

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

THE GRACE MESSENGER



may

May 2009

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

Return Service Requested
Dated Material

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

Vicar- Angela Khabeb

Editor/Church Secretary – Benhi !Khabeb

Sudanese Ministries - John Ivo Mounto

Youth Ministries - Brenda Spahr

Organist - Cody Talarico

Sexton - Brian Sutej

Interfaith Health Ministries - Virginia McGill

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2009 Council Members

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

Officers Serving the Congregation but not on Council:

The regular meeting of the Council was held April 14th. The Council members shared their prayer concerns: We pray for the healing of those mentioned in our monthly prayer list, as they continue to struggle with health concerns. We pray for Pastor Liz's daughter, Wendy Henexson, as her condition improves following her kidney transplant. Our prayers are extended to Gloria Moore and her family on the death of her daughter Terri Briley. We pray for a neighbor of Ron Adrian's, Joyce Thompson, as her family and friends cope with her death. Our prayers are extended to Arlone Farber as she continues with chemo therapy for her cancer and to Les Perkins a friend of Arlone's who is on Hospice Care. We continue to remember Ambros Lado and his family as they struggle with his cancer. Prayers were extended to the nephew of June Hilmer's, Bobby Heesacker, as he continues to improve following his illness. We pray for Angelo Bonaci, neighbor of Ron Adrian, who had a TIA; for Ken Hilmer as he struggles with dizziness and breathing problems. We pray for David Nange's son Paul, as he recovers from surgery on his knee and for a neighbor of David's who is recovering from a car accident. We prayed and celebrated the birth of Sarah Emery's son, and Pastor Laaker's grandson, Tommy. We prayed for Danaka on her upcoming baptism.. Devotions were led by Pastor Laaker reading the selected verses in the "Daily Texts" from Psalm 130:8 and Colossians 1:13-14. The psalm reminds us that through Jesus we will be redeemed. Colossians tells us that through Jesus we become closer to God even when we make mistakes.

Visions for Ministry: The Council discussed the chapter, The Dream of God, in the book, *Radical Welcome* by Stephanie Spellers. A quote from the text summarizes the chapter: "God rejoices when we move beyond ourselves, beyond our hostility and ignorance and suspicion, past our "dividing walls" and into relationship with one another, signifying to the world that we are one reconciled body, the body of Christ. In this, we reflect the mutual relationship and union that is the very nature of God self."

Reports were received from the Financial Secretary and the Treasurer. Please continue to give generously. Our income is running about \$600-1,000 a month behind our expenses.

Christian Education: Pastor Laaker asked for volunteers to be a part of the Wednesday Faith Quest planning meeting on April 22nd.

Evangelism/ Outreach: Vicar Angela's project is completed and was very appreciated by the people who attended.

Finance: Jack Williams discussed with the council the purposes of the Disney Endowment; matching funds from the GELC Endowment were discussed as well. Angela's internship officially ends on June 30th. She will not be able to receive a full time call to a congregation until after the fall assignment process. The Council, in earlier discussions, expressed a desire to offer her a temporary ministry role, much like Internship, through the end of the calendar year. Unfortunately, there will be no money available through the Synod or ELCA. Ron Adrian, Arlone Farber, June Hilmer and Vicki Cox were asked to form a committee to brain storm ways to financially support this extension of ministry following Angela's completion of Internship. The Council asked Pastor to include in the quarterly financial letter to the congregation the specifics on the Church's immediate difficulties in paying bills due to a shortage in giving.

Property: The property appears to be in "good shape." The back flow preventers were checked for \$100.00. Bob Moss and Jerry Van Ormer have been working hard repairing and painting the small classroom across from the kitchen in the basement of the church.

Service/ Social Ministry: Neighbors' South Coalition will be seeking volunteers for its summer build. A grant from Lyon's Club International, to build a home for a family with a handicapped child, has been obtained.

Support/ Stewardship: No new report.

Worship: Lenten worship went very well. Good feed back from the Lenten speakers on the friendliness of the congregation. The youth will be performing a skit this Sunday, April 19th.

