

grace notes

The newsletter of Grace Lutheran Church



Christmas at Grace

Making Room for Jesus at Christmas

How do we make room for Jesus in all the busyness of holiday preparations? There is always so much to be done! Cards need to be addressed and mailed. Our homes wait for us to decorate them both outside and inside. So many of us have to buy and wrap all the presents while we also try to bake cookies and prepare Christmas treats. Trees have to be set up and decorated! Family gatherings have to be planned. Whew! We're just exhausted thinking about it!

In all this busyness we invite you to take time to come to church and pause for just an hour or two to

worship and celebrate Jesus' birth. It can be a real way for us to make room for Jesus! For as we tell the story of Joseph and Mary coming to Bethlehem to discover there is no room for them at the inn, we will challenge each other to reflect how we might find just enough space for him to come again in us, as well as our holiday celebrations.

For those who are new to Grace, we celebrate Christmas in a "big way." We have five different worship services on Christmas Eve to give everyone an opportunity to include worship amid all the family activities. The first two are early Family Services (2:30 & 4:00 pm) which offer an extended children's sermon and a special gift for children. The next service (7 pm) has a more "contemporary" feel to it, as well as candlelight singing. The last two services (9 & 11:00 pm) will be joyous traditional candlelight services with lots of special choral music. And after the "big" celebrations of Christmas Eve, we gather in the quiet of Christmas morning to share the story of the Wisemen, and gather around the Lord's Table for a reflective "Quiet Communion" service (10:00 am).

Please note the following Worship Opportunities at Grace:

Christmas Worship Schedule

Tuesday	December 24	2:30 & 4 pm	Family Christmas Service
		7 pm	Contemporary Candlelight
		9 & 11:00 pm	Traditional Candlelight

Christmas Day Worship

Wednesday	December 25	10 am	Quiet Communion Service
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We hope you will join us for this special time of celebration!



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Pastor Mark's Remarks:



Advent...the season of waiting and preparing as our thoughts naturally turn to upcoming Christmas, family and church celebrations. It's one of my favorite seasons. Why?...because Advent challenges me more than the others. It's so easy to get caught up in all the frenzy of holiday preparations. I watch the ads on the TV counting down the number of shopping days left; I see all the Christmas decorations and feel like Christmas is already here, and I make a mental list of what still needs to be done! The result is often tension, anxiety, and a silent prayer to God: "Help!" His answer to me is "Advent" and its emphasis on slowing down and re-learning the importance of waiting.

Waiting is hard! I tend to be an impatient kind of guy! Just ask my wife Jeannie! I'm the kind of person who wants a quick answer, an easy fix, and likes to know what I have to do! I know I need to slow-down and relearn the importance of waiting, in many parts of my life. I need to take things slowly in order to find the space and time to adequately prepare for whatever I will face in the future.

Perhaps that's why I am excited about our Holy Conversations! It is a long and slow process of seeking God's direction regarding not only same-sex weddings at Grace, but how he is asking us to continue to be a welcoming community. In other words, how are we going to live out our name: Grace?

Part of me would like the whole process to be over quickly! I would love to arrive at the final decision now. I would love to have God send me a letter outlining exactly what he wants us to do! In the middle of all these desires to rush quickly to the end of the process, is Advent; the reminder to once again slow down, even in our Holy Conversations, so we might take time to consider and reflect even in the middle of something as challenging as same-sex marriage!

Advent is a time of prayer! The Holy Conversations process is centered on prayer. Advent is a time for reflecting upon the ancient promise of salvation and hope. Holy Conversations is a long process of reflecting upon ways to offer salvation and hope to everyone. Advent is a time for holding back in order to anticipate and crave Jesus to come again in our world. The Holy Conversations is also a time for holding back easy decisions in order to wonder how Jesus might speak to us throughout waiting.

