

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

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Web Site: www.graceluth.com
Like us on Facebook at:
www.facebook.com/gracelutheranomaha

DECEMBER SUNDAY EVENTS
9:30 a.m. Worship Service

Pastor - Rev. Dr. Damon D. Laaker
Editor/Church Secretary - Brenda Spahr
Organist - Colleen Jeffrey
Sexton - Alma Lopez

Delivered to the Post Office November 30



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THE GRACE MESSENGER

1889 - 2021



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

Connect with us on the web: graceluth.com

A note from the Pastor...

Bishop Brian Maas shared the following on the Nebraska Synod email update. I thought it was worth sharing with you.

Exercising the Gratitude Muscle: Definitions for the words “gratitude,” “thanks” or “appreciation” often use one or both of the other words of the trio—gratitude means thanks means appreciation means gratitude and so on... Some will use the phrase “a positive feeling” related to receiving something.

From my perspective, gratitude is more than a feeling—it’s an action, set in motion by a choice. Like exercise, gratitude is something we can practice regularly and in doing so, improve our overall health. Certainly scripture is full of prayers and phrases of thanks—“in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God,” (Philippians 4:6) is an often-quoted example.

Modern science is catching up with the ancient wisdom of scripture in contemporary studies of gratitude and the impact it has on those who practice it. Studies have shown improved mental health, improvement in those suffering depression or anxiety and even more frequent physical exercise and fewer visits to the doctor among other benefits of the simple act of giving thanks.

Gratitude isn’t just a positive feeling, and it’s certainly not reserved for one day a year. In this season of Thanksgiving, it’s a good time to begin or renew practices of gratitude through daily prayer, sending thank-you notes or emails or taking time to count one’s blessings. For people of faith, the benefits of gratitude include not only those things mentioned above, but the gift of a closer relationship with God.

Flex your gratitude muscle this month, and know that you are always held in deep appreciation by those of us on the Nebraska Synod staff who have the privilege of serving with you.

May gratitude and generosity mark your days.
Pastor Laaker



2021 Council Members

Donna Adrian	Tom Emery	Arlone Farber
Ralph Fitle	Janet Hula	Sandy Nielsen
Brenda Spahr	Amanda Vazquez	

Pastor Laaker

Officers Serving the Congregation:

Financial Secretary: Janet Hula Treasurer: Ralph Fitle

The regular meeting of the Council was held on November 9th. Council members shared their prayer concerns for a neighbor who is battling cancer.

Devotions: Devotions were led by Pastor Laaker, reading the selected verses in the “*Daily Texts*” from Psalm 51:17 and Luke 15:21. The first tells us that God will not hold our brokenness against us but rather forgive us and accept us as we are. The second suggests we are not worthy of God’s love and yet God loves us.

Visions for Ministry: Pastor will order The Post Quarantine Church for us to begin reading.

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

Christian Education: None.

Evangelism/Outreach: OTOC - Vicki provided a written report from the last meeting.

Finance: We will close out the Wells Fargo accounts at the end of 2021 and move those funds to the Restricted Account.

Property: Riding Mower is fixed! Camera in the back alley is set up and working. Fire Alarm Inspection indicates 2 sensors that aren’t working properly; however, they appear to be working fine. Phone system problems continue. Century Link came out a few times and it seems the issues have been fixed for the moment.

Continued...

Service/Social Ministry: Pantry (chickens): Janet is working on getting chickens with a Thrivent grant to give to pantry goers the week of Thanksgiving.

Give Thanks and Give Back: collecting food this month and will update the poster board from last year to reflect our total donations.

Gifts of Purpose: will finalize these on Saturday to be given out at the pantry on Monday, November 15.

Support/Stewardship: Fall Emphasis underway.

Worship: Worship - we would like to continue joint services for the next couple of months and re-evaluate.

Thanksgiving: Pastor will post the Nebraska Synod worship service online, or folks can go to St. Matthew's for in-person worship.

Christmas - planning on 2 separate Christmas Eve services 4:30 pm at Grace & 6:30 pm at St. Luke's.

Unfinished Business: None.

New Business: Nominating Committee will ask folks if they are willing to serve on the Council.

Terms are up for Arlone & Donna.

Announcements: Donna will prepare a prayer for next month.

Adjournment: The Council meeting closed in prayer and adjourned at 8:25pm.

Respectfully Submitted, Amanda Vazquez, Secretary

On Sunday, October 24, Francis Durham and Janet Hula presented me with a "Certificate of Awesomeness" on behalf of St. Luke's and Grace. I was honored to be remembered in such a special way. It is a privilege to serve the congregations of St. Luke's and Grace.

