whether you would like to take your flowers home after the holiday or donate them to the church for shut-ins or staff.



**Give Glory to God
through decorating
The Sanctuary
During the Season
Of Advent**

*Candlelight
Service*



**Christmas Eve
Candle Light Service**

December 24, 2011 at 5:00 p.m.

**Celebrating the joyous occasion surrounding
the birth of Christ together.**



Special Days in December at Grace Lutheran Church

- December 3 - ESL Christmas Celebration.
- December 13 - Council Meeting.
- December 14 - Photographers Club.
- December 15 - Neighborhood Meeting.
- December 19 - Christmas Luncheon.
- December 24 - Sudanese Christmas Celebration.
- December 24 - Christmas Eve Candlelight Service.
- December 25 - Christmas Day.
- December 31 - New Years Eve.

A little boy came home and announced, "I learned all about the very first Christmas in Sunday school today! There wasn't a Santa Claus way back then, so these three skinny guys on camels had to deliver all the toys. And Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer with his nose so bright wasn't there yet, so they had to have this big spotlight in the sky to find their way around."

-via Peter Dring... Land O Lakes, WI
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"At Mass, I always say a word or two to the small children and then ask them a question, a sometimes risky undertaking. On the fourth Sunday of Advent, I asked the children to name the wonderful celebration we were preparing for."

"The congregation howled with laughter when a little girl shouted out 'Hanukkah!' (Our music director is Jewish, but no relation to the girl.)"

-Rev. Gregory Chamberlin, OSB... Pastor, St. Benedict Cathedral, Evansville, IN
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One Christmas we did a live Nativity scene at the First Methodist Church in Plaquemine, LA. It was so cold the animals didn't show up.

"We would stand there shaking; then we would see car headlights and we would stand still."

—Betty Coussou, Columnist Smiley Anders
Baton Rouge (LA) Advocate
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Bible Wordsearch

The Church at Laodicia

Wordsearch 195

Rev.3:14-22

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AMEN
ANGEL
CHURCH
CLOTHES
COUNSEL
COVER
DEEDS
DOOR
EARNEST
EYES
FATHER
GOLD
HEARS
KNOCK
LOVE
MOUTH

NAKED
NEITHER
OPENS
PITIFUL
REFINED
REPENT
RULER
SALVE
SPIRIT
SPIT
THRONE
TRUE
VOICE
WEALTH
WITNESS
WORDS

WRETCHED
CREATION
DISCIPLINE
LAODICEA
LUKEWARM OVERCAME
SHAMEFUL FAITHFUL

After you find all the hidden words the left over letters spell out a Bible verse reading from the top left to the bottom right

Psalm 51

MORE PUZZLES AT:
<http://biblewordgames.com>

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'Twas the night before Christmas (Flight controllers version)

T'was the night before Christmas, and all thru the tower, controllers were sleeping just over an hour. The runways were empty, the tarmac was black. Controllers were nowhere – they'd all hit the sack.

When out in the sky there arose such a clatter 767's stacked high as a ladder. Their radios were chirping, their screams were not heard, pilots were wondering where to land their big bird.

Finally the answer, as pretty as you please, the controller was wide-eyed, awake from his ZZzzzzz:

"Use 170E, there's room for a fleet. now calm yourselves down so I can go back to sleep."

The pilots all landed and with a tip of their hat, stretched out in the lounge to join in the nap.

Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night, and may Santa land safely at the end of his flight!

—George Goldtrap
Ormond-by-the-Sea, FL

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