

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

Email: graceluth@graceluth.com
Web Site: www.graceluth.com
Like us on Facebook at:
www.facebook.com/gracelutheranoma

FEBRUARY SUNDAY EVENTS

St. Luke's, 2315 I St.
9:30 a.m. Worship Service

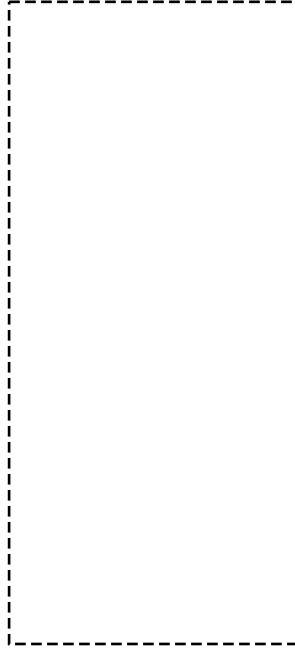
Pastor - Rev. Dr. Damon D. Laaker
Editor/Church Secretary - Brenda Spahr
Sexton - Alma Lopez

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THE GRACE MESSENGER

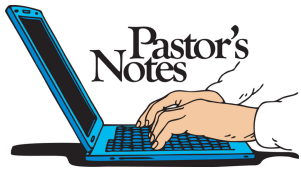
1889 - 2023



Valentine's Day

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



This past Sunday, January 22, the closing words to the Gospel reading were: Jesus went throughout Galilee...proclaiming the good news of the kingdom... At the end of December, the daily meditation from Richard Rohr was a reflection from Cynthia Bourgeault.

“The hallmark of this [Kingdom] awareness is that it sees no separation—not between God and humans, not between humans and other humans. And these are indeed Jesus’s two core teachings, underlying everything he says and does.

“No separation between God and humans. When Jesus talks about this Oneness, he is not speaking in an Eastern sense about an equivalency of being, such that I am in and of myself divine. What he more has in mind is a complete, mutual indwelling: I am in God, God is in you, you are in God, we are in each other. His most beautiful symbol for this is . . . John 15 where he says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Abide in me as I in you” [see John 15:4–5]. A few verses later he says, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love” [John 15:9]. While he does indeed claim that “the Father and I are one” (John 10:30) . . . he does not see this as an exclusive privilege but as something shared by all human beings. There is no separation between humans and God because of this mutual interabiding which expresses the indivisible reality of divine love. We flow into God—and God into us—because it is the nature of love to flow. And as we give ourselves into one another in this fashion, the vine gives life and coherence to the branch while the branch makes visible what the vine is. . . . The whole and the part live together in mutual, loving reciprocity, each belonging to the other and dependent on the other to show forth the fullness of love. That’s Jesus’s vision of no separation between human and Divine. “No separation between human and human is an equally powerful notion—and equally challenging. One of the most familiar of Jesus’s teachings is “Love your neighbor as yourself” [Mark 12:31; Matthew 22:39]. But we almost always hear that wrong. We hear “Love your neighbor *as much as* yourself.” . . . If you listen closely to Jesus’s teaching however, there is no “as much as” in there. It’s just “Love your neighbor *as yourself*”—as a continuation of your very own being. It’s a complete seeing that your neighbor is you. There are not two individuals out there, one seeking to better herself at the price of the

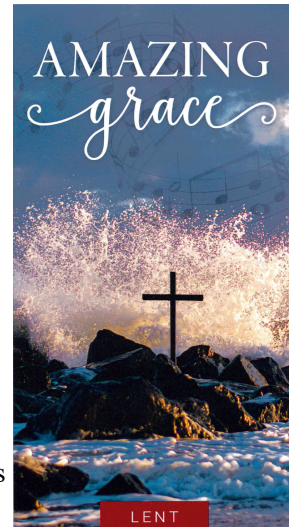
other, or to extend charity to the other; there are simply two cells of the one great Life. Each of them is equally precious and necessary. And as these two cells flow into one another, experiencing that one Life from the inside, they discover that “laying down one’s life for another” [John 15:13] is not a loss of one’s self but a vast expansion of it—because the indivisible reality of love is the only True Self.”

We will soon be surrounded with all kinds of merchandizing for love. May we keep in mind that God doesn’t merchandize love. God is love and we are love through God. May our daily effort be to allow that love to flow freely.