New Business: The Council will plan a graduation party in honor of Angela's Graduation in May. Tentative dates are May 24th or 31st. We will be celebrating Pastor's 30th Anniversary of Ordination in June. A catered dinner after church on June 14th is being planned.

Announcements: Ron Adrian will bring treats for our meeting in May. Pastor will be attending the conference, "The Mobilization to End Poverty" in Washington, DC, April 26 - 29. Pastor will be attending a Bridgebuilder Conference in Austin, Texas, May 4 - 6.



On Monday, April 20, Vicar Angela and I attended a conference that was entitled “Leadership in Anxious Times.” The presenter, Rev. Dr. Peter Stienke, said that as he has worked with congregations in various stages of anxiety he has observed several emotional triggers. He said one can expect that there will be increased anxiety when there are three to five major issues occurring at the same time. As he went down his list of thirteen triggers, I couldn’t help but notice that Grace Lutheran is undergoing at least three at this time. The three that I’m aware of are money, staff resignation, and the need for the church to change.

Now most likely none of these are new to any one of us. It is simply that they are all occurring at the same time. As he described these triggers, I couldn’t help but feel like someone had turned on a light in a dark room. “Wow! So that is what some of the emotional disturbance in the life of the congregation is all about.”

Over the course of the last twenty five years as your pastor, we have experienced together anxiety over these issues. I remember well the sixth year when we were having an extremely difficult time paying our bills. Then in the thirteen year, when I was granted the opportunity to take a sabbatical, we experienced one of the most difficult years in my memory. Money was not coming in; we were delaying payments, etc. But then things smoothed out, that is, until last year. All of a sudden, we were faced with shortfalls in eight out of the twelve months. This created anxiety in me and in your elected Council leadership.

It was during some of those same times in the past that we had transition in staff positions. So, as we entered this year, Pam Reents resigned and we sought new help in the office. Then about two weeks ago, Cody Talarico told me that he applied for a position with another congregation. Then this past week, he handed in his resignation. So here we have two major triggers of anxiety happening simultaneously.

In addition, the Council has been working diligently over the last six years at efforts to address the change that is necessary for us to be the church of all people in this community. We know we have to do things differently. In most cases, we have struggled to see clearly what it is that we must do differently.

All of this, plus the cultural reminder on an almost daily basis that things are not going as we might like or even expect, adds to the emotional anxiety in the life of each one of us. So what should we do? Should we try to define the things we’re facing in simple black and white terms? Should we blame someone for all the difficulty? Should we look for a miracle cure or a miracle worker? Should we simply just check out?

Dr. Stienke suggested that one of the things that he has observed is that churches that understand their mission not only survive but thrive. He said, “mission has churches, churches don’t have mission.” This may seem like backward thinking when there has been a good deal of emphasis on “having a mission.” Yet, he went on to describe a mission as a place that has missionaries and disciples, not members and patrons.

This got me to thinking. Is Grace Lutheran a mission? Do we have missionaries or members? Do we have disciples or patrons? Hmm! I wonder...

Dr. Stienke went on to say that Healthy Systems 1) focus on mission (who we are, what we are about), 2) focus on challenges, 3) focus on strengths, 4) manage conflict, 5) have clarity about roles, structures, and decisions, 6) are not afraid of pain, 7) exercise a nice spirit (observe celebrations, etc.), 8) have leadership that is working on their own levels of emotionality and maturity.

I’d like to believe the missionaries of Grace Lutheran are up to the challenge. God has not failed us yet, why would God fail us now? If God is good, all the time, then I believe that whatever lies in store in the days, weeks, months, even years ahead, must be Godly. I hope you’ll join me in the challenge to be the very best God has called us to be in this place.



Our Mothering God

As Mother's Day approaches, I am reminded of the Mothering attributes of God. Certainly most of us are most comfortable and most familiar with God as "Our Father which art in heaven..." But have you ever considered the many scriptures that illustrate God as Our Mother? For example in Luke 15:8-10, Jesus, in one of his parables, depicts God as a woman who has lost a silver coin and sweeps the whole house –carefully searching until she finds it. And of course there is Matthew 23:37. In this scripture, Jesus himself steps into the role of mother saying, "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..." In Hosea 13:8, God is imaged as an angry mother bear defending her cubs. In Deuteronomy 32:11-12, we witness God as a majestic mother eagle who "stirs up her nest, and hovers over her young; as she spreads her wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on her pinions." This rich and amazing imagery reminds us that the God we serve is far beyond our human understanding. Consequently, it is impossible for any one image to fully encapsulate all of who God is. What a blessing for us to have these many and varied representations of Almighty God.

