

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church  
1326 South 26th Street  
Omaha, NE 68105-2380  
402-341-7730

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#### REGULAR SUNDAY EVENTS

9:30 a.m. Christian Education

11:00 a.m. Worship Service

Pastor - Rev. Dr. Damon D. Laaker  
Editor/Church Secretary - Brenda Spahr  
Organist - Colleen Jeffrey  
Sexton - Alma Lopez  
Families In Action - Virginia McGill  
Community Outreach - Malachi Black

Delivered to the Post Office November 24

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# THE GRACE MESSENGER

1889 - 2015



2015

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



## 2015 Council Members

Ron Adrian  
Ralph Fitle  
Loren Moyer  
Pastor Laaker

Andrew Edwards  
Janet Hula  
Charles Tuw  
Arlone Farber  
Eva Martin  
Amanda Vazquez

### Officers Serving the Congregation:

Financial: Janet Hula      Treasurer: Ralph Fitle

The regular meeting of the Council was held on November 10th. The Council shared their prayer concerns for: Suzie Heldt & Lindsey Zach, Lindsey's newborn niece Emily Nelson, Arlone's mom, Norma Courtney and sister-in-law, Teresa Courtney and Uncle Melvin Obst, David Hula (Greg's brother), Joe Narducci, and veterans and servicemen and women for their service.

Devotions: Devotions were led by Pastor Laaker reading the selected verses in the "Daily Texts" from Jonah 2:6 and John 3:8. The first reminds us that God will lead us through the difficult times when we are lost. The second tells us that God gave the world Jesus to save us from our sinful nature.

Visions for Ministry: The author provided an interesting perspective using an analogy of an elephant, and depending on what part of the elephant a person touches, their description and experience would be very different from others. This can easily be applied to everyday life and the life of the congregation. It is important to step back and view situations from a broader vantage point to truly see the whole picture—or as much as can be seen from a human perspective. This chapter focused a lot on our individual and collective actions, how something seemingly small can make a pretty incredible impact in someone's life. We should be reminded that it is not the size or quantity of what we do, but the simple act of doing *something*. Read chapter 9 for next month.

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

Christian Education: None.

Evangelism/Outreach: The Halloween party had about 50 kids and 35-40 adults attend. Remainder of food was given to Heidi Gates who serves people on the street. We received positive comments from many of the attendees.

In continuing with the teacher appreciation gifts for Liberty Elementary, we will ask the congregation to gather items by December 6th. Sunday, December 13th we will gather to assemble the gifts for the school.

*Continued...*

Book reading program is going well. Will request feedback from teachers, and begin putting together plans for next year. (Possibly adding 3rd graders.) Malachi also wants to explore the idea of teaching chess to 4-6th graders at Liberty Elementary and will be talking to the principal about this possibility.

\$610 was contributed toward the CROP Walk this year.

Finance: None.

Property: The front door has been redone and is significantly better than before. There are still a couple small issues to address, but most of the draft issues have been resolved.

Service/Social Ministry: None.

Support/Stewardship: Pastor attended the fall discipleship day at the end of October along with a large group from across the city. One of the issues discussed was a congregational vitality and sustainability assessment, which is a pilot program the synod is exploring. Pastor has asked each council member to fill one out and we will discuss the results at our next meeting. We will also pass these out at the annual meeting for others to complete. Results will be shared with the Synod. Fall stewardship videos began this past Sunday and will last 4 weeks.

Worship: We will host Thanksgiving service this year on Wednesday, Nov 24 at 7pm. An invitation has gone out to St. Luke's, First Lutheran, Augustana, Iglesia St. Andres, and St. Martin's Episcopal. People are asked to bring desserts to enjoy afterward.

Christmas Eve service was at Grace at 4:30 last year and 6:30 at St. Luke's. We will plan to do the same again this year.

Unfinished Business: None.    New Business: We will provide gift cards to staff: Brenda, Colleen, Alma, and Malachi.

Announcements: Arlone celebrated the birth of her new grandson, Nolan Riley in October.

The theological conference that Pastor and Malachi attended in October was enjoyable.

