

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/gracelutheranomaha

JANUARY SUNDAY EVENTS

January 1 & 8 at Grace
15, 22 & 29 at St. Luke's, 2315 I St.
9:30 a.m. Worship Service

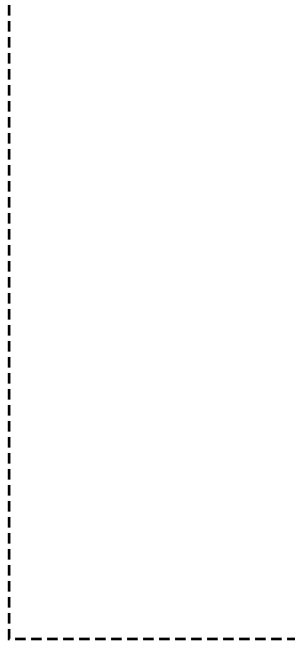
Pastor - Rev. Dr. Damon D. Laaker
Editor/Church Secretary - Brenda Spahr
Sexton - Alma Lopez

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THE GRACE MESSENGER

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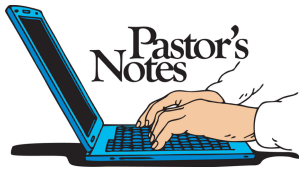


ANNUAL MEETING



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



Jon Tyson wrote in an article for Alban Institute: “The end of the year is the perfect opportunity to dream about what’s next. Maybe you’re already thinking about changes you’d like to see in your organization in the coming year. So much of the change we’ve experienced lately has been

involuntary: we had to adapt our approach to worship, ministry and fellowship in order to survive. Now that we’ve survived, it’s time to prayerfully discern what God has in mind for the future.”

I find these words encouraging. As we close out 2022 and begin 2023, it is a good time to reflect on what we think God has in mind for our future.

Aleta Payne also writes in another article for Alban Institute: Creating our future is a group effort. “How do we regather when we are still frayed, frightened and in some cases irritable? How do we reclaim the soft skills required to be together?

“In response, our first instinct might be to create something new. There is little that church people love to do more than to “fix it,” whatever “it” is. (There are also folks who don’t mind breaking things, and we’re seeing some of that too.) But that first instinct, often out of a combination of love, responsibility and discipleship, is to create what is needed.

“That raises challenges. First, too often in our Western culture, creating is seen as a solitary endeavor, an “I’ll fix it myself!” mindset that focuses responsibility and concentrates authority in the hands of one (or a very few). There are obviously times when we create alone, sometimes because the work is personal or because the medium doesn’t lend itself to the task of an eager committee.

“But the hierarchical models of many institutional churches can perpetuate the pattern in which a single person takes over work that would be better done by a group.

“Second, we’re often focused on re-creating. When we set out to re-create what we had — another option for making the coffee, planning the mission trip or leading the meeting — we presume on some level that nothing has changed and that our way is still the best.

Continued.....

“Same pot and brewing system, except it’s not.

“Re-creating ignores realities. It glosses over what we’ve all been through with COVID-19, racial pandemics and political disruption and ignores what remains ahead of us. Rather than building on the hard lessons of the pandemics, it assumes that we’re gearing back up to do what we’ve always done, much as we always have.

“But our world has fundamentally changed.

“Maybe, just maybe, this kingdom season is calling us instead to co-creation — the beautiful, intentional, messy and incremental work of envisioning and growing together. Indeed, it’s already happening!”

I find these words refreshing. May our new year be filled with many opportunities to co-create what God leads us toward in our future.

God bless!
Pastor Laaker

Grace Lutheran Annual Meeting

ANNUAL MEETING

Following worship service at St. Luke’s on Sunday, January 29th, please plan to stay and attend the Grace annual meeting in the St. Luke’s sanctuary. Keep watch in the bulletin for additional plans.

Everyone is encouraged to be present, hear all the events, activities and stories from 2022, and help make decisions for 2023! If you have any questions, please call the church office.