In Isaiah 46:1-4, the prophet records God's declaration of giving birth to God's people. The prophet writes, "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save." Whenever I read passages like this, I think about all that our mothers have done for us and all that we are willing to do for our children.

In another passage from Isaiah (42:12-14), we see an image of God as a warrior juxtaposed an image of God as a woman in labor. These two representations of God help expand our definition of God's strength and God's connectedness and concern for us. Furthermore, these examples also offer new language about childbirth. I am sure that some women who have been through childbirth might liken labor to a warrior in battle. The prophet writes: "Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare his praise in the coastlands. The Lord goes forth like a soldier, like a warrior he stirs up his fury; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes. For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant." These verses paint a picture of Our God in unmistakably feminine characteristics that we rarely encounter in our traditional discourse about God. Aren't these verses a treasure?

So, as we think about the diverse ways that we experience God's mothering love, I would like to leave you with one of the most beautifully compassionate illustrations of God as Our Mother.

Isaiah 66:10-13

"Rejoice with Jerusalem; be glad for her, all you that love this city!

Rejoice with her now, all you that have mourned for her!

You will enjoy her prosperity, like a nursing child with her mother.

The Lord says, "I will bring you lasting prosperity; the wealth of the nations will flow to you like a river that never goes dry. You will be like a child that is nursed by her mother, carried in her arms, and dandled on her knees. I will comfort you in Jerusalem as a mother comforts her child."

Happy Mother's Day!

Kids At Work 2009



Kids At Work Welcome Dinner 2009 will be held on Tuesday, June 2nd at 6:30 p.m. Invitations will be mailed out shortly with additional information.

Please do not panic, there is still room for a youth or two to sign up and be a part of this summer's activities, please feel free to call me at the numbers listed below if you or anyone you know that is interested.

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.

If you can volunteer once or twice during the summer or weekly, your help would be welcomed. 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.

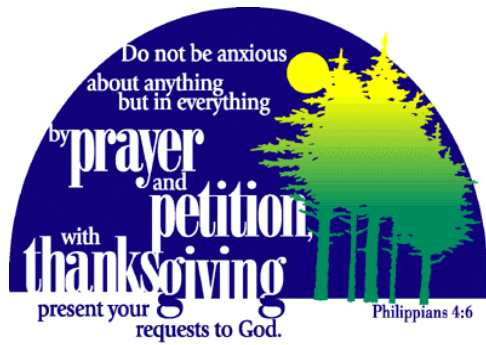
Being a team leader is not the only way to help with Kids At Work. When the youth return to church after completing their daily job tasks at various work sites, they are hungry and thirsty. Please consider providing a simple snack or beverage.

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*

A wife invited some people to dinner.
At the table, she turned to their six-year-old daughter and said,
'Would you like to say the blessing?'
'I wouldn't know what to say,' the girl replied.
'Just say what you hear Mommy say,' the wife answered.
The daughter bowed her head and said,
'Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?'

Shared by a friend via e-mail



Prayer Concerns from Family and Friends

- ◆ Andrew Edwards - Doing dialysis a couple times a week until a kidney can be found. (member)
- ◆ Sandy Fitzgerald - Cancer treatments continues. (member)
- ◆ David Nange's son, Paul as he recovers from surgery on his knee. (Council member)
- ◆ Ken Hilmer - As he struggles with dizziness and breathing problems.(member)
- ◆ La Vonne Moss -Ongoing health issues. (member)
- ◆ Fern Matson - Ongoing health issues. (member)
- ◆ Elna Burns - Suffered a stroke sister of Don Olson (member)
- ◆ Kristine (Nelson) Mauler- Treatment for her cancer. (daughter of Barbara Nelson))
- ◆ Arlone Farber - Treatment for her cancer. (member)
- ◆ Wendy Henexson- Recovery from transplant surgery. (daughter of Pastor Liz Conner)
- ◆ Ambros Lado - Ongoing health issues and as a result of cancer. (member)

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 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 wisdom for your Church Council here at Grace Church.