Pastor really enjoyed the Voyagers conference he attended in DC last week. Ralph will bring treats for December.

Adjournment: The Council meeting closed in prayer and adjourned at 8:56 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted, Amanda Vazquez, Secretary



Meister Eckhardt once asserted "if the only prayer you say in your whole life is 'thank you,' that will suffice." I believe that a transformative life is grounded in gratitude. Spiritual development involves pausing to notice what's going on in the congregation and the world and then responding with words and actions of affirmation and healing.

I am so grateful for the ministry of the people at Grace Lutheran. I think about all the wonderful small things that go unnoticed on the larger scale but are truly powerful marks of affirmation and healing for many. Thank You! Thank you for acting on your vocational call to be little Christs to others.

In a couple days, we will celebrate the Day of Thanksgiving. A week ago, the South Omaha Community Care Council gathered under the theme, "Thanks Giving." They recognized individuals and groups that had contributed to the well-being of the community and its individuals. They also invited those gathered to respond with a love gift for the organization. I hope as you gather around tables in this Holiday Season you will share thanks for the ways you have seen gifts given. I would also invite you to consider a love gift for a ministry that is affirming and healing.

We are now entering the season of Advent. Advent invites us to prepare for the coming of Christ. There is a profound sense in which Christ is always coming again and again, more and more, both his arrival and in our continuing expectation. It will be easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of preparations but I hope you will take time to pause. Pause to notice the way Christ comes in ways seen and in ways hidden. Pause to express thanks for the wonder and joy that accompanies the revealing of Christ among us. Pause to praise God for such a marvelous gift.

I hope you make room in your preparations to participate in Advent worship on Sunday mornings. I hope you will make room in your hustle and bustle to participate in the Christmas Eve celebration.

Thank you for your ministry of sharing Christ in your family, in your workplace and within the community. May God bless our preparations and our thanks giving.

Pastor Laaker

PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS

## Open the Door of Your Heart

It's December and preparations for Christmas are underway. Unfortunately, for some, this is a period of great stress, inadequate sleep, and too much busyness. Is this what Advent is all about? Jesus said, "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me*" (Revelation 3:20). What a pleasant request! Shut the door of the world. Open the door of your heart. Let the King of Glory come in! He is the one we honor and proclaim! He is the one due our allegiance and our service. Enjoy fellowship with Jesus!



"O come let us adore Him."

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for sending your Son to show me how much you love me. Help me to respond faithfully to your love. Help me to minimize the distractions during my Christmas preparations so that I can focus on you. In your name precious name I pray. **Amen.**



### Christmas Eve Service Schedules



Grace Lutheran Church  
Christmas Eve Service  
4:30 p.m.

St. Luke's Lutheran Church  
2315 I Street  
Christmas Eve Service  
6:30 p.m.



Two convenient times and locations to Joyfully Celebrate the wonders of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ in the season of Christmas with friends, family, and loved ones!



And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

*Ephesians 6:18*

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

**Individuals listed below have ongoing health issues and concerns:**

Andrew Edwards



James Harrahill

Ken Hilmer

David Hufford

Carolyn Matson

LaVonne Moss

Don Olson

Urbano Vasquez

Norma Courtney (Arlone Farber's Mom.)

Christian Barajas (Samantha Trejo, Angela & Alex Everitt's brother.)

Dottie Hula (Greg Hula's Mom.)

Linda Pafford (Friend to many.)

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

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 Damon Laaker, Grace Lutheran Church

Bishop Brian Maas, Nebraska Synod

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, ELCA Bishop

Pray for the Sudanese community in general. David Nange, John Boato 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.*

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

Ferne Matson - Home.

Joe and Barbara Narducci - Home.

Barbara Nelson - Life Care Center, Elkhorn.



*We always thank  
GOD for all of you  
and continually  
mention you in  
our prayers.  
1 Thessalonians 1:2, NIV*



**Grace Quilters for  
Lutheran World Relief**

Monday mornings from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Join a lively group of people and assemble amazing tie quilts for Lutheran World Relief organization. These quilts are delivered around the world to areas most in need of a little comfort. Please feel free to stop by check out the activity. Coffee break and joke time is 10:00 a.m.; another opportunity in fellowship with one another. No experience necessary!