Pastor Laaker

In honor of the 250th anniversary of the writing of “Amazing Grace,” we will be using this mid-week worship series for Lent by theologian Michael Hoy. He ties the words of the beloved song to our lives today as Christ’s disciples. Those in the Bible who experienced the amazing grace of God help us each week to realize that though we once were lost in sin, we now have been found by Jesus, and though we once were blind to God’s mercy, we now can see God’s love at work in us through our Savior’s death and resurrection.

We begin on Ash Wednesday, February 22, 6:30 pm at St. Luke’s. The remainder of the mid-week services will be virtual and posted to our You Tube Channel.



Weekly Schedule and Topics

Ash Wednesday, February 22nd
Week One, March 1st
Week Two, March 8th
Week Three, March 15th
Week Four, March 22nd
Week Five, March 29th

David
Isaiah of Babylon
The Prodigal Son
The Blind Man
The Woman at the Well
Paul

Continued.....





2023 Council Members

Ron Adrian Andrew Edwards Sarah Emery
Arlone Farber Ralph Fitle Greg Hula
Eva Martin Brenda Spahr
Pastor Laaker

Officers Serving the Congregation:
Financial Secretary: Janet Hula Treasurer: Ralph Fitle

The regular meeting of the Council was held on January 10, 2023. Council members shared prayer concerns.

Devotions: Devotions were led by Pastor Laaker, reading the selected verses in the “*Daily Texts*” from Exodus 3:11-12 and Matthew 10:16. The first tells us that even if we feel unworthy, we are capable of extraordinary things when God is with us. The second reminds us that Jesus sends us out.

Visions for Ministry: Creating our Future is a Group Effort by Aleta Payne
The article talks about not falling back into old pre-pandemic routines as we move forward. Council members shared laments about certain aspects of fellowship that we no longer experience; but also about some of the good changes that have taken place and the positive impacts resulting from those changes. It challenged us to think about how we can move forward carrying with us some of the things that worked well before while adapting and growing to meet the needs of this new, post pandemic world?

We will begin a new book - Do I Stay Christian? Read Chapters 1 & 2 for next month.

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

Christian Education: Confirmation class resumes tomorrow.

Evangelism/Outreach: All donations have been delivered to Liberty and Spring Lake schools. Thank you to all who donated Kleenex, Clorox wipes and other items. Your generosity was greatly appreciated by the staff at both schools!

Our February project will be to collect items for Celebration Cake Boxes to be distributed at the pantry. Each box will consist of a 9x13 foil pan, cake mix, can of sprite, frosting, and sprinkles. Our goal is to make 60 celebration cake boxes to distribute at the Loaves and Fishes pantry.

Finance: Council reviewed a propose 2023 Budget. Property Tax Exemption form was filed.

Property: We are getting HVAC Bids to replace the furnaces and the roof top AC unit.

Service/Social Ministry: none

Support/Stewardship: Financial Statements will be distributed this month.

Worship: Lent in 2023 will feature an Amazing Grace series.
Council members decided that online Lenten services would be best with the exception of Ash Wednesday.

Feb 22: Ash Wednesday Service at St. Luke’s 6:30 pm.

Unfinished Business: Annual Meeting - at St. Luke’s in the sanctuary.

Nominating Committee
The terms for Janet, Amanda, and Sarah are up.

Audit Committee

New Business: Endowment Board Nominee - Amanda Vazquez

Announcements: Pastor Heidi Wallace is helping us prepare a joint response for both councils to use at their annual meetings. We will also work on creating a Taskforce for the joint councils to continue this work. Brenda and Janet are interested.

Brenda will prepare a prayer for next month.

Adjournment: The Council meeting closed in prayer and adjourned at 9:08pm.

Respectfully Submitted, Amanda Vazquez, Secretary

Continued...



And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.

2 Corinthians 9:14

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

Vicki Cox
June Hilmer
Carolyn Matson
Marilyn Van Ormer



Andrew Edwards
Samuel Mantzaris
Pam Reents
Urbano Vasquez



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 Scott Johnson, Nebraska Synod
Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, ELCA Bishop

Pray for the Sudanese community in general. Charles Tuw is the elder 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:

Vicki Cox - Home
Barbara Nelson - Life Care Center, Elkhorn
Rev. Terry Nielsen - Echo Hills
Marilyn Van Ormer - Home



All of our homebound enjoy receiving mail, if you would like to brighten their day, please call the church office for any addresses you need. Blessings!