Many thanks!
Pastor Laaker



Stewardship

In the letter announcing our Fall Stewardship emphasis – Fearless Generosity – I ended with this paragraph. "Using us as willing vessels, God through the Holy Spirit – the power at work within us – is able to accomplish abundantly more than we can ask or imagine. In your personal prayers and as you gather in fellowship with others, please remember to invite God's guidance through this special emphasis. May Paul's prayer for the church at Ephesus be our prayer as we begin this exciting time of exploring how God is calling us to be fearless givers and fearless stewards – as individuals and as a community of faith.

We have explored the themes of the emphasis: Fearless Living; Fearless Service; Fearless Sowing; and Fearless Giving. I hope these themes have touched your heart and life in positive ways. May we be fearless stewards of the grace of God.

Pr. Laaker

Christmas Eve Services

Come! Let Us Adore Him!

4:30 pm Grace Lutheran Church
1326 South 26th Street
6:30 pm St. Luke's Lutheran Church
2315 "I" Street



The Joy of Christmas through listening to Scripture readings and to Pastor's Message while we worship together and sing some of our favorite Christmas Hymns. In keeping with tradition, we will end our Christmas Eve Service by singing Silent Night by candlelight.





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

Please keep in your prayers the individuals listed below who have health issues and concerns:

Mickey Andersen
Andrew Edwards
Carolyn Matson
Sue Mize
Pam Reents
Urbano Vasquez



Vicki Cox
June Hilmer
Susan Miller
David Nange
Marilyn Van Ormer



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 and Charles Tuw are the elders for the Sudanese Worshiping Community.

Pray for our Shut-in and Nursing Home resident:

Mickey Andersen - Home
Barbara Nelson - Life Care Center, Elkhorn
Rev. Terry Nielsen - Echo Hills

Terry enjoys receiving mail, if you would like to brighten his day, please call the church office for his **new** address. Blessings!



Thrivent Member Network - Nebraska Region hosted a November Food Shelf Challenge.

Everyone has been invited to bring donated non-perishable food items during the month of November in the hope of collecting over 500 items.

The most current count of donated items at the time the Grace Messenger went to print is **594!**

Since we have collected over 500 items, the food drive will be supplemented with a Generosity Multiplier Gift of \$500.00 courtesy of the Thrivent Member Network - Nebraska Region. The gift will be directed to the Loaves and Fishes Fresh Food Pantry at Grace.

Thank you to all who donated food items and their time!



Through the Immanuel Vision Grant and the Gifts of Purpose Project; one fall gift was made available to pantry goers on Monday, November 15th. The gift included bakeware, dish towel, dish cloth, oven mitts or hot pads, a welcome friend decorative piece and a pair of scissors. Items were placed in a bag with words of encouragement labelled on the gift bag. The gifts brought smiles to many appreciative people!





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 Mary and Amanda for your weekly dedication running the recording equipment every Sunday during worship service.



Thank you Ron, Donna and Brenda for taking care of the altar, and preparing communion.



Thank you Mary, Janet, Donna, Ron, Eva, and John, for your dedication and help in assembling the monthly Grace Messenger!



Thank you to the Grace Reads Volunteers who go out and read to second graders at Liberty Elementary School on the second Wednesday every month.



Thank you Alma for keeping both Grace and St. Luke's clean and looking so welcoming to all who enter.



Thank you to all Loaves and Fishes Pantry Volunteers; for delivering food items on Sunday mornings, unloading and putting food items away until Monday mornings, getting everything ready for Mondays and in greeting and serving all with smiles, care and love!

PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS

Thanks to all at Grace Lutheran Church Pantry for the gift of hand made lap afghans. They will add to the comfort of our residents and families at Hospice House.

Your thoughtfulness means the world to us.

Best to all of you.

Gary W. George

The Josie Harper Hospice House



P.S. Thanks to Mary Thompson for making the delivery.



1 – Nowa Keita

3 – Barb Nelson

15 – Izabella Perales

18 – Marilyn Van Ormer

22 – Sherif Lado

24 – Lola Harsin

Happy Birthday in faith and blessings be upon you! On your birthday, remember that you were wonderfully made by God and rejoice in his love. You are so blessed to be you and to share the amazing love of Jesus on your birthday! May God bless this day with more love than your heart can hold.



Upcoming Retreat at Carol Joy Holling Camp:

High School Retreat. December 29-30th. Join us for a faith-filled winter adventure all while getting to hang out with camp friends old and new.

