

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

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**APRIL SUNDAY EVENTS**

9:30 am. Worship Service  
At St. Luke's Lutheran Church  
2315 I Street

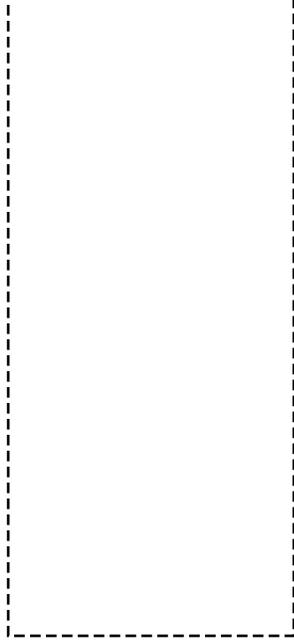
Pastor - Rev. Dr. Damon D. Laaker  
Editor/Church Secretary - Brenda Spahr  
Sexton - Alma Lopez

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# THE GRACE MESSENGER

1889 - 2023



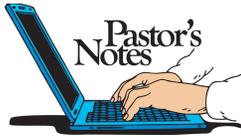
*Easter*  
**SUNDAY**



April Worship Services  
will be held at St. Luke's  
Lutheran, 2315 I Street

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](http://graceluth.com)**



I do so appreciate the opportunity I have to participate each Spring and Fall in a week-long continuing education group called Clergy Voyagers. This group has been coming together since 1999 to explore Bowen Family Systems Theory and its application to congregations and leadership by Rabbi Edwin Friedman.

Learning Bowen theory is a life-long effort that requires more than just reading the literature and going to a couple conferences. To continue learning Bowen theory, members of the Voyagers come together to:

- 1) Explore theory and practice through presentations by well-known and respected Bowen theory scholars as well as members of the Voyagers;
- 2) Work on the process of differentiation of self through family of origin groups, and contact with peers;
- 3) Engage in theological reflection through case studies, written works, and theological presentations; and
- 4) Work on pastoral practice through case studies and networking with other pastoral leaders.

The time we spent together this Spring focused on societal emotional process. This describes how the emotional system governs behavior in whole societies. Cultural forces are important in how a society functions but are insignificant to explain the ebb and flow in how well societies adapt to the challenges they face.

For example: It is more difficult for families to raise children in a period of societal regression than in a calmer period. Some practitioners would say this is what we are seeing in society today. A loosening of standards in society increases the difficulty of less differentiated parents like Michael and Martha holding the line with their children. Grace inflation in many schools makes it easier for students to maintain grades with less work. In the litigious climate, schools that try to hold to standards for their students often face lawsuits from irate parents. The prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse adds to parents' worry about their adolescents. The current societal regression is characterized by an increased child focus in the culture. Much anxiety exists about the future generation. Parents are criticized for being too busy with their own pursuits to be

adequately available to their children, both for support and to monitor their activities. When children like Amy report feeling alienated from parents and their values, parents' critics fail to appreciate the emotional intensity that generates such alienation.

Some people advocate for more focus on children by citing the many problems young people have. Using children's problems to justify increased focus on them is precisely what many parents have been doing. Young people's increased problems are part of an emotional process in society as a whole. A more constructive direction would be for people to examine their own contributions to societal regression and work on themselves rather than focusing on the future generation.

The emotional system in which each of us lives is a powerful force. In order to change the impact, I have to focus on what I can learn about who and what and how my family predecessors functioned. In turn, if I don't examine the system in which I was formed, I am determined to repeat it. It also means that I will have to be intentional in my efforts to function in ways that discern who and what and how I wish to be.

Now when we put all of us together in a faith community, the emotional system becomes even more challenging since each of us brings our system with us. All of this is to say that I am grateful for the opportunity to engage in this educational effort with other clergy each Spring and Fall.

Pastor Laaker

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Earth Day is Saturday, April 22nd. Visit [earthday.org](http://earthday.org) today and learn 52 different ways you can be involved in saving the earth one footprint at a time. Examples include: Consider bringing your own reusable bags when shopping and switch from plastic water bottles to reusable water bottles.

*Continued....*



## 2023 Council Members

Ron Adrian      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

**Call to Order** Sarah called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

**Gathering of Prayers** We asked for prayers for Greg’s friend, Greg, the family of Andrew Edwards, people in Turkey and Syria in their continued efforts in cleaning up after the earthquake, people of Ukraine and all affected by the ongoing war, for the people in California as they are anticipating yet another storm, and a more peaceful country here in the US.

**Devotions** Devotions were led by Pastor Laaker, reading the selected verses in the “*Daily Texts*” from Deuteronomy 8:3 and John 6:63. The first reminds us to live a life of deeper meaning with focus on the word of Lord not just on Sunday, but every day. The second tells us that as disciples we follow and learn from Jesus Christ.