I find I am hopeful. I am thankful! I am excited because of all of you! Grace is an incredible church where people desire to do whatever is necessary to reflect the love of God, in Jesus Christ. You have demonstrated over and over in the past, that when we talk, study, struggle, pray, listen, God is always doing a new thing in our midst! This is not the same church I came to serve more than 18 years ago. Frankly, I'm not the same pastor! You've helped God change me! I know God has done some wonderful things in and through us, and I believe he's doing it again, as we enter this time of Advent!

May you and your family have a wonderful season of waiting, as we gather to celebrate Jesus' birth!

In Him,
Pastor Mark



Associate Pastor Steve Thomason

Deep Blue Dreams

What is the American Dream? The answer to that question has definitely changed over the generations. Many people would say that the American dream is about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are good things when used properly. However, when they are distorted they can become expressions of selfishness unfettered.

This past week I saw a video titled "What is a Trader?" It was produced by Right now media at rightnow.org. This provocative video stated that many of us in the United States have become hijacked by a distorted version of the American Dream that cries out, "Me, Me, Me!" and "More, More, More!"

This distortion becomes very clear during this time of year. Black Friday is now Dark Thursday night. Retailers are already peddling their goods, playing upon consumer desires to sell the next and greatest version of their product. Our consumerist culture cranks up to a frenetic pace during this season. We become competitive and aggressive shoppers. We plan parties to outdo our neighbors, and long for nostalgic moments that will enhance the holiday experience.

I was discussing the Trader video with a group of parents this week and I asked them if the distorted American dream was a reality in their lived experience. They responded with a resounding, "Yes!" I then asked them a question that I would like to pose to you, the reader of this article...

"What is God's Dream?"

That is the question that Advent asks. Advent is a counter-cultural time. When the distorted American dream reaches fever pitch with hot red and vibrant green lights, the church slows down into deep blue. Advent is a time when we join the people of Israel and ask, "What is God's dream for the world?"

God dreams for a time when peace reigns, when the lion lays down with the lamb. The prophets painted a picture of a Messiah who would turn the world upside down with a radical call to peace and justice on earth.

This Advent, I encourage you to dream with God. Take time to go into the deep darkness of silence, contemplation, and expectant prayer. Resist the temptation to run with the Christmas rat-race that chases the distorted American Dream. This Advent, let's dream God's dream, together.



Church Administrator Ralph Holbrook

We have much to be thankful for here at Grace! As we enter into Advent – it is a time for us to share a joyful attitude with others in our community.

Thank you for your prayers and cheerful giving! We could not do the life-giving ministry we do on a regular basis here at Grace without your generosity and prayers. God's Spirit has certainly been moving in our midst this year: in the children's area; in the youth department; in our worship area; and Sunday Evenings at Grace, just to name a few.

We recently sent out an end of the year letter and statement highlighting just a few of our accomplishments here at Grace. Here are a couple financial highlights.

We have:

- ◆ Completed the first phase of the Free 2B Grace Stewardship Campaign.
- ◆ Attempted to make a personal contact with all 519 families at Grace *and* connected with over 340 families.
- ◆ Engaged many Grace Families in prayer and spiritual growth.
- ◆ 159 families have come along side us and are participating in the Stewardship Campaign.
- ◆ Begun to address deterioration issues with more work continuing in 2014.
- ◆ Made six additional mortgage principal payments, saving Grace approximately \$45,000 in interest over the life of our loan.
- ◆ We have addressed many building projects to help maintain our wonderful facility; so that, we may continue to do ministry here at Grace.

To do all this takes gifts of time, expertise, and financial resources. God has truly blessed us this year with all of these things! Thank you for the generosity you have shown, we trust you've been blessed through your giving (Acts 20:35). As we end the year and prepare for a great start to 2014 - would you please consider making a year-end financial gift as we celebrate God's abundance and ministry here at Grace

Thank you for giving to build *the ministry of Grace in the Heart of Andover and beyond!* May you have a blessed Advent Season!

Upcoming Events:



Advent Wreath Making Event & Potluck Dec. 1st at Grace!

Please join us for the **Advent Wreath Making Event** Sunday, Dec 1st from 5 to 7 pm in Fellowship Hall. Please bring a main dish, salad or dessert to share and we'll enjoy an ole fashioned potluck at 5 pm (green Jell-o anyone?). Then we'll create our advent wreaths and conclude the evening with singing carols together.