Sudanese Church Requests

- ◆ Pray that Ivo Mounto would be able to meet the needs of his people and return to the USA soon.
- ◆ Pray for the Sudanese community in general. Pray that the elders in the church community will have wisdom in their counsel.
- ◆ Pray for Jadin Kora, he was born with a disabling birth injury to his arm and shoulder..
- ◆ Pray for Cody and Jennifer to be prosperous in their future endeavour's in ministry.

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

Martin Luther

Showdown at the Easter Corral”



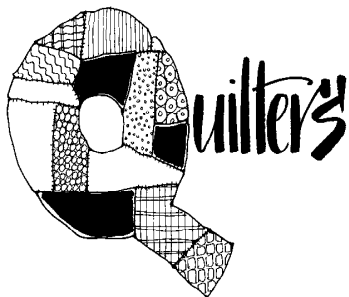
Front Row; Imani, Emily, Alicia, Azeya, Dru and Devon. Back Row; Andrea, Eva, Angelina, Samantha, Alexandra, Danaka, Greg, Autumn and Angela.



A scene from “Showdown at the Easter Corral” with Miss Coyote, Maggie Dalene, Marshall Pilate and Deputy Chester.

Thanks to all parents, grandparents and friends who helped support the actors, you help make the play fun for all!

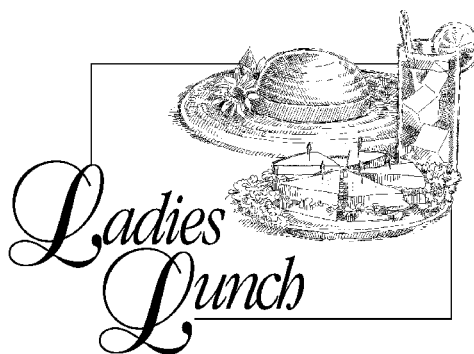
News from the Families of Grace Lutheran Church



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.



Lutheran Women of Omaha Luncheon

Program: LUTHERAN HOME-Christine Merrill
Project: Monetary/ Lutheran Home

Reservation Required by Sunday, May 10
Contact Mardell Gocek, 292-1328
Cost is \$6.00 per person



*Women of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America*

W/ELCA Board & Circle Meeting

**May 19, 2009
1:00 p.m.**

Bible Study Leader
La Vonne Moss

Hostess
Norma Olson

Please keep the Women in prayer as
they will take a summer break summer.

Wednesday Night Faith Quest



Grace Lutheran Church
1326 South 26 Street
341-7730

Each Wednesday Night
5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

(Free Light Supper at 5:30 p.m.)

Bible Stories, Games,
Crafts, Drama, Music



We will be going to **ROME** to visit **Paul and the Underground Church** this summer at **Vacation Bible School**. The dates have been set:

Monday, July 20th through Friday, July 24th, 2009
Evenings: 5:30 pm to 8:00 pm.

Please save these dates and plan to join in the fun! That's fun for everyone, adults and children alike!

Naturally, your help is needed to set up our city of ROME and to get "with the times." Please be on the look out for these items to lend or donate:

DECORATIONS:

- Earthenware, clay or terra cotta pots, bowls & urns.
 - Imitation Fruits & Vegetables
 - Imitation Greenery, especially Ferns, Palms, Vines & Trees.
 - Blankets & Rugs to sit upon (folding chairs will be the exception this year)
- Colorful Cloth & old Sheets

If you want your items returned to you after VBS, please see Janet Hula so proper arrangements can be made to do so. Do not lend anything valuable that might get broken or misplaced.

COSTUMES:

Although it's not essential, it would be super cool to have all staff and participants dress in Bible time / Roman attire. Are you good with a needle and thread? Would you like to help sew up a costume or two? Do you have any scrap material you'd like to donate?

Keep an eye on the bulletin board in the upper fellowship hall for ongoing VBS information. Contact Janet Hula, Rome's Ultimate Director, to volunteer and contribute to this exciting event.