We have already started planning for the summer of 2022. Our Early Bird registration is now open! Campers who sign up before January 31, 2022, will receive \$50 off a full-week session and a pair of CJH socks! We would love for your Confirmation group to join us at The Springs or Ranch Camp. It's not too early to reach out to Jessica, our Registrar, to reserve your group's week at camp.

Visit CJHCenter.org to learn more and register!

Signs and Wonders

Sign posted in a French church:

"It is possible that on entering this church, you may hear the call of God. On the other hand, it is not likely that God will contact you by phone. Thank you for turning *off* your cell phone. If you would like to talk to God, come in, choose a quiet place, and talk to God. If you would like to see God, send God a text while driving."

~ via Bob Whie, Owego, NY

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Answer: 36 (10 in the J, 15 in the O, 11 in the Y). Jesus is at the bottom of the large O



Grace Lutheran Church has some additional ways that you could contribute without spending any out of pocket funds.

Take a few moments of your time to download the app for TAGG - Together A Greater Good; they partner with several community business. Take a snapshot of your receipt so that some businesses will donate 5% to a charity of your choice (Grace Lutheran).

While shopping online at smile.amazon.com you can designate Grace Lutheran Church as your charity of choice and Amazon will donate a percentage of your purchase to Grace.

Register your Bakers Plus card with Kroger and choose Grace Lutheran as your charitable choice!

Saving your Family Fare, Bag & Save, No Frills, Fresh Market and SunMart receipts will benefit Project Hope. For every \$150,000 in receipts collected, Project Hope receives \$1,000 to use for dairy products. Receipts will be mailed to Project Hope monthly.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Lutheran Disaster Response brings God's hope, healing and renewal to people whose lives have been disrupted by disasters in the United States and around the world. When the dust settles and the headlines change, we stay to provide ongoing assistance to those in need.

Lutheran Disaster Response strives to help the church continue to be church in the midst of disaster — following Christ's call to bring hope and healing to our neighbor in need. Some key areas of work include:

- Providing emotional and spiritual care for people who have been affected by a disaster and for leaders who respond to a disaster
- Coordinating volunteers through our local affiliates
- Assisting refugees in a holistic way by meeting the varied needs of the community
- Promoting disaster risk-reduction by helping communities build their assets thereby reducing the effects of likely disasters
- Providing long-term recovery efforts by addressing the unmet needs months or even years after a disaster strikes

Prayers and donations for those impacted are always needed. Donations made to Grace Lutheran Church with the memo line indicating "Lutheran Disaster Response" will be forwarded to the Nebraska Synod office in support of the many efforts ongoing right now.

Loaves and Fishes Pantry

*Grace Lutheran Church
1326 South 26th Street
402-341-7730*

Pantry is Open 10:00 - 11:00 am
Every Monday



Variety of fresh foods donated by
Trader Joe's and Whole Foods.

All are served with love and care.



Staying within the CDC guidelines the Pantry continues to reach



out to those in need on a weekly basis. During this time of reduced gatherings, clients of the Loaves and Fishes Pantry have been driving through the alley and picking up prepared sacks and bags of much needed food items. The Pantry is in need of additional bags, paper sacks and egg cartons to continue this community service, if you are able to donate please call the church office 402-341-7730.

Do you know of a family or individual in need of food assistance? Please share the Pantry information with them.



**FACE MASK
REQUIRED**

Protect the
volunteers,
yourself and
your family!



**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, Feminine hygiene products, Hair products (combs, brushes, picks), Bathroom tissue, Shampoo, Dry Laundry Soap, Hand Sanitizer, Sunscreen, Bug Repellent, Band-aids Diaper wipers, and Diapers, especially sizes 6 and pull-ups.

We always need paper or plastic bags.

First Christmas news reports

(JN Associate Editor Rev. Paul Lintern is pastor of Oakland Lutheran and Southside Christian Churches in Mansfield, OH.)

Scriptures say that in the fullness of time God sent his son to the world. Scholars agree that the time of Jesus' birth and his ministry 30 years later were ideal for "getting the word out" because Rome had - in its own special Roman way - brought the whole known world together under one banner, so to speak.

Still, some wonder why it wouldn't have been better for God to wait until the age of mass media and the internet, when the message could be better spread across the globe. Why didn't God wait?

I know why. This is what I imagine the Christmas story would be like, if it were to happen in this social platform age:

* "She's having God's baby, or so she says. Girls who talk to angels and husbands-to-be who don't know how to react. Next on Dr. Phil."