The Advent wreath kit, including candles and evergreens, will be provided for a cost of \$12. Please bring your own pruning shears or scissors, and also decorations such as ribbon, pine cones, etc.

The advent wreath in our homes will be a reminder to prepare our hearts for Christ's birth. As we light another candle each week, and as we share in family devotions around the advent wreath, we will focus on the true meaning of Christmas.

Please join us as we make our Advent Wreaths on Sun. Dec. 1. Sign up on the opportunity pages in bulletin or call the church office 763-421-6520. For more information, please contact Jessie Crooks, JessieR-Crooks@gmail.com



The Great Escape - February 28th Mark Your Calendars!

Women, do you need an 'escape'? Well then, save the date for the next "Great Escape" Women's Fellowship event to be held Friday, February 28th from 6:30 to 9:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall at Grace. Mark your calendars.

New Advent Wreath at Grace!



Grace Lutheran has been given a special gift for Advent: a redesigned Advent Wreath!!! We want to thank Dean Keller for taking our old wreath which hung high above the baptismal font and rebuilding it. It is now smaller and sits on a beautiful pedestal on the chancel area. It will be easier for families to light it during our Advent Worship services. We are thrilled that many of the blue ceramic tiles created years ago by Steve Nelson are now easy for all to see. Thanks to you Dean for your wonderful gift. Many thanks as well to Judi Wold & Sue Melody for their amazing Advent decorations.



We hope you will join us in a series of Holy Conversations as our church begins the process to talk, share and pray about a challenging topic: same-sex marriage and how it affects our ministry at Grace. It is our hope that the following steps will encourage everyone at Grace to have a place to be heard and affirmed as we consider this issue.

- ◆ **Holy Conversations I** - Was held *October 24 & 29 at 7:00pm*. During these sessions, the question, "How do we agree to disagree and still find unity in our church?" was discussed.
- ◆ **Holy Conversations II** - Was held *November 19th, December 3(OT); January 7 & 16 (NT) all at 7:00pm*. During these sessions we will study scripture to find out what the Bible says about sexuality, homosexuality and marriage.
- ◆ **Holy Conversations III** - to be held during the months of *February & March* (dates to be determined). These meetings will help us process and discern what we have learned throughout our journey.
- ◆ **Holy Conversations IV** - to be held during the months of *March & April* (dates to be determined). We will meet to discuss and share all the information we have gathered in the Holy Conversations process for the congregation to review and discuss.
- ◆ **Vision Board Decision - May** - during this time the vision board will meet to make a decision about Grace's policy regarding same-sex wedding ceremonies at our church.

Log onto our website at www.graceandover.org and click on the "Resources" tab, and then scroll down to Holy Conversations to review some of the material that was compiled at each of the Holy Conversation sessions.



Check out the *Grace Calendar* online at www.graceandover.org, for all of the latest upcoming events and happenings at Grace!

Thank You:



The "Love of Grace" Bazaar Committee would like to express their sincere thanks to all of you who helped make this year's bazaar a "whopping success!" We thank the scouts who helped with set up and clean up and the shoppers, bakers, and crafters who donated their food, time and talents. We were thrilled to have so many vendors who wanted to display and sell their homemade wares. We would like to especially thank those in the church office for their "behind the scenes" work and the Grace members who volunteered their time during the actual bazaar...we really couldn't have done it without you. The \$1800 in profits will be dispersed to missions/charities yet to be named. Until next year.....Caroline, Renee, Jan, and Deb



LIVE, LAUGH, LOVE Re-Cap!

by BreAnn Haugrud

"He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake." –Psalm 23:3

Just as the psalmist wrote of the refreshment only God can provide in Psalm 23, the fall Women's Retreat at Bunker Hills was a time of total peace and soulful restoration for myself and many others.