**Prayer Service**

**Wednesday**

**December 16, 2015**

**7:00 p.m.**

An inspiring and quiet experience in meditation, light music, and a deeper connection within God's presence, peace, and love.



**Buy Your 2016 God's Creation Calendar!**

The Calendars Are Here! Calendars are open for everyone, if you would like to purchase a copy, please look for Donna or Brenda on Sunday mornings or call the church office at 402-341-7730.

Calendars include beautiful monthly scenic photography enhanced with inspiring Scriptures from the Holy Bible. High-quality, heavy-weight stock with gloss coated photo pages and ample space to write appointments and family events.

Same Great Price ~ Only \$5.00



## Order Your Poinsettias Cost is \$7.00

A Sign-Up Sheet has been posted on the Bulletin Board, please order before December 6th

Be sure to designate whether you would like a red or white plant and whether you plan to take your flowers home after the Christmas holiday or leave them at the church to be shared with shut-ins. For your convenience, you can call the church office at 402-341-7730 to place a poinsettia order.

**Grace Lutheran Church  
Annual Christmas Luncheon at  
Piccolo Pete's Restaurant  
2202 South 20th Street  
Wednesday, December 16, 2015, 11:30 a.m.  
Everyone is Welcome!**



Piccolo Pete's is planning on closing their doors for the last time on December 31st, take the opportunity to catch up with folks at Grace and plan to attend in the celebration and fellowship time. A Sign-Up Sheet has been posted on the bulletin board, or you can call the church office, 402-341-7730, with your planned reservation.



  
**Donate Gloves & Scarves  
Christmas Mitten Tree**

It is that special time of year! The Christmas Mitten Tree will be displayed in the upper fellowship hall during the month of December.



As in past years, during the sales of this Christmas Season, consider adding a pair of mittens, gloves, scarf or any additional warm apparel to place on the mitten tree. Your gift will go to benefit shelters and pantries in the area.



For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:10

- Thank you to Marilyn and Jerry Van Ormer for their on-going dedication in caring and tending to the plants in the entry way, they continue to thrive and look welcoming.
- Thank you to the ESL tutors; Malachi Black, Vicki Cox, Arlone Farber, Mary Laaker, and Amanda Vazquez, for making connections with the students willing to learn and form friendships.
- Thank you to Jerry and Marilyn Van Ormer, Greg and Janet Hula, and Eva Martin; who take turns picking up altar flowers every Sunday morning.
- Thank you June, LaVonne, Eva, and Marilyn for your continued dedication in creating a reflection of God's love and care in every quilt sent to support Lutheran World Relief.
- Thank you LaVonne, June, Gloria, Marilyn, Jerry, Eva, and Malachi for your dedication and help in assembling the monthly Grace Messenger!
- Thank you to Ron and Donna Adrian and Brenda Spahr who take turns in the care of the altar, and preparing the communion table.
- Thank you to all ushers, Andrew, Jerry, Ron, Vicki, Mary, and Malachi for greeting everyone on Sunday mornings.
- Thank you to the Liberty Elementary readers; Malachi, Pastor Laaker, Arlone, Margie, Vicki, Eva, and Brenda for sharing the gift of learning through imagination and fun with the second graders.

PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS



Are you ready? Do you have what you need? Such vague questions can leave a person wondering what particularly is the focus. This is similar to the vague future that is about to unfold. It's hard to say what will happen and what is on the horizon, yet we must find ways to prepare ourselves and make plans.

Change is coming; in fact, it's already here. It's inescapable and unavoidable. It's easy, presumably natural even, to continue in the same patterns, habits, and thought processes we always have. It seems standard to address a problem after it has occurred. Yet time and again, we find that missed signs, warnings, and bird's eye views of potential pitfalls go unheeded. Perhaps, there is too much of a need for security (or perhaps to much fear) to act boldly and proactively when we have reasonable cause to do so.