Grace Pomroy, Director of the Stewardship Leaders Program shares a reflection on a question: **What would God have me do with God's money?**



"This is the first and most important question about faith and finances. I think anyone who can give you a simple answer to it isn't thinking hard enough about it. While there may be beautiful and succinct theological responses, the way this is lived out in practice is often more difficult to discern in everyday life.

"After my first conversation about stewardship with Rev. Jerry Hoffman this was the question that followed me home. If the money I have is God's and not really mine, how does that shift the way I use it? My first knee-jerk response was to give more of it away. God would have me live frugally, keep as little for myself as possible so others could have more of it. While I don't think there's anything wrong with this initial response, I would say that my response twelve years later is a bit more nuanced. Instead of seeing giving as the best way to use my money through a lens of faith, I try to find ways to use my money that reflects God's love in every area of my financial life: saving, spending, giving, and earning money.

"Today, when I hear this question, I think less about giving and more about how I'm spending my money. Is the money that I'm spending everyday going to support makers who are being equitably paid? Is it being used to support others in my local community? How are my purchases impacting the health of our planet? As you can see, it leaves me with more questions than answers. However, I've watched as these questions have helped to transform some of my behaviors and caused me to be more thoughtful in my day-to-day spending. Do I still purchase too much on Amazon? Absolutely! And yet, I've seen how moving to a small town that's chock full of local businesses in an area that's more climate conscious has helped me to think more critically about my purchases as a steward of God's creation and my own community."

How might you reflect on her opening question: What would God have me do with God's money?

Blessings
Pr. Laaker



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 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, and Eva, for your faithful dedication in helping assemble 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 third Wednesday every month.

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

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

You know you're getting old when....

"...You say something to your kids that your mother said to you, and you always hated it."

"...You sing along with the elevator music."

"...You answer a question with 'Because I said so.'"

"...You have a party and the neighbors don't even realize it."

~ via Prof. Dick Means, Kalamazoo, MI
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Happy Birthday in faith! May blessings be upon you! On your birthday, remember that you were wonderfully made by God and rejoice in God's 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.

6 – Joseph Koka
8 – Dustin Andersen
Brenda Spahr
9 – Destiny Perales
10 – Jackson Vazquez
24 – Hayden Bauer
25 – Graham Moyer
26 – Sandy Nielsen



Buying or making a cake to celebrate someone's birthday, anniversary, holiday, or even having a great week may not be feasible for a family that needs the support of a food bank or food pantry. When it's hard to feed your family, you aren't thinking about buying extras like a celebration cake.



Let's Make
Celebration Cake Boxes!



A celebration cake box includes:
cake mix can of frosting
candles sprinkles
can of Sprite

(not everyone will have oil or eggs on hand, a can of lemon-lime soda can be used as a substitute)
disposable 9x13 foil pan with lid



Bring your Celebration Cake donation items to church during February. Celebration Cake Boxes will be distributed through the Loaves and Fishes Pantry at Grace. If you have any questions, please speak with Amanda Vazquez or Cindy Fleming.



**Cordially invites you to
Our 14th annual Spring Fundraiser**

Celebrating Community: 2023

Silent Auction * Cash Bar * Appetizers * Music

Join the fun at the OTOC Community Fundraiser on Sunday, March 26th from 4:00 to 7:30 pm at the Omaha Design Center, 1502 Cuming Street. Tickets in advance are \$25, \$30 at the door. Please join us for the Silent Auction, Cash Bar, Appetizers and Live Music. Contact Vicki Cox if you are interested in purchasing a paper ticket or go on line to purchase tickets at otoc.org.

Bidding on auction items open virtually on Saturday, March 18th and will close at 6:30 on Sunday, March 26th, the night of the event.



**Rally4Kids
Thursday, March 2, 2023
DJ Sokol Arena
701 Florence Blvd.**

Rally 4 Kids, Investing in children, families, and futures.