The theme "LIVE, LAUGH, LOVE" was a very fitting description of the retreat activities for the 30 women in attendance on Nov. 2nd. It was a beautiful day of fellowship and connection in God's presence. It was evident that Christ was working through the women facilitating the event to minister His peace and grace to those attending.

I found the whole experience completely refreshing and now look forward to each opportunity to live, laugh and spread God's love each and every day.



Graceful Seniors

According to the Grace Lutheran roster, there are currently 88 senior members at the present time. On December 14, 12 senior men will be ringing the Salvation Army bells at County Market in Andover. The Senior men are planning an ice fishing trip sometime in January as well. Members of the property team finished painting the columns and the round window at the church entrance.

The newest member of the property team, Harold Zupon, single handedly accomplished an enormous project this fall. He reconnected the vent fans in the portables, as well as replaced eight 4'x8' sections of siding on them. Thank you Harold! This month we also had assistance from two non-seniors who are not members of the property team. Ralph and Kris painted the new siding for us. Thank you, Ralph and Kris

On the third Tuesday of each month, Pastor Gene Heglund leads the "breakfast" seniors in a Biblically-related study on the Parables at the Farmstead in Andover. The breakfast buffet cost is \$6.50 per person. The meeting begins at 8:30 and is usually completed by 9:45. Reservations need to be made for the breakfast and there is a calling committee who does this each month. If you are interested in joining, please contact Kris in the church office at 763-421-6520.

The November Countdown to Sharing:

THANKS to everyone who gave of their time, talents and resources in our November Countdown of Sharing! Your overflowing generosity is such a blessing to so many people in our local community as well as those in need around the world! THANKS be to God!

"This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God!" 2 Corinthians 9:12

Our church-wide efforts are almost complete, and here are the updated results at the time the Grace Notes went to press in late November:

- ◆ 447 Volunteers packed meals at Feed My Starving Children on Nov. 22/23
- ◆ 401 Operation Christmas Child Shoe boxes were collected
- ◆ 154 Winter Coats were donated to Hope 4 Youth and ACBC Food Shelf
- ◆ 260 Pairs of Mittens were collected for Sand Creek Elementary students
- ◆ 78 Volunteers served our Family Promise guests at Grace, Nov. 24-30

Your Generosity results in THANKSGIVING to God!

Children's Ministry:



Kim DeVries
Co-Director of
Children's
Ministry



Monica Allen
Co-Director of
Children's
Ministry



Grace Lutheran Children's Ministry

Like our new Facebook page and keep up with everything happening in Children's Ministry here at Grace!



Rockin' Kids Bible Club

In December, we will learn about the prophets and the special visitors that came and visited the Baby Jesus. We will have a craft night and our Christmas Party during December. **Wed. Dec 14 – RKBC Christmas Party and last RKBC in 2013; Wed. Jan 8 – RKBC begins in 2014**

Nursery!

Sunday mornings are FUN in the nursery! Nursery is available at all services, and is staffed with fully trained volunteers who have a gift and love for our littlest ones. We love having your children in the nursery and the younger your child is, the easier the adjustment will be!



Nursery will be offered at these Christmas Eve Services - 2:30, 4:00 & 7:00pm



Family Worship Weekend - December 8th & January 5th

Children will begin in Worship Services with their families and then be dismissed to SONday School after the Children's Sermon. The SONday School children will be sharing a special song in worship. Children may just come forward when it is time to sing.

No SONday School during the weekends of: November 30/December 1 or December 28/29

SONday School Christmas Program – Sun. Dec. 15 at 2 p.m.

Our Christmas Play this year is **Wee Three Kings**. Join us as we travel through time, to King Herod's court and see the journey of Kings as they meet the Messiah.

Dates to remember:

- ◆ **Sat. Dec. 7 at 9 a.m:** Rehearsal for Grades 3-5 who have a part in the play.
- ◆ **Sat. Dec. 14 at 11 a.m:** Rehearsal for ALL children Grades 1-5.
- ◆ **Sun. Dec. 15-**Program begins at 2 p.m. Children need to be here by 1:40 p.m. Please bring Preschool and Kindergarten children to the Nap Room and Grades 1-5 to the Fellowship Hall.