Jesus knew the signs and warnings of upcoming danger. He had the perfect view of what was to come. He wanted the disciples to be ready when danger arose. He showed them how to face adversity head on and be confident. Fear paralyzes and keeps us from acting boldly and confidently in God. Just as Jesus knew of the dangers to come yet still acted confidently, we too can follow this model. We cannot allow fear to dictate our inability to be vigilant and ready when bad things happen. We cannot allow fear to hinder us from living in love and acceptance of our responsibility to help those in need.

The power of love cannot be overstated. When we challenge ourselves to face our fears and act out in love for another, we unleash limitless potential to have lasting change in the world. We must be prepared to take this step though. We must guard our minds against inaccuracies we hear. We must understand the nature that fear plays in undermining our ability to live at the highest levels of human dignity. We must take hold of the reality that while the dangers in life are real, the power to overcome dangers lies within us. Light can only overcome darkness when it is placed in it, not from a distance. Are you ready to be placed in the darkness so you can light the way for someone else? What will you do to be that light? This is our Christian charge. Be blessed and be a blessing to others.

Malachi Black  
Community Outreach Associate  
[outreach@graceluth.com](mailto:outreach@graceluth.com)



**Lutheran South Pantry**  
**4401 South 23rd Street**  
**402-502-7070**

Items that clients cannot purchase with their food stamps are always appreciated: Dish Soap, Kleenex, Bar Soap, Deodorant, Toothbrush and toothpaste, Shaving Cream, Razors, Mouthwash (without alcohol), Feminine hygiene products, Hair products (combs, brushes, picks), Bathroom tissue, Shampoo, Dry Laundry Soap, Can Openers, Diaper wipers, and Diapers, especially sizes 4, 5, 6 and pull-ups.

**We always need paper or plastic bags.**

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### A Christmas prayer

(The following Christmas prayer was delivered by U.S. Senate Chaplain Peter Marshall on Dec. 19, 1947, in the U.S. Senate, addressed to a victorious nation recovering from World War II.)

We thank Thee, O God, for the return of the wondrous spell of this Christmas season that brings its own sweet joy into our jaded and troubled hearts.

"Forbid it, Lord, that we should celebrate without understanding what we celebrate, or, like our counterparts so long ago, fail to see the star or to hear the song of glorious promise.

"As our hearts yield to the spirit of Christmas, may we discover that it is Thy Holy Spirit who comes – not a sentiment, but a power – to remind us of the only way by which there may be peace on earth and good will among men.

"May we not spend Christmas, but keep it, that we may be kept in its hope, through Him who emptied Himself in coming to us that we might be filled with peace and joy in returning to God. Amen."

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In an effort to further express our gratitude for the incredible work teachers at Liberty Elementary School provide each day impacting the lives of children, Grace Lutheran Church is in the process of collecting items for appreciation baskets. Items needed to complete baskets are hand wipes, tissues, sanitizer, band-aids, pens, pencils and post-it notes. Items need to be collected by Sunday, December 6th.

### Christmas-time Nostalgia

At Christmas-time I miss you more  
than any time of year...

I miss you all the time, but more  
when Christmas-time is near.

That's when I miss our talks  
and how you'd help me  
trim the tree,  
you'd tell me  
of each ornament ~  
its "family history"...

We'd work a jigsaw puzzle,  
tons of eggnog we'd devour;  
we'd pull out Christmas carols,  
harmonizing hour-by-hour.

We'd sit at the piano  
playing duets by the score,  
and soon we'd get the giggles  
and we'd wind-up on the floor!

We had so much in common  
that time always seemed to fly,  
but now I miss your laugh so much  
sometimes it makes me cry.

Is Christmas celebrated  
up in Heaven,  
like down here?  
I miss you all the time,  
but more  
when Christmas-time is near.

~ Connie

If tears could build a stairway,  
and memories a lane ~  
I'd walk right up to Heaven  
and bring you home again.