There's No Place Like Rome!



Happy Mother's Day

Attributes of a Godly Mother ...

She has accepted Christ as Savior
 And Lord of her whole life;
 She has peace with God,
 That calms her inner strife;
 She knows how to trust
 The Father for all things;
 She is right and just,
 In the guidance she gives.

She knows how to pray
 For her family's daily needs;
 She can point the way,
 Which God wants all to go;
 And always seeks to guide
 Her family towards God;
 For she abides in the Lord,
 Walking the way He leads.

She knows how to share
 the importance of the Holy Word;
 And seeks to reach her child
 From the depth of her heart;
 She always tries to be
 Loving, gentle, and kind;
 She helps her child grow
 In divine wisdom, insight, and grace.

She takes a house and makes it
 A pleasant home for her family;
 And if her children stray
 A forgiving love they will find.

One who aspires to be all of this,
 A Godly Mother she is indeed;
 For she has not been remiss,
 In reflecting the Almighty God
 In whom she believes,
 For all her children to see.

- Treasury of Quotable Poems -

My Mothers Tear

The bright conspectus of my mother's tear
 Prescribed in song the song I was to sing.
 It did not orient my life. It laid
 The whole foundation of my working mind.
 How things like stars and tears and song have made
 So lucently the I descriptivent
 In me, I shall not say, for it was fear
 Of things I could become that put the blear
 Upon that eye. No star, if men are men,
 Could change the man I am, but one tear stayed
 This, my too constant heart, and gave it song.
 One tear gave note that I the child was made,
 Sang, and life, breath, poetry were one—
 Sang, and my echo uttered, "Here."

David Prinz Hufford

To all the Church "Moms" in our lives:

Even if we are not biologically related to
 you, your love and support of us makes
 you our honorary mothers this month.

We will always be grateful for your influ-
 ence on us, your prayers on our behalf and
 your spiritual guidance.

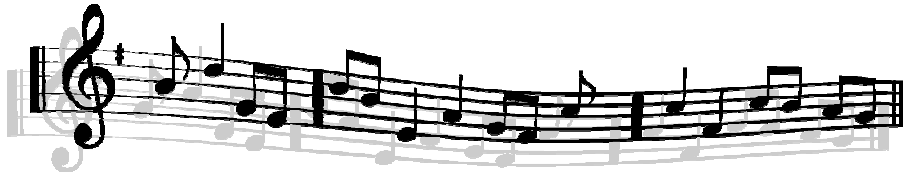
I'm Grateful to Have a Mother like You

A mother like you must be
 the dearest of all Gods creations.

I can't think of anything
 that is as sweet
 as a mothers love
 that is as precious
 as you are to me
 or that is as appreciated
 as you are by every single smile
 within me.

I love you so much, Mother. .
 And I thank God that you're mine.

Carey Martin



This Far By Faith

It is with a heavy heart as I sit to write a fond farewell to you, my dear friends at Grace Lutheran Church. I came to Grace just shortly after beginning my career as a music educator, having moved to the area upon completion of my undergraduate degree. I remember the joy and anticipation as the glorious Temple Organ neared the completion of its refurbishment. The finishing touches and fine tuning completed on December 23, 1999, just in the nick of time for Christmas Eve service added to the wonder and awe of the season.

You have been with me as I met and fell in love with my darling wife Jennifer, the completion of my Masters Degree in music education and as I began my work with the Nebraska Children's Chorus. I will always remember the moment Ragazzi Youth sang Ave Maria here in the sanctuary and the tremendous feeling of peace which overcame me at that moment.

I have witnessed the work of the Spirit in your hearts as you have embraced the development of new programs and ministries to serve those in the neighborhood, while maintaining a fondness for the praise of His name through new and traditional hymns and songs. I'll never forget the October when I figured out how to sequence the organ in order to let me leave the organ bench and play the piano and the organ at the same time! Many thought I had bewitched the instruments! Of course, they may have merely been in the Halloween spirit. I also remember the first time I added a few of my own touches to jazz up "Soon and Very Soon."