The Giving Tree!

This year we will have a "GIVING TREE" at Grace, allowing us to share our abundance and God's grace with families in need in our local community. As part of our Faith and Community Partnership with Sand Creek Elementary School, we will collect gifts underneath our GIVING TREE for the first few weeks in December. Then later this month, we will deliver these gifts to families at this school who will be blessed by your generosity this holiday season.

The GIVING TREE is located outside of the Children's Ministry office (near the Fellowship Hall). On the tree, there are tags with specific requests, for example 'a toy for 6 yr. old boy' or 'Cub gift card' for the family holiday meal. Simply take a tag from the GIVING TREE, purchase the requested item, tape the tag onto your gift, and bring your gift to church by Tuesday, December 17th.



Youth Ministry Happenings: Steve Thomason & Tom Baker

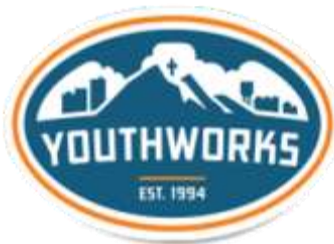


Planet Wisdom: a 24-Hour Turbo Boost for Your Soul!

“PlanetWisdom has always been focused on discipleship, but this year we’re digging deeper into what it means to grow in Christ. As we begin with the basics of what it means to follow Jesus, we’ll progress into an understanding of the fruit of the Spirit, how to break bad habits that keep us from Jesus, and what new disciplines we can embrace to help us become more like Jesus—to really thrive in our faith.” *(from the PW website)*

Friday night, December 6th – Saturday, December 7th at Grace Church in Eden Prairie with *Mark Matlock, Heather Flies, the Skit Guys*, and worship led by the *Chris Coleman Band*. We will leave at 4pm on Friday and stay overnight at the Hyatt Place in Eden Prairie. We will return by 5:30 on Saturday. **The cost is \$80 with a \$25 deposit due by Sunday, November 17th. Register online at www.graceandoveryouth.org.**

Grace High School Youth are going BEYOND our borders in 2014!



During the summer of 2014, our high school youth will be challenged to go beyond their comfort zones to serve and grow. For those who have previously attended a YouthWorks site, we are offering a week at the YouthWorks Beyond site in Puerto Rico from June 21-28. This Beyond site offers a deeper understanding of the people and communities we will serve along with the challenges of a different language and environment.

For those who have never been on a mission trip, we will be heading north from July 19-26, to serve in the communities near Thunder Bay, Ontario. This trip is open to all youth currently in the 8th grade through high school seniors. Check out the website below for more information and to register.



SWAT Saturdays!

SWAT stands for *Students Worshipping All Together*. On the second Saturday of every month, high school students will *plan* and *lead* the 5:00 worship service.

After the service we’ll grab some food and hang out in the Youth Room and Fellowship Hall.

This is an excellent opportunity to step up into leadership, take the next step in your worship experience, get connected to more people at church, and invite your friends to a unique worship experience. There will be an opportunity for musicians, artists, ushers, communion servers, scripture readers, testimonies, sound techs, and party planners to serve at this event each month.

It’s Not Just a Place to Serve, It’s a Place for Students to Worship

Let’s see how many high school students we can get to attend the next SWAT on **Saturday, December 14** at the 5:00pm service.

The SWAT team is led by *Noah Vaillant* and *Kari Trembath*. If you would like to participate in this service contact Pastor Steve, Noah, or Kari.

Have you visited the youth website yet? All the up-to-date information is there:

www.graceandoveryouth.com



Grace Lutheran Church

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A Ministry of Grace in the heart of Andover and beyond!

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*We invite you to join
us for one of our
Christmas Eve Services
on Tuesday, December 24th*

Services will be held at:

2:30 & 4:00 pm for our Family Christmas Service

7:00 pm for our Contemporary Candlelight Service

&

9:00 & 11:00 pm for our Traditional Candlelight Service

We hope you will join us for this special night!