~ Author Unknown

*Skywriting.net*





December 2015



**6 - Arlone Farber**  
**13 - Malachi Black**  
**20 - Margie Sutej**  
**24 - Terry Nielsen**  
**27 - Mary Laaker**  
**Jan. 3 - Brenda Spahr**

#### *December Alcolytes*

**6 - Donna Adrian**  
**13 - Janet Hula**  
**20 - Andrea Spahr**  
**24 - Greg Hula & Donna Adrian**  
**27 - Brenda Spahr**  
**Jan. 3 - Vicki Cox**

#### December Ushers

**Ron Adrian**  
**Malachi Black**  
**Andrew Edwards**



#### December Greeters

**6 - Andrea and Brenda Spahr**  
**13 - Ron and Donna Adrian**  
**20 - Mary Laaker and Sarah Emery**  
**24 - Loren and Marsha Moyer**  
**27 - Andrew Edwards and Larry Foreman**  
**Jan. 3 - Greg and Janet Hula**

December 2015



**1 - Nowa Keita**  
**3 - Barb Nelson**  
**9 - Sharon Irwin**  
**15 - Izabella Perales**  
**16 - Frankie Costanzo Jr.**  
**18 - Marilyn Van Ormer**  
**19 - Lee Costanzo**  
**22 - Sherif Lado**  
**24 - Lola Harsin**  
**31 - Joseph Narducci**

Did we miss your birthday?  
Please contact the church  
office and let us know!

Responsibility List

#### Altar Flowers

**6 - LaVonne Moss** in loving celebration of her Anniversary.  
**13 - Andrew, Christi, Clay Edwards and Tracy Petrini** in  
loving memory of their parents Albion and Charlotte.  
**20 - Greg and Janet Hula** for a Joyful Advent.  
**27 - Jerry and Marilyn Van Ormer and Charlotte Palczynski**  
in loving memory of Kirk Petersen.  
**Jan. 3 - OPEN.**

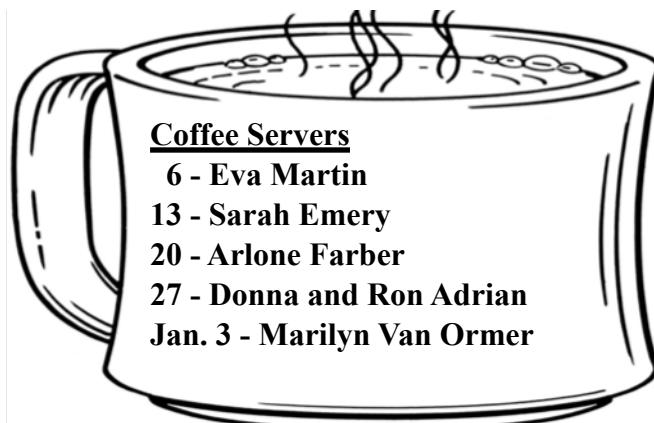
#### Flower Pick-Up for December:



#### Backpack Program



**6 - Pastor and Mary Laaker.**  
**13 - Pastor and Mary Laaker.**  
**20 - Brenda Spahr** wishing all a Merry Christmas.  
**27 - Arlone Farber** remembering all who face hunger issues.  
**Jan. 3 - OPEN.**



#### Coffee Servers

**6 - Eva Martin**  
**13 - Sarah Emery**  
**20 - Arlone Farber**  
**27 - Donna and Ron Adrian**  
**Jan. 3 - Marilyn Van Ormer**





Virginia McGill, MA  
Executive Director

[www.familiesinactionomaha.org](http://www.familiesinactionomaha.org)



Gema C. Wolde  
Community Health Worker  
Se habla espanol.