* "This is Anderson Cooper with reports from Rome where moments ago Prime Minister Augustus declared that all the world should be enrolled. If this makes it through Parliament, it could mean a lot of changed plans for the upcoming holiday season."

* "They say the sky lit up and angels sang to them. Drug use in the shepherding industry. Listen to Newt's new podcast on your I-heart App."

* "New on the Astrology network: Following a star, to near from far, these Magi follow ancient sky rituals across the hot lands of the Middle East in the latest installment of 'Superstars of the Stars.'"

* "Honey, is the donkey packed? Get the kids and let's go. Reservations? No one goes to Bethlehem; we'll find a place easily." (Cue: Captain Obvious.)

* "The situation is getting tense here in Jerusalem. Premier Herod suspects a political coup, involving a baby no less. It raises speculation of bloodshed. Embedded with the Roman Army, this is Joe Scarborough."

* "A video of an innkeeper turning away a homeless family has gone viral after he is heard saying, 'No room for your kind here.' A bystander tweeting the scene shows the couple quietly leaving and the innkeeper sneering at them. See it now on NewsViews on-line."

* "It looks as though all lanes leading into the City of David are backed up for miles. Take your time folks; this will be a long Christmas Eve commute. This is Priscilla Aquilla with your traffic one update."

* "She said she couldn't have children, but now in her old age, Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah, is pregnant. Women who conceive in their old age and men who are left speechless because of it, next on Good Morning Jerusalem."

* "Travel accommodations for the holy family provided by Egyptian Airlines and Holiday Inn. Take a flight into Egypt; there's always room in the Inn."

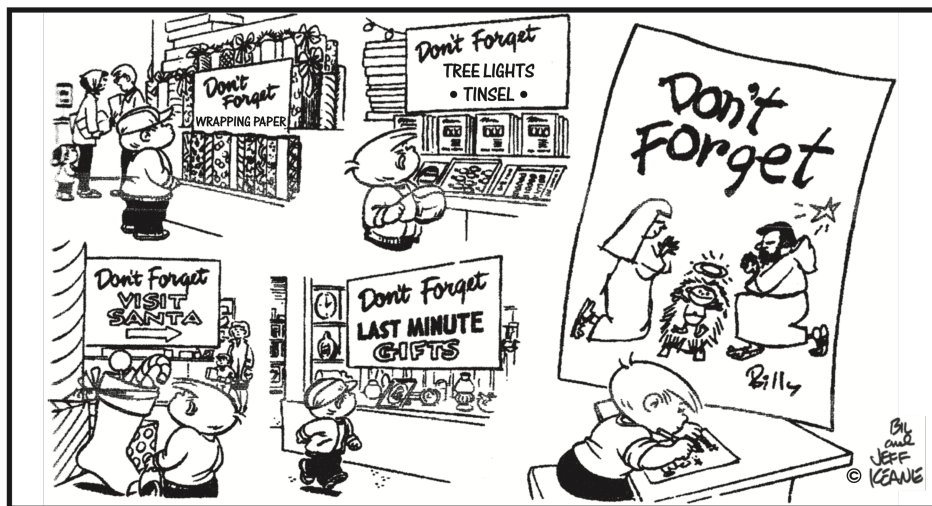
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"Mommy, what is Christmas?" asked the three-year-old girl. Her mother carefully explained that Christmas is Jesus' birthday. "Then why do we not give gifts to Jesus if it's His birthday?" The mother explained the tradition of exchanging Christmas gifts as expressions of our love for each other, and that seemed to end the matter.

It did not come up again until Christmas Eve when a sleepy little girl placed a package under the Christmas tree on her way to bed and explained that it was a birthday gift for Jesus which she was sure He would open during the night while she slept. After she was asleep, the mother, not wanting her daughter to be disappointed, opened the clumsily wrapped package and found the box empty.

On Christmas morning the little girl was thrilled to find the package had been opened and her gift was gone. "What was in it?" asked the confused mother. "It was a box full of love," came the answer.

How childlike! How Christlike!

~ via The Chimes
First Presbyterian Church, Witt, IL

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Advent word search



ANGEL
ANTICIPATION
CANDLES
EMMANUEL
FOUR
HOPE
JESUS

JOSEPH
JOY
LIGHT
LOVE
MARY
PEACE
PINK

PREPARATION
PURPLE
REJOICE
SAVIOR
WAITING
WREATH



WORSHIP
with us

Worship Update

December Sunday Worship Services will be held here at Grace Lutheran Church. Service begins at 9:30 a.m. Hope to see you here!