Join us for a casual evening of fun, inspiration, and impact. Enjoy entertainment, gourmet concessions, games, live auction, raffle, and more! Doors open at 6:00 pm with games and high end concession stand food. Program begins at 7:00 pm. Casual game day attire encouraged. Rally for kids is our chance to celebrate children and families.

Performance by Magician Ben Seidman, he is an award-winning magician who has made appearances on the Netflix Original, Brainchild, and Penn & Teller: Fool Us, on the CW. He is the Resident Magician at Mandalay Bay, Resort and Casino in Las Vegas. Seidman's performances are high energy and packed with stand-up comedy and world-renowned slight-of-hand.



**COMMUNITY
RELAY**
Powered by findhelp

Community Relay is a free, online directory to help you find services and support in your local community.

Starting with your zip code, you can search for local programs and services for things like food, housing, job placement, transportation, legal services and more. Community Relay is searchable in over 100 different languages and more than 155,000 organizations participate nationwide! Community Relay is a free resource presented by the Nebraska Health Network. Please visit - communityrelay.com and see if you and someone you know can benefit from this helpful website!

Lutheran Women of Omaha
Tuesday, February 14, 2023
12:00 Noon



Join us at Augustana Lutheran Church, 3847 Lafayette St.

Cost: \$3.00 Bring your own lunch.
Drinks and dessert will be provided.

Guest speaker is Paulette Genthon, Director of the University College of Healing Arts. Free Will Offering to be determined.

Call Mardelle Goczek at 402-292-1328 by Sunday, February 12th to reserve your seat.



Usable Glasses Give New Life

Refractive errors can be easily corrected with eyeglasses, yet millions living in low and middle income countries lack access to basic eye care services. Lions Club have recognized the urgent need for corrective lenses and collect usable glasses in their communities to support the Lions Recycle For Sight Program.

If you have a set or two of previous wearable glasses no longer in need, please bring them to the church office and help individuals to see their world a little more clearly. A box is located in the back of the sanctuary to place them.



Thrivent Choice Dollars can have tremendous impact on an organization.

Eligible Thrivent Financial members:

Show your appreciation for Grace

Lutheran Church by directing your

remaining 2022 Choice Dollars. You have until March 31, 2023 to direct those 2022 dollars. Go to Thrivent.com/thriventchoice to learn more.

Or call 800-847-4836 and say "Thrivent Choice" after the prompt.

This season of Lent, we will walk with people around the world afflicted by war, displacement, disease and poverty by collecting and assembling Lutheran World Relief Personal Care Kits.

BASKETS OF PROMISE

During Lent, we will be collecting items each week to assemble 60 Personal Care Kits on Sunday, March 26th following worship services. The Personal Care Kits provide basic sanitation and hygiene items for families who have lost their belongings in some of nature's devastating disasters. These kits help individuals to stay healthy, clean, and preserve personal dignity.

Items needed to complete a Basket of Promise are:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| February 26th | Bar of Soap (4 to 5 oz., any brand, in original wrapping). |
| March 5th | Bath Towels (light-weight, maximum 52" x 27", dark color recommended). |
| March 12th | Toothbrushes (adult size, in original packaging). |
| March 19th | Combs. |
| March 26th | Nail Clippers (metal, attached file optional). |

You can be a part of this Lenten journey and bring an item or two and brighten the hope, faith, and future of an individual or a family through Lutheran World Relief.

There will be a basket in the back of the sanctuary to collect donated items. If you have any questions, please speak with Brenda Spahr.

Open My Heart, Lord A Women's Pre-Lenten Retreat



Exploring Spiritual Practices:

Relational Prayer with Vicar Gretchen Olson Kopp

Zentangle with Diane Harpster of dianeharpsterart.com

Body Prayer with Emily Wageman

Join us at **Kountze Memorial Lutheran Church – Fellowship Hall**

2650 Farman St., Omaha, NE

(enter west office door on Farnam or

handicap entrance from west parking lot, by orange tower)

Saturday, February 18 from 10 AM to 2 PM

Cost is \$10 day of the retreat

Salad Luncheon provided.

Supplies for all Spiritual Practices provided.

Childcare can be provided as requested.

Diane Harpster Art will be able to be purchased during event.

Our time will be spent learning new faith practices that can be continued through the Season of Lent, as we take time to share our faith journeys as women of the church.