## Building Community, Promoting Health and Wellness

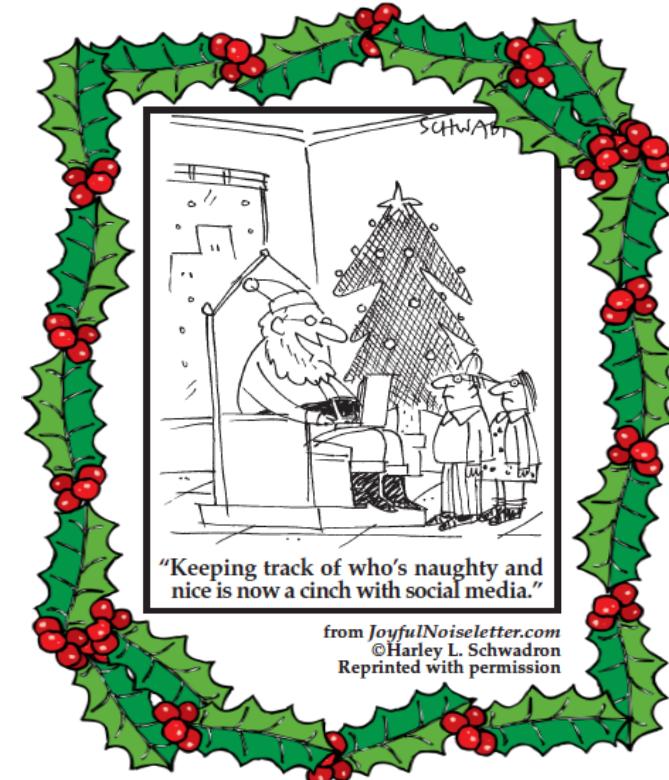
Interfaith Health Service/Families in Action is grateful to our various community partners including NE Methodist College, Children's Hospital & Medical Center, St. Joseph, and our numerous volunteers who assisted us in carrying out an incredibly successful (and fun!) mobile health screening clinic including free flu shots on November 22nd in Lynch Park! This event provided community members with several services including screenings for blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol, height and weight, flu shots, health information on various topics, and fun activities for children! We are grateful to our Latina staff & youth interns, our volunteers from Creighton University and Marian High School, and the nurses and instructors from Nebraska Methodist for their time, energy, enthusiasm and passionate commitment to health, wholeness, community-building, and service! Also, a big thank you to St. Joseph for hosting us and to all the folks who came out to participate! We appreciate your presence, your feedback, and your support of IHS/FIA!

Virginia, Gema and Kaela



Grace Lutheran Church  
ESL (English as a Second Language) Classes  
Saturdays 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.  
402-341-7730

Do you know anyone searching for the opportunity to learn the English language? Please direct them here at Grace. Every Saturday morning they would be greeted with a smile and very helpful tutors to start their education in one of the most difficult languages to learn as a second language.



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## Baker's Community Rewards

Grace Lutheran Church has been accepted into the Baker's Community Rewards Program. Grace will get credit for every purchase\* you make using your registered Plus card. The more you shop with Baker's, the more opportunity Grace will have to earn rewards. It is just that easy!



Haven't had the chance to sign up? Not a problem, please contact the church office for a complete list and instructions on how to obtain your registered Baker's Plus card, talk to a Baker's associate; they are happy to help set up your rewards card, or you can refer back to previous issues of the Grace Messenger. Grace Lutheran's 5-digit NPO is 62209.

For assistance setting up an online account or with general questions, please feel free to contact Baker's at 800-576-4377 option 3, or email at [DCR@dillonstores.com](mailto:DCR@dillonstores.com). **If you're already registered, beginning Jan. 1, 2016, you will need to re-register for the new year.**



## It's Cold Outside!

As the seasons change and your family migrates indoors for the winter, a lot of energy can be wasted to keep your home comfortable. Between 40 and 70% of all home energy is wasted, but we could save about half of that by buying efficient appliances and taking energy-saving measures.

Here are some inexpensive solutions to consider:

**Cover your air conditioner:** If you cannot remove your window unit, consider covering it both inside and out. Besides protecting your air-conditioner unit, these covers also keep cold air from entering your home through the space around the air-conditioner and can be a great way to lower utility bills.

**Caulk It:** Small spaces and gaps around windows and pipes and wires entering the home create energy wasting drafts that can cut the efficiency of your heating system. Most caulking products cost under \$10.00; rope caulk, one of the easiest types to apply, sells for about \$4.00 for 40 or 50 feet.

