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

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

February 2012



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: Ja	anet Hula Trea	Treasurer: Margie Sutej							

The regular meeting of the Council was held on January 10, 2012. The Council members shared their prayer concerns for the following individuals who are having health issues: Sue Rose, Twyla Winterfeld, Jack Williams, Carolyn Matson, Mike Adler, Wanda Black, Rex Olson, Tim Nickels and Randy Haynie. We continue to pray for our shut-ins: Barbara Nelson, Barb Narducci, and Mae Lane; we pray for the oppression that is taking place in Syria and other parts of the world; we pray for our own city and the violence that has erupted recently; we pray for people across the nation that are unemployed; we pray for justice in immigration reform; we pray for all people distressed by economic hard times; we pray for leaders to put aside political feelings and unite together in finding solutions to the economic crisis; we pray for the needs of our Sudanese brothers and sisters; we pray for the people of Nome and Cordova, Alaska, as they deal with extreme winter weather that is causing a severe fuel shortage; and we pray for the 2011 flood victims who are still dealing with the after effects of this natural disaster.

Devotions were led by Pastor Laaker reading the selected verses of Joel 2:13 and Mark 1:15 from the "*Daily Texts*." Joel reminds us that we must serve God with pureness of heart, and not with rituals. The verse from Mark reminds us that Jesus preached the "good news", a message of salvation.

<u>Visions for Ministry</u>: The Council discussed an article by Bishop Mike Rinehart titled, "*Insiders and Outsiders*." Bishop Rinehart talks about how positive change will happen when we care about people outside the Church as much as we care about those inside. We all have an opportunity to be a part of something-called change. There are significant risks to accept and navigate in any change that is made. However, there is no growth without change and it takes more than just the Pastor of a Church to make changes—it takes people and their "open attitudes" to get through the difficult and painful risks. We must serve where God calls us.

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

Christian Education: No new report.

<u>Evangelism/Outreach</u>: There has been some conversation on pursuing a Lutheran Service Corp volunteer position for 2012. At this time, Grace cannot financially do this alone. This would have to be a "shared position" with another church. Pastor Laaker will be explore some other avenues and keep the Council and congregation apprised of any new information.

<u>Finance:</u> The Council reviewed the Disney Endowment Income and Disbursements for the years 2006-2011.

Continued...

<u>Property:</u> The parking lot project expenses are all paid to date. The lines will be restriped in the parking lot in the spring, due to the agreement that was made with the contractor.

Our roofing contractor has discovered additional concerns on the roof repair. He will work with Church Mutual, our insurance company, to explore additional insurance coverage to properly repair or replace the roof.

The property to the south of the Church may be going "on the market" for sale in the very near future. At this time, there is no discussion to report on the matter, as the property is not "officially" for sale yet.

The Council made a motion that was made and carried to have three new "regular kitchen" stoves purchased with memorial funds for the downstairs kitchen. A slight accident with one of the old stoves prompted the Council to take this action, as we felt that safety is the first priority.

Service/Social Ministry: No new report.

<u>Support/Stewardship</u>: The Council reviewed the 2012 pledges, as this information ties in with the budget that is being put together.

Worship: No new report.

<u>Unfinished Business:</u> Arlone Farber and Andrew Edwards will be attending the Cluster Meeting on February 4th at First Lutheran Church, along with Pastor Laaker.

The Nominating Committee is busy finding nominees for the three positions' on the Council. The nominations will be brought to the congregation at the Annual Meeting on January 29th. The Audit Committee will meet before the Annual Meeting to review the Church books from 2011.

<u>New Business</u>: The Council nominated Janet Hula for the open position on the Endowment Board. Motion carried.

<u>Announcements:</u> Greg Hula will bring treats to the February 10th, 2012 Council meeting. A reminder that the Annual Meeting will be held on Sunday, January 29th preceded by a potluck dinner. Please plan to attend.

"On the first day of Sunday school, a five-year-old boy handed his teacher a note from his mother. It read, 'The opinions expressed by this child are not necessarily those of his parents.""

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—via George Goldtrap Ormond-by-the-Sea, FL Reprinted with permission From JoyfulNoiseletter.com



When St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Houma, LA, burned down, a parent explained to her young daughter, "Our church was the oldest church in Houma."