Did you participate in an event that happened here or through Grace? Consider writing a report to be placed in the Annual Report. Please have your reports into the office by Monday, January 16th. Thank you.



2022 Council Members

Ron Adrian	Andrew Edwards	Sarah Emery
Ralph Fitle	Greg Hula	Janet Hula
Eva Martin	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 December 13, 2022. Council members shared prayer concerns for continued recovery for a member who was recently diagnosed with cancer, Andrew, Jackie, Jerry Goodrich, for people to continue receiving their boosters and vaccinations, those affected by wars and violence abroad, and hope that everyone is nicer to one another, "Peace on Earth".

Devotions: Devotions were led by Pastor Laaker, reading the selected verses in the "Daily Texts" from Deuteronomy 6:16 and Galatians 6:7. The first tells us that one is not to test God or commit any sins, stay on the path of 'goodness'. The second reminds us that we all fall short, we are not worthy to be saved and we should not mock God, yet God is with us, and our debt has been paid.

Visions for Ministry: Article on Money, mission, and meeting in person – a new study of COVID-19's effect on churches focused mainly on the financial side. Council discussed changes that have been implemented since the Covid outbreak both within the pantry outreach and during worship service. Giving remains close to consistent with the most noted changes being that we no longer pass the offering plate, therefore loose offering has been down.

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

Christian Education

None.

Evangelism/Outreach: Barnabas Dyedi, is very interested in attending seminary through the Teem Program with the NE Synod ELCA. Majority of classes will be online with a couple of weeks required in person, maybe in California.

Grace Reads has adjusted days and times to read in December due to Christmas break.

Continued...

Finance: A Pantry volunteer fell and is in a full body cast and in rehab. Insurance has been notified; we lift her up in prayer.
Council approved Pastor's Housing Allowance for 2023.

Property: Tile pieces need to be replaced or we could replace the tile in the entire basement.

Furnaces are now 24 years old and are starting to show signs of possible carbon leaks, to ensure safety Pastor has placed carbon monoxide detectors in the areas kept warm by the furnaces. We will be replacing systems in the spring or summer.

Vacuum was not running, Pastor took the vacuum in for repairs and was shown a reset button that cleared everything, no repairs needed!

Service/Social Ministry: Restorative Justice Class will be using the fellowship room on December 29th.

Families in Action will be moving out of the office space upstairs and may continue to maintain storage space in the basement.

Support/Stewardship: None.

Worship: Christmas Eve Service will be at St. Luke's at 4:30 pm. Christmas Day will be here at Grace at 9:30 am.

Unfinished Business: A new list for treats has been placed in the kitchen for anyone who would like to sponsor treats following worship service.

Joint Councils will be meeting with the new Assistant to the Bishop in the sanctuary on Sunday, December 18th following worship service.

New Business: We will need a Nominating Committee, Audit, and Endowment Board member for 2023.

Announcements: Sarah will prepare a prayer for next month.

Adjournment: The Council meeting closed in prayer and adjourned at 8:41pm.

Respectfully Submitted, Brenda Spahr, Secretary Pro-tem

**9:30 am Worship Services will be split during
the month of January as follows:
January 1st and 8th at Grace Lutheran
January 15th, 22nd & 29th at St. Luke's Lutheran**





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
Pam Reents
Urbano Vasquez



Andrew Edwards
Samuel Mantzaris
Sue Mize
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 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!

What am I worth? What is my body worth?
Am I worthy of love, of rest?

How do our bodies and our worth intersect?



Our relationships with money and bodies not only shape our relationship with God, but impact our relationships with each other. The narratives we tell about our worth intersect with our ability to recognize God's movement in the world. We are unable to imagine what belonging means in the kingdom of God and create structures around these imaginings without decolonizing the relationship between our worth and work.