**Visions for Ministry** Do I Stay Christian? by Brian McLaren  
Council discussed Chapters 3 & 4 where once again we learned of the horrific history of Christians toward ethnic and indigenous people all in the name of Christ. *Convert, leave, submit, or die.* These horrific stories are not just in history but continue in present day as well. We agree it is a challenge to have difficult discussions while maintaining the integrity of who we are today and who we would like to be tomorrow. Council looks forward to reading and discussing chapters 5 and 6 for next month’s meeting.

**Minutes** The minutes of the regular February 2023 meeting of the council were approved as printed.

**Financial Secretary’s Report** The report of the Financial Secretary, Janet Hula, was presented and accepted by motion.

**Treasurer’s Report** The report of the Treasurer, Ralph Fitle, was presented and accepted by motion.

**Mission Share** The monthly Mission Share contribution and the San Andres contribution were made in February - ending with 100% of our pledge for both.

*Continued...*

## **Committee Reports**

**Christian Education** Early Communion class attendees have been Lama and Angelina; their father is Barnabas Dyedi who continues his Candidacy Application for Seminary with the ELCA Teem Program. Included within the program is the Congregation Support through Endowment funds.

**Evangelism/Outreach** OTOC Spring Fundraiser is this weekend. Vicki, Mary, Arlone and Amanda donated a basket which has been given for the silent auction.

NE Brass Concert scheduled for Saturday, April 1st at 7:00 pm. Volunteers are needed to help with refreshments during intermission.

Pastor shared an encouraging pantry story with amazing grace being shown between one pantry participant to another.

**Finance** Offering envelopes have not arrived as of today, Pastor discussed with Council of seeking out another company for next year, Council agreed. (FYI, they arrived the following day.)

Sarah motioned to ratify the Disney Endowment Distributions submitted to the Council. Ralph seconded the motion, Council approved.

**Property** A box of new tile has been purchased to replace basement tile that had been damaged.

The boiler was cleaned and waiting for a part to arrive to complete repairs by Leo’s Boiler.

**Service/Social Ministry** 93 Celebration Cake packets were assembled on Monday, March 6th for the Pantry distribution on Monday, March 13th. Approximately, 10 Cake boxes will be delivered to both Liberty and Spring Lake Elementary Schools.

The Personal Care Kits will be assembled following Worship Service on Sunday, March 26, in support of the Lutheran World Relief efforts.

**Support/Stewardship** None.

**Worship** Maundy Thursday Service will be in person at St. Luke’s at 7 pm. Augustana Lutheran Church has extended an invitation to join them for Good Friday service on April 7, 6:30 pm.

**Unfinished Business** None.

**New Business** Brenda Spahr and Eva Martin will attend the Synod Assembly in Kearney June 2nd and 3rd.

*Continued...*

**Announcements** Pastor shared a letter he received from Uganda asking for donations to help with a water well for an orphanage. The letter was personally handwritten directed to Pastor Damon Laaker. It is interesting as to how Pastor Laaker's name has reached as far away as Uganda!

Eva will prepare a prayer for next month.

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

Respectfully Submitted, Brenda Spahr, Secretary

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## Palm Sunday

9:30 am Worship at St. Luke's Lutheran Church, 2315 I Street.



## Maundy Thursday

6:30 pm Worship at St. Luke's Lutheran Church, 2315 I Street.



## Good Friday

6:30 pm Worship at Augustana Lutheran Church, 3647 Lafayette Avenue.



## Easter Sunday

9:30 am Worship at St. Luke's Lutheran Church, 2315 I Street.

There will be a pre-service coffee and refreshments beginning at 8:00 am Easter morning.

Extend an invitation to family, friends and neighbors!  
Hope to see you there!



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  
Samuel Mantzaris  
Pam Reents  
Urbano Vasquez  
The family of Andrew Edwards



June Hilmer  
Carolyn Matson  
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!

## Stewardship as Investment

Picking the right starting point for stewardship is vital to get us where we want to go as individuals and as communities of faith.

One possible starting point could be called stewardship as investment. "Give and God will bless you" expresses the same idea, and is reinforced through biblical testimony. When seeking to reassure the disciples who questioned the sacrifice asked of them, Jesus said: "There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age ... and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). The Christian steward is one whose giving will be met by God's giving. However, to use this as a starting point for stewardship can be misleading, if not counterproductive. If we begin by presuming that we give to get, where does that take us? The Reformation erupted over just this issue in the sale of indulgences. Beyond that, if our starting point is "give and be blessed," what happens to stewardship when the giver encounters pain, suffering or deprivation? Does the giving end until life improves? Or, does guilt induce more giving, so as to force God's hand?