The ultimate optimist, the girl replied, "And now we'll have the *newest* church in Houma!"

> —Columnist Smiley Anders Baton Rouge (LA) *Advocate* Reprinted with permission From JoyfulNoiseletter.com



I have begun reading a new book I picked up at our Theological Conference last October. The name of the book is "The Future Starts Now." It is a collection of ideas from a variety of authors who are part of an organization, A Renewal Enterprise.

In the third chapter, the writer begins to describe a situation that afflicts most organizations including faith-based organizations. This affliction is the "If we only had (fill in the blank) game. This game always leaves one feeling like one

never has enough or anything. So the focus becomes whatever you put in the blank.

I was struck by this reflection. I began to wonder how often I played this game. Then I began to wonder how often we as leaders within this mission center play this game. If this is the focus of our leadership efforts, the author says that our focus is upon the blank for sole purpose of the potential the blank can produce for us. I wondered, is this what God calls us to do? Are we supposed to be concerned about what the blank can produce for us? I don't think so.

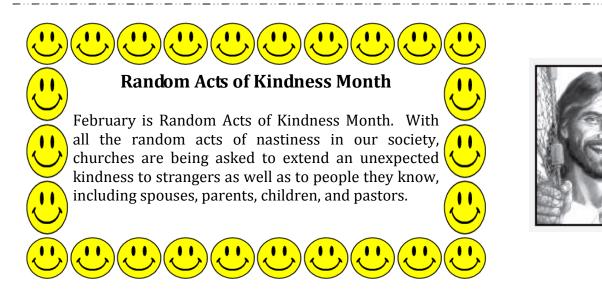
In an earlier article I wrote about another author's reflection on the focus of our ministry efforts. You may recall the primary question: How can I ask God to bless you today? This seems to be a very different approach to the blank game. One is not seeking what one will gain from the other, rather one is seeking to become the agent by which God's presence and goodness is brought to bear on the other's life.

I do like the questions this new author raises: What difference did I make in the world today? Did I make a contribution to something or somebody else? How am I being useful to God? These are marvelous questions that can help me and hopefully all of us to keep our focus on the most helpful way of being a disciple of Jesus.

I believe this will be a very interesting year. I trust God will help us find ways to become a blessing to others. I trust we will be given the opportunity to make a difference in our world each day. I hope we will become the means of contributing to the well being of others.

May God help us be the best we can be, recognize the gifts we have to be a blessing to others and do the things that really matter.

Pr. Damon Laaker





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, and Ernie Olson 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.
- Thank you to the Newsletter Assembly Committee (LaVonne, Bob, Marilyn, Jerry, June, Eva, Gloria, Louise, and Ernie who dedicate one morning every month to prepare the Newsletter for mailings.



Thank you so much for the birthday cards and wishes. Your thoughtfulness and caring spirit shine brightly in my heart and made this birthday a day filled with blessings.

> Thank you, Marilyn Van Ormer

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, Matthew 25:35"

For the same price as the Altar flowers (\$12.00) you can sign up to sponsor needed food for youth in the metro area. A sign-up sheet has been posted on the bulletin board next to the flower chart.





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 Ongoing health issues.
- Rose Heesacker as she receives chemotherapy for cancer treatment. (June Hilmer's sister.)
- Rex Olson healing during his cancer treatment. (Don Olson's brother.)
- Wanda Black recovery from surgery. (Ernie Olson's Aunt.)
- Pastor Judy Gifford ongoing cancer treatment. (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 lung cancer. (Andrea Spahr's Grandma.)

Pray for our Shut - ins and Nursing Home residents:

Mae Lane - St Joe Villa. Barbara Nelson - Life Care Center, Elkhorn. Barbara Narducci - Home Jack Williams - Brookstone Meadows, 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.

> Happy moments, praise God. Difficult moments, seek God. Quiet moments, worship God. Painful moments, trust God. Every moment, thank God.





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. - Take a look at the current Quilting Joker!



Wednesday Night February 15, 2012 7:00 p.m. Candle light Prayer Service for Confession, Meditation and Healing at Grace Lutheran Church. *People of all faiths are welcome*!