"The challenge to change from charity to community-based, from mainline to interreligious, from white-dominant to intercultural, from working for the community to serving with and alongside the community is a move that requires acknowledging the structures that perpetrate and perpetuate poverty, xenophobia, and disenfranchisement." – the Rev. Dr. Amaury Tañón-Santos

Dr. Tañón-Santos describes the hard part, right? Our culture is designed to ask what the land will produce and how a person's worth is connected with the profit they produce. The workings of empires are not tied with community-based, relationship-driven structures. Rather, this economy is often at odds with the kingdom of God where healing comes without consideration of profit gain. Yet, this is not God's story and our hope is in the prophetic made real, in body. In the everyday moment.

This past Advent we awaited Jesus' coming to bring a new kingdom. What does an alternative way of being with and for each other look like in the day to day? It is a prophetic act to claim a new way of being for each other that values people over profit, connection over currency, and belonging over belongings. It is these little prophetic acts, done over and over again, that expose our vulnerable selves to alternative understandings of productivity.

In this way, stewardship is shifted to include how we care for ourselves and for each other.

As we think about shifting structures and new economies, we are reminded that our faith in Christ's coming is rooted in our day to day relationships, in our momentary connections that reflect our hope and liberation for the kingdom that is to come.

Edited from Luther Seminary's Stewardship Leaders Program

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 second 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 who decorated the sanctuary and other areas of the building in order to share the Christmas spirit!

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!

Thank You!

Mary and I want to express our sincere thanks for your generous gift to us here at Christmas. We treasure your kindness and love. Please know we are deeply grateful.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.
Pastor Damon Laaker



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.

1 – Nenchi Ilka
13 – Joel Gammon
21 – Lorraine Brown
23 – Theila Nyiwe
26 – Janet Hula
31 – Gerald Helm
Bobby Stechenfinger

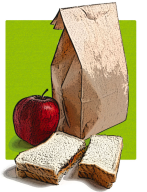
Lutheran Women of Omaha
Tuesday, January 10, 2023
12:00 Noon

Join us at Rejoice Lutheran Church, 2550 S. 138th Street.

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

Program will be "No More Empty Pots" (garden planting to table prep)
Free Will Offering will support No More Empty Pots Monetary.

Call Mardelle Gocek at 402-292-1328 by Sunday, January 8th to reserve your seat.



Project Hope, Inc.
6201 N 60th Street

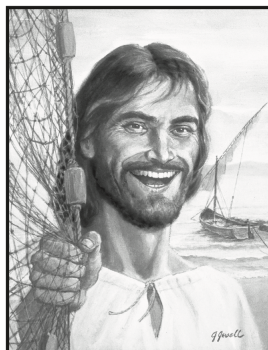
Are you cleaning out closet space? Ready to donate a few clothing items? Consider donating to Project Hope, they continue to provide winter clothing and outer wear for those in need. Please check out their website at www.projecthopeomaha.org for suggested items in need. If you have any questions, please call Project Hope's office at 402-453-7649.

We are called to feed and clothe God's people in need. We believe nutritious food contributes to good health. We value people with love, hope, compassion and dignity.

Into the Heavens and back

The Risen Christ by the Sea (right) ascended into the heavens on a spacecraft on August 4th and returned to earth.

One of the space tourists on the flight, Steve Young of Melbourne, FL, the former CEO of a telecommunications company, took with him 100 wallet-size prints of the famous painting by artist Jack Jewell. The prints were provided to Young by Paul Berube, a Rockledge, FL, friend who wanted prints that had gone into space.



The Risen Christ by the Sea

Young was one of six “space tourists” who made the 10-minute suborbital flight on Jeff Bezos’ sixth Blue Origin flight to the edge of space and back at a velocity of 2,239 mph.

From 66 miles above West Texas, the passengers on the supersonic flight unstrapped at the high point of the trajectory and began floating about.

They marveled at the spectacle of earth below and the deep black of space above.

“Oh my God!” one passenger gasped.

The spacecraft’s three main parachutes unfurled and inflated, and brought them back safely.

The Risen Christ by the Sea wallet-size cards carry this message from John 15:11: “I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” John 15:11 also appeared on the Certificate of Flight.