Please register by Wednesday, Feb. 8th by supplying the information to info@kmlchurch.org

+ + + + + +

Name: _____

Email or Phone: _____
(used only to notify of event changes)

Need Child Care for # of children/ages: _____



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.



1611 1/2 Farnam Street
Omaha, NE 68102

Beginning Monday, February 6th, Table Grace will be open from 7:00 am to 2:00 pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Closed on Wednesday and Sunday.

Specialty Coffee, Pastries, Bagels, Pizza, Soup, Salad, Daily Specials!
No set prices. Community Cafe - donate instead of pay.
Eat here - feed the Community.

Ways you can donate: Paypal nhbs.cc/paypal * Text the word "NOURISHING" to 44-321 * Come to Table Grace for a meal and give * Attend a Food Truck lunch and give * Send a check to Table Grace (address above) * Book an Event nhbs.cc/book.

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 clean plastic grocery bags and paper grocery bags!** Please continue to keep the Pantry and all the work that is done in your prayers.



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



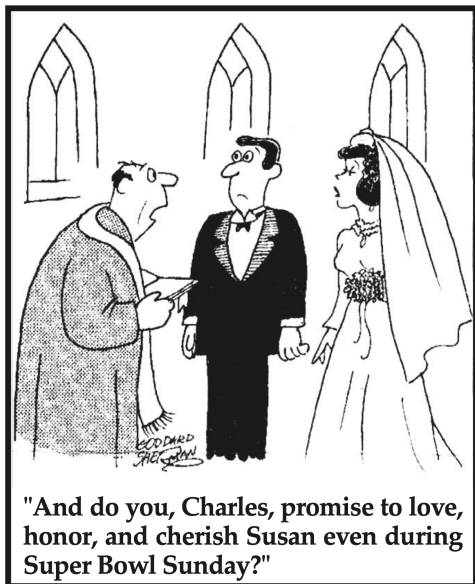
face masks
are encouraged

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, Diaper wipes, and Diapers, especially sizes 6 and pull-ups.

We always need paper or plastic bags.



from JoyfulNoiseletter.com
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A prayer for laughter

Rev. Dale Schoening of Woodward, IA, found this Church of Scotland Celtic Prayer, titled "I Need Some Laughter, Lord," by an unknown author.

I need some laughter, Lord.
I have had enough of sad saints
and sour religion.

I have had enough of sin spotting
and grace doubting.
I need some laughter, Lord,
the kind you planted in Sarah.

But, please may I not have to wait
until I am ninety and pregnant.

Jokes reprinted with permission from JoyfulNoiseletter.com

A group of married women at a Baptist church in Florida pranked their husbands into wearing the same shirt to a Sunday service.

Each of the wives bought and mailed an identical pink plaid shirt to her husband with instructions to wear the shirt for the Valentine's Day banquet at Lighthouse Baptist Church in Gulf Breeze, FL.

All 24 husbands obediently showed up wearing matching pink shirts on a Sunday morning at the church, and were astonished to see their buddies wearing the same shirt. The sanctuary exploded with laughter.

The wives concocted the prank at a baby shower, and kept it a closely held secret. "It showed how fun church can actually be," one wife commented.

Pastor Jeff Adams noted that the Bible is full of joy and good cheer, and many families started coming to church after hearing of the prank.

~ via Dianne Lane, Kalamazoo, MI



Greater Love



y v n e o e f l t l o n o n l
l i t i i a r l o p a r n a j
i d r n p n i v c a t s i r d
m n r p e h e a r t o i d i o
a o o e l m n l j u l l n v t
f i e p i d d e l i g h t f e
l n a o y t s n i s e v l m d
o r e h t u r t a g e r r v m
w v t y s n u i t m h s u s l
e e c f l k l n o k m b l a s
r e j o i c e e e i f o o g w
s i m n h i e n g s k n c r t
e o d t t a h d v r o f t i p
c p s a j n r o u e e o n i r
l u p n e a l v h i e a n n i

commandment
family
hope
love
rejoice
valentine

delight
friends
jesus
neighbor
soul
candy

envy
heart
kind
patient
truth
flowers

Happy Valentine's Day

Meister Eckhart, the 13th-century mystic, had this gem of wisdom for all who take themselves too seriously: "God is enjoying Himself and God expects us to join Him."

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