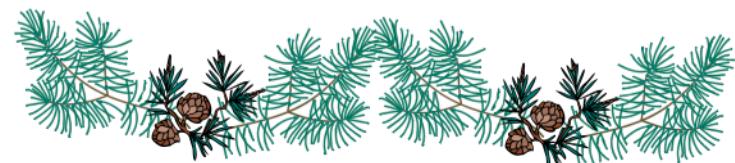
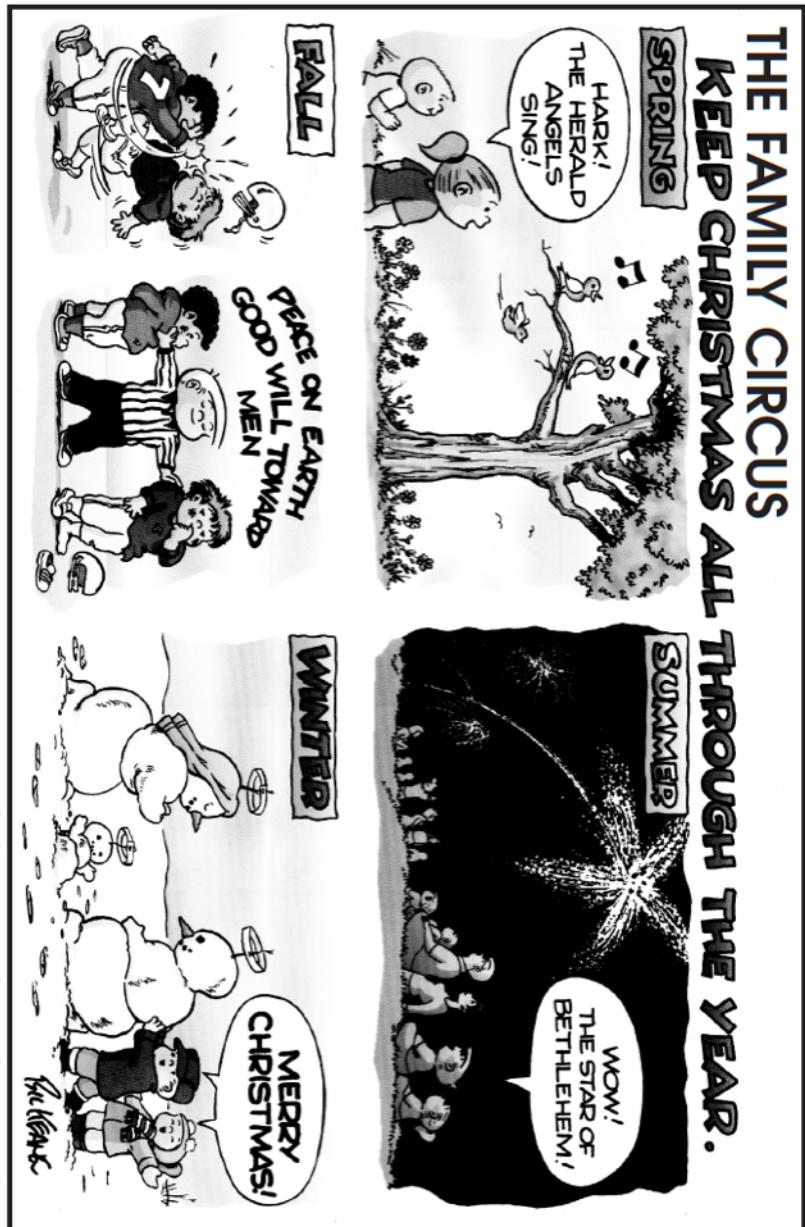
**Block drafts:** Draft blockers are foam plates that fit behind light switches and electrical outlets to reduce drafts that enter through those spaces. You can get a packet of 10 for about \$3.00 and they are easy to install with just a screwdriver.

**Install heat reflectors:** These are thin sheets that fit behind radiators, to reflect heat away from the wall and back into the room.

**Perform regular maintenance:** If you have a forced air furnace, make sure to clean or change the furnace filter about once a month. Most furnaces will need to be professionally cleaned and tuned once a year.