Lutheran Women of Omaha will meet February 14, 2012 for a 12:00 Luncheon at St. Matthews Lutheran Church 1725 South 60th Street

Program: Stephen Center

Project: Stephen Center

Reservations By: February 12, 2012 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.

95 items decorated the mitten tree and were donated to area shelters. Among those items were 26 hats, 24 pairs of gloves, 20 pairs of mittens, 10 scarves, 6 pairs of men's socks, 5 pairs of slippers, 3 wrist warmers, and one pair of infant socks. Thank you to all who placed items on the tree and so graciously donated the above items. They are greatly needed!



The 2012 Flower Chart is now up, if there is a special occasion or event you would like to honor, remember, or lift up in praise now is the time to reserve that date!

"Helping Hands" Working Together in God's service





Our youth will hold soup pots at church doors on Souper Bowl Sunday, February 5th. They will join young people in churches all across the country to collect money for those who are hungry and hurting.

In 2011, youth groups in all 50 states and outside the United States participated in the Souper Bowl of Caring generating \$9,583,628. All of the money collected is donated to a charity selected by the participant. <u>None of the money is sent to Souper Bowl headquarters</u>.

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 5, 2012.





Virginia McGill, MA Executive Director

Gema C. Wolde Community Health Worker Se habla español.

SPOTLIGHT ON TAI CHI INSTRUCTOR AND FAMILIES IN ACTION VOLUNTEER, DANIEL

In keeping with our name change and mission, Families in Action has been augmenting programs for men, in addition to our on-going programs for women and children. A key volunteer in helping us bring about new programming is Daniel L. Daniel began working with me and Gema three years ago, helping with our community programs and Amigos in Action programs.



Families in Action is fortunate that Daniel's schedule has allowed him to re-visit his volunteer efforts within our programs and the community. It is with great enthusiasm that we decided to feature his new Families in Action Tai Chi classes and a brief interview synopsis in this month's newsletter article. Virginia and Gema, Families in Action

1. How did you hear about families in Action?

I heard about some tremendous programs in the community helping women and children and decided to offer my services to help expand programs. My first introduction was helping out when Families in Action held summer activity camps for participants in local parks throughout the city. I was happy to help from the beginning and feel that people were very interested in learning more about health, wellness and stress management.

2. How long have you been teaching tai chi? **I have been teaching Tai Chi for 12 years now.**

3. Where were you born?

I was born in Omaha, and while I have lived in Omaha my entire life, I have also had the opportunity to travel in theUnited States.

4. What interested you in Tai Chi?

My martial arts mentors inspired me to continue learning and to help others learn. In addition, other inspirations are Laozi and Tao Te Ching, Yip Man, Jet Li, Donnie Yen, along with various other books and biographies.

5. Why do you enjoy teaching to Families in Action?

I enjoy bringing and sharing the practice to Hispanic/Latino families to contribute in bringing positive energy, happiness and longevity our community and homes.

6. When are your classes and who can take them? **Classes are every Friday. Anyone interested can contact Virginia or Gema.**

7. Why do you think Families in Action is so important to the community? Families in Action is vital to our community because families can come together to be active and be educated about exercise, nutrition, and healthy lifestyles. Families in Action promotes education for the entire family, in a variety of settings and ways, and I'm proud to be part of it.



Lutheran Marriage Encounter

Now that the kids are back in school, how about a refresher course for Mom & Dad? Restore Communication, Rekindle Romance, and Renew Commitment. This is the perfect time to register for the Lutheran Marriage Encounter weekend of your choice. You'll spend two nights in a comfortable hotel and enjoy five delicious meals from Friday at 8:00 p.m. to Sunday at 5:00 p.m. Four presenting couples, including a Lutheran clergy couple, give a series of presentations followed by questions the couples discuss in the privacy of their hotel room. There is no counseling and no group sharing. No one tries to change who you are. It's great for couples who already have a good marriage and want to enrich their relationship, but it also does wonders for those marriages that have lost their luster through years of child rearing and work obligations.