The Risen Christ by the Sea was painted by Jack Jewell, a Scituate, MA, seascape artist, at the suggestion of a friend, Rev. Martin Clarke, OFM Cap, a chaplain in the New York Fire Department. Rev. Clarke, a *Joyful Noiseletter* consulting editor, sought an inspirational painting of a smiling, triumphant Risen Christ.

Jack Jewell donated the original print to *The Joyful Noiseletter* and it became our trademark.

The Joyful Noiseletter has distributed thousands of these prints, which are often used as prayer cards, in the past 30 years.

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!



We all know how faith comes alive when we step outside of our day-to-day routines and explore faith conversations with our peers at camp. Check out this upcoming opportunity for the youth of your congregation to get back to camp this winter:

January 21-22, 2023 - High School Retreat. We are trying something new this year, and moving the Retreat out of winter break and into January.

To learn more about this retreat and to register, visit: CJHCenter.org/upcoming-retreats.

Early Bird registration is now open for summer camp 2023. Campers who sign up before January 31, will receive \$50 off a full-week session and a CJH Camp beanie!



Words to Start the New Year

“I have decided to stick to love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.”

~ Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“The positive thinker sees the invisible, feels the intangible, and achieves the impossible.”

~ Winston Churchill

“If you find joy and happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway.”

~ Mother Teresa

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Dear friends of Grace Lutheran Church,

My name is Ashley, and I'm the Associate Director of [MICA House](#). Over the last couple of years, MICA House has continued to provide shelter and support to families and women experiencing homelessness in our community. Although we had to reduce the number of volunteers and supplemental programming, we never stopped serving through our mission.

We are in need of volunteers for our [BUDDY Program](#) – a play program that allows kids to be kids while their parents attend classes in the evenings. BUDDY Program is hosted on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday night from 6-8 PM. Individuals interested in supporting the youngest clients at MICA House can apply via this form: <https://bit.ly/3C8HMPu>

We are also in need of food and supplies like pasta, canned vegetables and fruit, and diapers (size 5-6). We have online wish lists through Amazon and Target that can ship directly to us. Groups or individuals are also welcome to host a collection drive for items, and we would be happy to talk more with anyone who is interested in hosting a drive.

Visit our website at: themicahhouse.org to learn more about the volunteer opportunities at MICA House. If you need or want any additional information, please don't hesitate to reach out. I look forward to hearing from you! Thank you!

Ashley Flater, Associate Director/Interim Executive Director MICA House
1415 Ave J, Council Bluffs, IA 51501 ~ phone: 712-323-4416 x. 2105
aflater@themicahhouse.org

2023 Winter Retreat

January 14, 2023

9:00 am - 3:00 pm

St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Grand Island



Join us for a day of fellowship, fun, and lunch.

Guest speaker is Jennifer Rodewald, she is a Christian author of fiction who is passionate about the Word of God and the power of story. There will be updates from Saved to Serve Opportunities, Conference Spring Gatherings, and of course, some fun surprises for all.

Visit: womenoftheelca.org for additional information.



1611 1/2 Farnam Street
Omaha, NE 68102

2022 has been a year of successes and challenges. Costs are on the rise, upward trend in cafe patronage to be the "in need" who volunteer for their meal. Income is down. We invite you to give generously to assist in sustaining the mission of Table Grace Ministries. We are seeking monthly donors who would give \$100 - \$5000 per month or one time donations. All donations are welcome. We thank you for your support, prayers, and partnership.

Successes

7000 Cafe meals served

3000 Truck meals served

32 - 10 day applicants

3 - 10 day graduates

Challenges

Fuel prices 44% increase

Food prices 9.1% increase

In need meals 20% increase

Income/donations 10% decrease

Ways you can donate: [Paypal nhbs.cc/paypal](https://www.paypal.com/nhbs) * 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](https://www.nhbs.cc/book).