Consider two texts, each capable of bringing stewardship to focus and fruition:

First, consider the opening verse of Psalm 24: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it." All faithful stewardship begins in that affirmation. All that we have, all that we are, all that is — all belongs to God. Whatever comes into our hands does so as a trust from God. We live in a God-given world. The second verse to consider as a starting point is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." All creation is not only God-given, it is God-loved — a love made clear in God's own selfless act of giving.

Christian stewardship simply, yet profoundly, imitates God's example of giving. Stewardship is our love taking form, as God's love took form, through the giving of ourselves. Stewardship is nothing more and nothing less. Taken together, these two verses provide stewardship's most enduring starting point — stewardship as an act of selfless thanksgiving.

Pr. Laaker

May God  
Bless You



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!

Dear Pastor Damon & Grace Lutheran Endowment,

Thank you for your continuing support of Table Grace Ministries! We are deeply grateful for your gift of \$5,000.00 toward our Gala fundraising efforts. This will help support and nourish the community in the coming year!

Blessings, Simone, Matt & the Table Grace Ministries Team

Thank You!



Volunteers gathered in the fellowship hall and assembled **70 Personal Care Kits** following Worship service on March 26th! Thank you to all who made this year such an inspiring impact through the giving of time, donations, and monetary gifts. May God's love reflect to all who may receive the Personal Care Kits given!

Lutheran World Relief Organization distributed guidelines to follow in our assembly process. All items that do not meet the LWR guidelines will be given to a local pantry where they will be distributed to those in need.



**Celebrate Cake Boxes**

Thank you to everyone who helped make Celebrate with Cake boxes a huge success. We were able to provide cake boxes to the Loaves and Fishes pantry, South High School and Central High School. Thank you for bringing joy to people who might need a little help celebrating a birthday, anniversary, a great day at school or work, or just because!



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 – Sarah Emery  
Eva Martin
- 5 – Emily Bauer
- 7 – Linda Helm
- 8 – Elizabeth Koka
- 14 – Thomas Emery
- 16 – Daven Everitt



Nebraska Brass is one of the Midwest's most popular brass quintets, performing a wide variety of music including classical, Dixieland, and jazz. The Nebraska Brass celebrated its 35th anniversary in 2022 and also received a Mayor's Arts Award in 2013. Several programs are available, including A Nebraska Brass Christmas, All-American Pops, and other concerts featuring various musical styles. Nebraska Brass can also customize a concert to suit the needs of the sponsoring community or organization. Your audience will be entertained by the ensemble's style and precision, as well as their engaging and lighthearted commentary.

**Nebraska Brass will be performing "Music from Around the World" Concert at Grace Lutheran Church on Saturday, April 1st at 7:00 pm.**

Lutheran Women of Omaha  
Tuesday, April 11, 2023 - 12:00 Noon

Join us at Immanuel Lutheran Church, 2725 N 60th Ave.

Cost: \$3.00

Bring your own lunch, drinks and dessert will be provided.

Guest speaker is Pam Burklund & Joyce with "Mission to Haiti". Free will offering will benefit Mission to Haiti Monetary.

Call Mardelle Gocek at 402-292-1328 by Sunday, April 9th to reserve your seat.



## Bishop Eaton Issues Statement on Anti-Transgender Legislation

3/20/2023 11:20:00 AM

As we approach March 31, many people are preparing to recognize Transgender Day of Visibility, an international day to celebrate the contributions of transgender people and raise awareness about the deadly injustices they face.

As bishop of this church, I am concerned that the rights of transgender and nonbinary Americans have been targeted all over this nation. Nearly 400 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills were introduced across the United States in 2022, most of them targeting trans youth. That is twice the number from 2021 and almost eight times the total from 2020. The language in many of these bills attacks the humanity of trans and nonbinary people, often erasing the dignity that should be afforded to everyone.

While members of our church hold various convictions regarding gender, the teaching of our church supports legislation and policies to protect every person's human dignity and civil rights. (Human Sexuality, p. 19) As Christians we believe every human being is created in God's image, and we must honor and celebrate God's creation. Our church teaches that we affirm transgender and nonbinary siblings as God's children, who are loved unconditionally. Our social statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* (2019) also declares that this church commits itself to "advocate for and support laws, policies, and practices that respect diverse bodies rather than discriminating against, objectifying, or devaluing them" (p. 60).

I urge us, as people of faith, to love our neighbors, care for the vulnerable and marginalized, and work for justice and equality. We may have differing opinions on "matters related to sexual orientation and gender identity," (FSJ, p. 61) but we must always uphold the dignity and humanity of everyone. These disagreements do not allow us to accept actions that dehumanize, discriminate against or objectify any individual or group.