Lutheran Marriage Encounter Weekends

February 10-12, 2012 in Lincoln, NE Dayle & Terri Mautz 402-540-8508 dtmautz@yahoo.com

Please register one month in advance.

March 9-11, 2012 in Sioux Falls, SD Vern & Karen Harrington 712-533-6221 giblem@frontiernet.net



Donate your used books

The Library Board is collecting used books, puzzles, videos, DVD's, CD's and cassettes in good condition as a fund-raiser for the Library during the Lent season.

A sale table will be set up in the Upper Fellowship Hall beginning on Ash Wednesday. Stop by the table and browse any time. This is a self-serve sale. A container for the proceeds will be placed on the table along with the merchandise for sale.

Why not use this opportunity to pass on materials collecting dust on your shelves at home to help provide money to buy new books for the library or stop by and pick up a good used book at a GREAT value!

There are only two kinds of drivers: Idiots and Maniacs. Idiots include anyone that drives slower than me, and the Maniacs are everyone that drives faster than me.



www.gcfl.net



What is the purpose of <u>Lent</u>? Why do we celebrate this 40-day season of fasting and prayer that begins this year on February 22 (Ash Wednesday), observes Good Friday on April 6, and concludes triumphantly on Easter Sunday, April 8? Lent is intended to resurrect our joy. Lent originally meant "springtime": the word comes from the Old English word for "spring," lenten, which came from lengan, "to make longer"—reminding us that the slow, wonderful lengthening of this season in our souls can signal an end to a winter of bitterness and the flowering of Christ's love in us.

Ash Wednesday, February 22 6:00 p.m. Lenten Supper 7:00 p.m. Ash Wednesday Service

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter Eve. It commemorates the forty days of fasting and prayer by which Jesus prepared himself for his ministry. (St. <u>Matthew 4:1-11</u>.) Since the 7th Century it has been the beginning of a period of Christian fasting and prayer. It is called Ash Wednesday because, if they wished, penitents could have ashes placed onto their foreheads at the communion rail.

Ash /> Wednesday



Volunteers are Needed to Serve and Prepare Lenten Dinners

Hosts and Hostesses are needed to prepare and serve the Wednesday Night Lenten Supper beginning on February 22 through March 28. volunteers will also be needed for the Maundy Thursday meal and the Easter breakfast. If you are willing to help, a sign up sheet has been posted on the bulletin board next to the Flower Chart.

"Often when we lose hope and think this is the end, God smiles from above and says, "Relax. It's just a bend, not the end."

—Author unknown Reprinted with permission From JoyfulNoiseletter.com "Why is a car's windshield so large and the rearview mirror so small? Because our *past* is not as important as our *future*. So look ahead and move on."

> —via Peter Dring Land O Lakes, WI Reprinted with permission From JoyfulNoiseletter.com

Between Heaven & Mirth - heresy of the humorless

(Just in time for Christmas, Fr. James Martin, SJ, associate editor of *America* Magazine and a consulting editor to *The Joyful Noiseletter*, has authored a magnificent new book on the value of joy, humor and laughter in the spiritual life. The following article is excerpted from Fr. Martin's book, *Between Heaven and Mirth*. ©2011 by James Martin, SJ. Used with permission of the author and HarperOne, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.) **By Fr. James Martin, SJ**

In some religious circles, joy, humor, and laughter are viewed as excessive, irrelevant, ridiculous, inappropriate, and even scandalous. But a lighthearted spirit is none of those things. Rather, it is an essential element of a healthy spiritual life and a healthy life in general. When we lose sight of this serious truth, we cease to live life fully, truly, and wholly. Indeed, we fail to be holy. And that's what my new book is about: the value of joy, humor, and laughter in the spiritual life. This book had its genesis a few years ago when I began to give talks about 20 saints who had been influential in my spiritual life. Wherever I spoke – whether in parishes, colleges, conferences, or retreat centers – what people wanted to hear about *most* was the way the saints were joyful people, led lives full of laughter, and how their holiness led inevitably to joy. People seemed fascinated by joy. It's almost as if they'd been waiting to be told that it's okay to be joyful believers.

Still, many clergy, as well as some devout believers in general, give the impression that being religious means being dour, serious, or even grumpy. Joylessness is nondenominational and interfaith.