I wish you all of God's blessings as you move forward in your service to do His will and be a witness to His glorious works. I sincerely hope you will stay in contact with us over the years. The journey on which I'm about to embark will expand my work within the church. Where it will lead, only He knows. In closing, I leave you this blessing which is dear to my heart. I passed by this message every day in my childhood home and rediscovered it in song as a group of music teachers left a two-week intensive course of study with this as our final farewell. I find it only appropriate to share it with you at this crossroads we face.

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
May the rain fall soft upon your field,
And until we meet again may you rest in the palm of God's hands.

With love and blessings.

Cody and Jennifer Talarico

*Grace Council is going to have a farewell reception in honor of Cody and Jennifer on Sunday May 17.
We wish Cody and Jennifer Gods blessings in their ministry.*



Virginia McGill
Director, (402) 660-6689

Gema Wolde, Se habla español. (616 4721)

Students Form Relationships in Interfaith's Artists in Action Program

"Miss Virginia, you spilled paint on your shirt", I hear from several students as I finish setting out paint for our Artists in Action class. I look down thinking, great, I've ruined my shirt, one of the few non tee-shirts I have and all because I'm the substitute teacher this evening. "April Fool's!" quips Martin, our class jokester and the clear organizer of this particular prank.

It has been years since anyone has played an April Fool's joke on me!!! I have missed it! I was happy and impressed that Martin and the class took it upon themselves to do so. I thanked them, letting them know that I've missed those April Fool's tricks that are lighthearted and designed to induce real laughter.

Though it was not in my carefully constructed syllabus for the evening, our entire class of students began talking about April Fool's jokes and their most memorable laughs. Having a time set aside to talk with each other while working on various art projects is one of the many things I hold dear about Interfaith's newest collaborative program with Arts for All.

Our students attend different schools during the day, they come from Field Club, Mars, Bancroft, Norris, Castelar, Ashland Park Robbins and a host of other schools. But during the evenings, they come together to share their stories and settle in to an environment of comfort and familiarity. They share stories of April Fool's past, soccer games won, confirmation classes attended, struggles with peers or birthday's celebrated. Every student has something to say and something to contribute to the conversation.

It is a blessing of the highest magnitude to see our young students grown, learn and respect each other. I look forward to the next class I am allowed to substitute teach for with our Artists in Action Program.

Virginia McGill, Interfaith



Stations of Hope

You are invited to a program about Arts For All Inc., a local nonprofit organization dedicated to making the arts available and affordable for everyone. This program is presented by Interfaith Health Service, a South Omaha coalition. This unique gathering is the second in a series intended to promote healing and hope in our community.

Come to be entertained and enlightened!

Date: Tuesday May 12, 2009

Time: 6:30 PM

Place: Grace United Methodist Church
2418 E Street, Omaha, NE 68107

Topic: Arts For All, Inc. Class Presentations

Presenters:

Judy Mallory, Executive Director, Katie Zimmer, Maria Palma, Karen Longstein, Zachary Brown, Katrina Naraine.

Child Care available. Light refreshments will be served.

Contact Katie Zimmer at 4158903 or

katie@artsforallinc.com

Community News



**DON'T
FORGET
TO VOTE**

Mayoral Election

May 12, 2009

8:00 AM - 8:00 PM

**4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Monday thru Thursday**

**Games, Crafts, and Fun
Geared for Elementary Kids!**

Free!

Director, Brenda Spahr



**JOIN US
AFTER
SCHOOL**



MAY

May is

*Better Sleep Month
National Good Car Care Month
National Photo Month
National Salad Month
National Egg Month
National Barbecue Month
Revise Your Work Schedule Month
Date Your Mate Month
National Hamburger Month
Fungal Infection Awareness Month*

Special Days at Grace Lutheran Church in May

- 1 - Latinas In Action
- 2 - ESL Class -Special Trip to Zoo
- 10- Mothers Day
- 12 Mayor election Day
- Faith Quest ,Wednesdays 5:30 pm with light dinner.
- 17 Farewell reception for Cody and Jennifer.
- 17 Vicar Angela's graduation/celebration on May 31
- 25 - Memorial Day.
Celebrate Safely - Church Office Closed.
- * 31 Pentecost!

Wear Red to Church!