*Continued...*

We must stand together, dear church, faithfully advocating for the full humanity and dignity of all people. Let us recognize and affirm the humanity of our transgender and nonbinary siblings. Let us advocate for their dignity. Let us continue to be guided by God's love and compassion as we seek justice and equality for everyone.

In Christ,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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](https://communityrelay.com) and see if you and someone you know can benefit from this helpful website!

The 35th Annual Quilt Auction will be Saturday, July 29, 2023 at Carol Joy Holling Camp, Conference & Retreat Center.



The church office recently received a "Quilters Guide" Book for any one or group who is interested in creating and working on a quilt to be donated for this summer's Quilt Auction.

Quilts should be delivered to Carol Joy Holling Camp beginning June 1st and before July 21st. Quilt Donation Forms are available in the church office.



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

**New Hours for Breakfast and Lunch**  
**Mon, Tues, Thur, Fri & Sat. from 7 - 2**  
**Closed: Wed and Sun**

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](https://www.paypal.com/np/hbs) \* 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).



## 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**

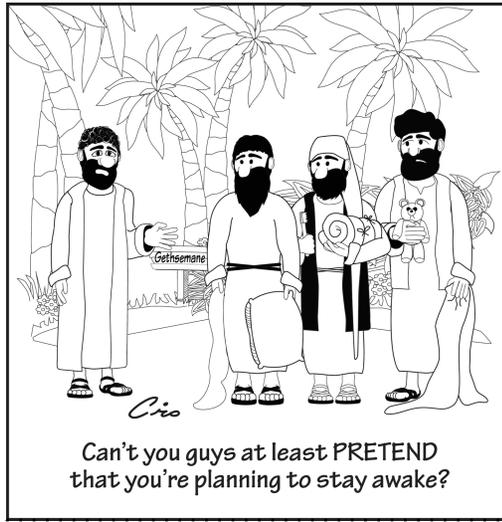


Items that clients cannot purchase with their food stamps are always appreciated: Dish Soap, Kleenex, Bar Soap, Deodorant, Toothbrush and toothpaste, Feminine hygiene products, Hair products (combs, brushes, picks), Bathroom tissue, Shampoo, Dry Laundry Soap, Hand Sanitizer, Diaper wipes, and Diapers, especially sizes 6 and pull-ups.

**We always need paper or plastic bags.**



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**THE FAMILY CIRCUS** By Bill and Jeff Keane



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**Hillbilly wisdom**

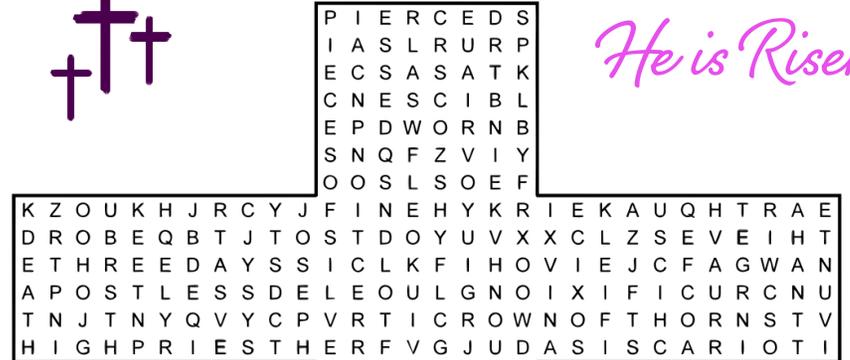
- ~ "You cannot unsay a cruel word."
- ~ "Most of the stuff people worry about ain't never gonna happen anyway."
- ~ "Silence is sometimes the best answer."
- ~ "Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. Leave the rest to God."

~ via Rev. Dr. Karl R. Kraft, Dover, DE  
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**EASTER WORD SEARCH**



*He is Risen*



- ANGELS
- APOSTLES
- BETRAYAL
- BLOOD
- CALVARY
- CROSS
- CROWN OF THORNS
- CRUCIFIXION
- DARKNESS
- DEATH
- EARTHQUAKE
- EASTER
- GOLGOTHA
- HIGH PRIEST
- JESUS CHRIST
- JOSEPH
- JUDAS ISCARIOT
- KING
- LAMB

- MARY
- NAILS
- PASSOVER
- PIECES OF SILVER
- PIERCED
- PILATE
- RESURRECTION
- ROBE
- ROMANS
- SACRIFICE
- SIMON OF CYRENE
- SOLDIERS
- SON OF GOD
- SPEAR
- STONE
- TEMPLE
- THIEVES
- THREE DAYS
- TOMB

"Christ came to bring joy: joy to children, joy to parents, joy to families and to friends, joy to workers and to scholars, joy to the sick and joy to the elderly, joy to all humanity. In a true sense, joy is the keynote of the Christian message and the recurring motif of the Gospels... Be messengers of joy!"

~ Pope John Paul II  
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