Religious organizations seem to reward the more *serious* types; they rise to the top because their dour attitude is perhaps seen as proof of the seriousness of their intent. People's past experiences with the clergy leads them to equate ministry with melancholy.

A God of joy But the lives of the saints, as well as those of great spiritual masters from almost every other religious tradition, show the opposite. Holy people are joyful. Why? Because holiness brings us closer to God, the source of all joy.

Joy, a characteristic of those close to God, is a sign of not only a confidence in God, but also, as we see in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, gratitude for God's blessings. As the Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said, "Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God." *Humor* is also an essential but neglected requirement of spirituality. Most of the saints, for example, had a terrific sense of humor and could easily laugh at themselves.

The Book of Psalms is filled with frequent expressions of joy in response to God's goodness. In his book *The Humor of Christ* (Harper & Row, 1964), the Protestant theologian Elton Trueblood pointed out that much of Jesus' earthly life and ministry were about joy. In his book, *The Joyful Christ – The Healing Power of Humor* (HarperCollins, 1985) which launched *The Joyful Noiseletter, JN* editor Cal Samra points to numerous passages in the Gospels that stress the joy of Christ and those who encountered him.

When I imagine Jesus, it is not simply as a person who heals the sick, raises the dead, stills the storm, and preaches the good news. It's also as a man of great goodwill and compassion, with a zest for life, someone unafraid of controversy, free to be who he knows himself to be, and brimming with generous good humor. Full of high spirits. Playful. Even fun.

Humor helps in a host of ways in religious institutions. It tells us that God's presence is often communicated through joy. It reminds us that God wants us to laugh from time to time. It invites us not to take our institutions with such deadly seriousness. It cautions us that we are not in control. It lifts our spirits. It defuses awkward situations. Why not use it? And why not enjoy it? Humor can be a balm for a troubled soul. Joy, humor, and laughter show one's faith in God. For Christians, an essentially hopeful outlook shows people that you believe in the Resurrection, in the power of life over death, and in the power of love over hatred.

A gift of joy The Gospels tell us that joy is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Joy, humor, and laughter are spiritual gifts that we ignore at our own peril.

After his appointment as archbishop of New York in 2009, a *New York Times* reporter asked Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan about the declining number of vocations to the Catholic priesthood and wondered about his approach to that problem. Archbishop Dolan's answer: "Happiness attracts." When you're deadly serious, you're seriously dead. So be joyful. Use your sense of humor. And laugh with the God who smiles when seeing you, rejoices over your very existence, and takes delight in you, all the days of your life.



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A group of home health care agencies in Metro Detroit were charged by federal prosecutors with bilking Medicare of \$11.5 million by filing false billings for hundreds of psychotherapy treatments for dead people, *The Detroit News* reported. One therapist's defense attorney was contemplating defending his client by arguing that his patients died when they got his bill for psychotherapy sessions.

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Special Days in February at Grace Lutheran Church

February 2 - Groundhog Day.
February 8 - Photographers Club.
February 14 - Council Meeting.
February 14 - Valentine's Day.
February 15 - Prayer Service.
February 16 - Neighborhood Meeting.
February 22 - Ash Wednesday Service.
February 22 - Photographers Club.
February 29 - Lent Mid-Week Service.



A man living in a rural Kansas area reported: "We recently had a new neighbor call the local township administrative office to request the removal of the 'DEER CROSSING' sign on our road.

"His reason: 'Too many deer are being hit by cars out here! I don't think this is a good place for them to be crossing."

> —via Lowell Yoder Holland, OH Reprinted with permission From JoyfulNoiseletter.com





A woman went to doctors office. She was seen by one of the new doctors, but after about 4 minutes in the examination room, she burst out, screaming as she ran down the hall. An older doctor stopped and asked her what the problem was, and she explained. He had her sit down and relax in another room.

The older doctor marched back to the first and demanded, "What's the matter with you? Mrs. Terry is 63 years old, she has four grown children and seven grandchildren, and you told her she was pregnant?" The new doctor continued to write on his clipboard and said, "Does she still have the hiccups?"

Valentine's Day -- 1 Corinthians 13

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