"988" The Nation's New Mental Health Hotline

"988" has been activated as the new three-digit mental health program hotline. In 2020 the Federal Communication Commission designated "988" as the new help number and Congress funded it. Anyone who needs help with their mental health, particularly people in crisis or those struggling with mental health issues, should call this number. Operators speak both English and Spanish and have access to interpreters with over 150 languages.



When people call, text, or chat 988, they will be connected to trained counselors that are part of the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network. These trained counselors will listen, understand how their problems are affecting them, provide support, and connect them to resources if necessary.

The current Lifeline phone number (1-800-273-8255) will always remain available to people in emotional distress or suicidal crisis, even after 988 is launched nationally.

Website: suicidepreventionlifeline.org and 988lifeline.org

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.



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.

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.



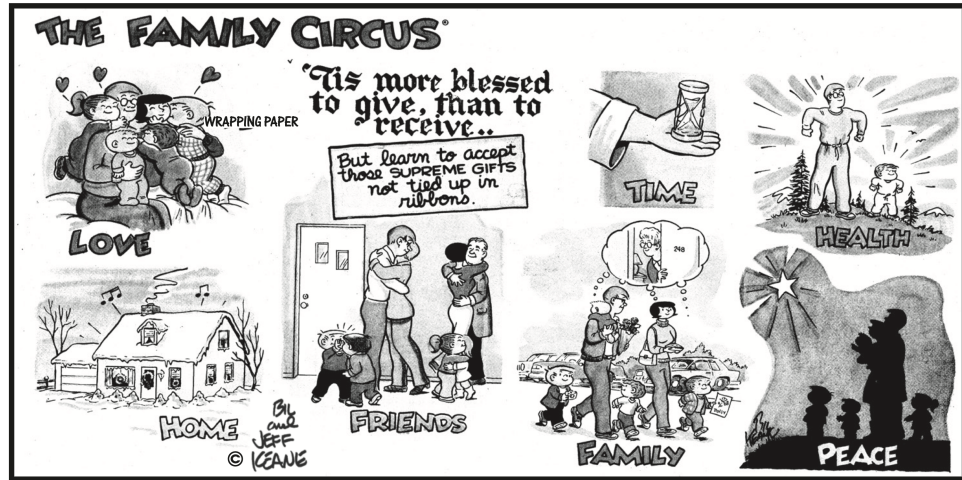
face masks
are encouraged

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, Sunscreen, Bug Repellent, Band-aids Diaper wipers, and Diapers, especially sizes 6 and pull-ups.

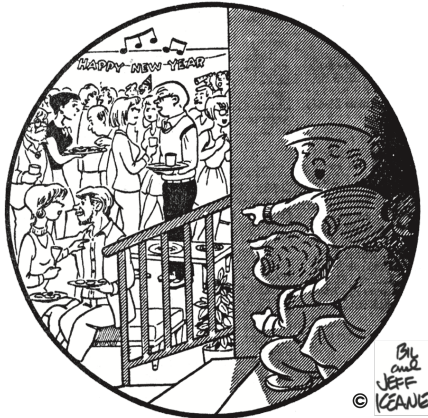
We always need paper or plastic bags.



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THE FAMILY CIRCUS By Bil and Jeff Keane



"Let's get our piggy banks and go wish everybody Happy New Year."

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Epiphany



Z L I Y Z N R T W W Y M Z C I R Q
Q S V V B E T H L E H E M A T D M
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K I T R E A S U R E B Q Z O D Y N

Balthasar	Bethlehem	Camels	Child	Epiphany
Feast	Frankincense	Gaspar	Gifts	Gold
Homage	Jesus	King	KingHerod	Light
Magi	Manger	Mary	Melchior	Myrrh
Night	Offering	Star	Three	Treasure
Twelfth	Wisemen			

When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with their flock, the work of Christmas begins: To find the lost; To heal the broken; To feed the hungry; To free the prisoner; To rebuild the nations; To bring peace among brothers and sisters; and To make music in the heart.

- Howard Thurman, Asbury News, Minneapolis, MN