**Reflective Window Film:** Place these thin, plastic sheets directly on the inside of window panes and glass doors. The film reflects inside heat back into your home, reducing the amount that is conducted outside through windows. The film costs about \$10.00 a window and is easy to put on - it adheres to the window directly, or with the help of water from a spray bottle.

**Weatherstripping:** Create a tight seal around all your windows to reduce heated air from escaping outside. Weatherstrips fit around window and door frames with a self-adhesive backing.



## Christmas Song

According to folklore, the song “The 12 Days of Christmas” was written to help young believers learn about their faith. Although no evidence proves that claim, some say the popular carol contains these codes:

The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus Christ.



Two turtle doves are the Old and New Testaments.



Three French hens stand for faith, hope and love.



Four Calling birds are the four gospels.



Five Golden rings are the Law: the first five books of the Old Testament.



Six geese a-laying represent the six days of creation.



Seven swans a-swimming represents the gifts of the Holy Spirit, prophecy, serving, teaching, exhortation, contribution, leadership and mercy.



Eight maids a-milking are Jesus' eight Beatitudes.



Nine ladies dancing are the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.



Ten Lords a-leaping are the Ten Commandments.



Eleven pipers piping stand for the Eleven faithful disciples.

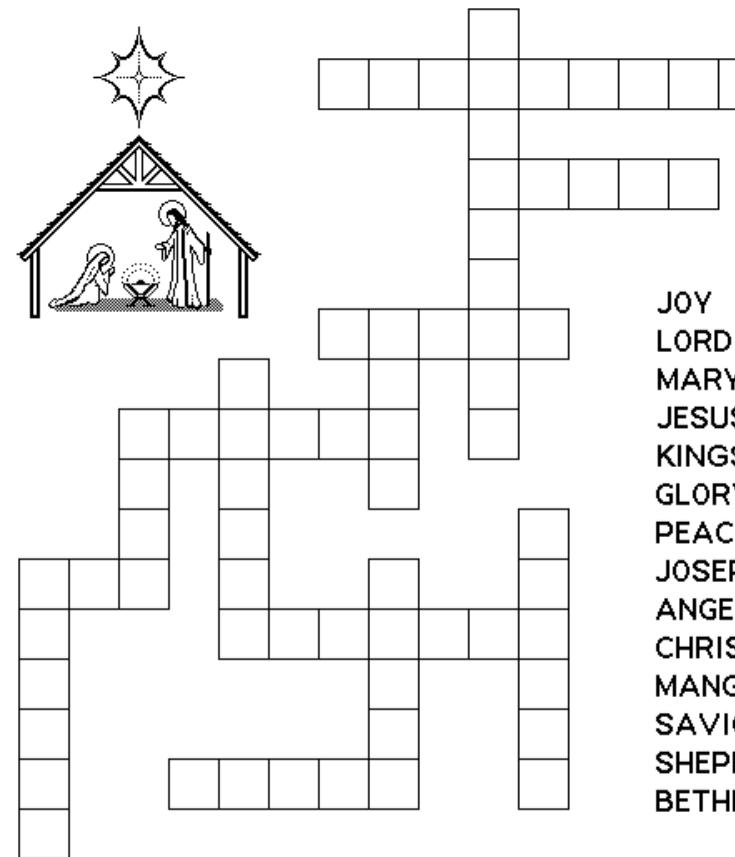


Twelve drummers drumming symbolize the twelve statements of belief in the Apostles' Creed.



## Christmas Crossword

Make all the words fit into this crossword.  
Each word is only used once.



JOY  
LORD  
MARY  
JESUS  
KINGS  
GLORY  
PEACE  
JOSEPH  
ANGELS  
CHRIST  
MANGER  
SAVIOUR  
SHEPHERDS  
BETHLEHEM



### Eight Christmas gifts that don't cost a cent:

The gift of listening.  
The gift of laughter.  
The gift of a compliment.  
The gift of solitude.

The gift of affection.  
The gift of a written note.  
The gift of a favor.  
The gift of a cheerful disposition.

—via Apple Seeds  
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