

January/February 2024

Grace Notes



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH • 7300 W DIVISION RIVER FOREST IL 60305 • 708-366-6900 • WWW.GRACERIVERFOREST.ORG

Baptized and Connected to the Tree of Life

By Troy Medlin

I've recently been reading *How To Read A Tree: Clues and Patterns from Bark and Leaves*. According to the author, Tristan Gooley, "many trees that thrive near water have a distinctive rib on their leaves. They look like they have a stream down their middle." We are baptized children of God. We have been immersed in water and in the triune God, and continue to walk "wet" all the days of our lives. We are like a tree planted and fed by those streams of mercy that never run dry.

It was Luther who talked about how in baptism every Christian has enough to learn and practice for a whole lifetime. We are carried and nourished by those waters. We die to sin and rise to new life every day. How do people know we have been to the water? We have a cross traced over our brow like the distinctive rib on those leaves. That is not visible to those around us, though. When people "read" us what do they see? What do our leaves tell our neighbors?

I continue to be inspired by the way that you live out your callings as children of God beyond the walls of 7300 Division. I know many of you serve others week after week and year after year. Some have been caring for our new neighbors who have come to Harmony and the food pantry since early 2023. There you are encountered by Christ who comes disguised as a stranger. I'm in awe of your faithful and steadfast witness.



Photo of the Baptism of Jesus window at Grace.

Continued on page 2

Many of you have also responded to the call to care for those new neighbors who have found themselves living in our own neighborhoods and in the village many of us call home. You have volunteered at Grace Episcopal, Good Shepherd, and United. I continue to be amazed by the bins in the atrium that overflow again and again. Those items go to our new neighbors living in Oak Park and in North Lawndale — tangible signs of the love of God that crosses borders and boundaries to get to each one of us.

Not only that, but you filled the mitten tree with hats, gloves, and scarves to bless the Little Leaders of Tomorrow and the new neighbors at Harmony. You supported the Night Ministry with stockings. This is a snapshot in time. This is who you are. I could go on and on with examples.

“It is when our lives are cruciform that we testify to that cross shaped over our brow. It is when we loosen the grip on our own life so we can give our lives away that we show our neighbors who we are.”

As the post-holiday winter sets in, may we continue what Howard Thurman calls *The Work of Christmas*, “To find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner, to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among others, to make music in the heart.” You do this in large and small ways every day.

It is our acts of love that show the world we have been planted by those

saving waters. It is when our lives are cruciform that we testify to that cross shaped over our brow. It is when we loosen the grip on our own life so we can give our lives away that we show our neighbors who we are. When the world outside “reads” the people of Grace may they say that we must be baptized and connected to the tree of life — and that their lives are better because of it. I know that they are. It is a joy to see God’s promises at work in you.

Worship in February

Sunday, February 4

Fifth Sunday of Epiphany

Service of Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.
Isaiah 40:21-31, Psalm 147:1-11 & 20,
1 Corinthians 9:16-23, Mark 1:29-39

Sunday, February 11

Transfiguration of Our Lord

Service of Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.
2 Kings 2:1-12, Psalm 50:1-6, 2 Corinthians 4:3-6,
Mark 9:2-9

Wednesday, February 14

Ash Wednesday

Imposition of ashes and Holy Communion at 8:25 a.m.,
11:30 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.
Joel 2:1-2 & 12-17, Psalm 51:1-17, 2 Corinthians 5:20 —
6:10, Matthew 6:1-6 & 16-21



Sunday, February 18

First Sunday in Lent

Service of Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.
Genesis 9:8-17, Psalm 25:1-10, 1 Peter 3:18-22,
Mark 1:9-15

Sunday, February 25

Second Sunday in Lent

Service of Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.
Genesis 17:1-7 & 15-16, Psalm 22:23-31,
Romans 4:13-25, Mark 8:31-38

Wednesdays during Lent

**On February 21 and 28, join us for Lenten Midweek
Worship at 8:25 a.m., 11:30 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.**

**Supper will be served at 6:00 p.m. in Fellowship
Hall.**

Faith Formation in 2024

Pastor Lyle



As we enter the New Year at Grace, we have many ways to grow in our faith, especially on Sunday mornings. This is true during worship, of course, but it is also true before and following worship. Many Sundays will continue to look like Sundays always have. There will be Sunday school, Confirmation, adult education, and Bible study. On other Sundays, we will

offer a single option for adults, the better to draw us together in Christ and create community. This will be the case during Lent. Finally, on a few other Sundays, we will have a single intergenerational option for all members. Remember, we are gifts to each other from God, and this is true across generations or other distinctions. We'll always keep you updated via Sunday is Coming emails.

From February 18 through March 17, I will lead a study of *Belonging: 5 Keys to Unlock Your Potential as a Disciple*, by Karoline Lewis. Dr. Lewis teaches at Luther Seminary and will be our homilist for Bach Cantata Vespers on January 28; she will also be leading adult education that morning. *Belonging* centers on the biblical story of the Samaritan woman. I'm looking forward to spending this time with you as together we rediscover the deep joy of what it means to truly belong – to Christ and to one another. Books will be available at no cost to you, but please sign up so we know how many to order. A link to sign up will be available soon.

Faith Formation continues after worship, especially for our youth as they gather for Teen Talk. Later in the spring, New Member sessions will begin, too. See you soon at Grace. Remember, Sundays start at 8:45 a.m. with Grace Gathers!



From left to right: Sunday morning worship at Grace Church and after-worship distribution of blessed prayer shawls. October, 2023. Photos by Debra Funderwhite.

Adult Education Schedule

January 28: *Lessons at the Well: What the Samaritan Woman Teaches Us*

A deep dive into the story of Samaritan woman and its teachings.

Led by Karoline Lewis, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN Professor

February 4: *Religion's Roles in the Ukraine War*

An explanation on the complexities of the conflict

Led by Nicholas Denysenko, Valparaiso University Professor

Find the complete Adult Education schedule at www.graceriverforest.org>faith formation>adult education

Grace School

By Ana Garcia

Grace Lutheran School has recently ventured into uncharted territory by forming its first Robotics team, and the results have been nothing short of thrilling. This exciting initiative was made possible by the passion and expertise of two Grace parents: Jeff Blackman and Richard Cavanaugh. Jeff, an aerospace engineer, and Richard, a scientist specializing in Particle Physics, joined forces to guide and inspire a group of budding engineers, grades 6 through 8, through the intricacies of robotics.

The Robotics team showcased their prowess in their inaugural competition, where thirty-six teams from various schools competed. Grace Lutheran School fielded two teams, and the results were impressive. One team secured the eleventh position, while the other claimed the twentieth spot. This is an amazing start for such a novice team. The collaborative efforts of these students were commendable, demonstrating not only technical skill but also effective teamwork, problem-solving, and a shared commitment to achieving a common goal. We eagerly anticipate their future competitions.



Photo 1: Grace children at the Robotics competition. Photo 2: Jeff Blackman and Richard Cavanaugh at the same competition.



Grace School Robotics team at the Robotics competition.

In another milestone, the school's orchestra program celebrated its first concert featuring all strings – viola, violin, and cello. The concert marked a triumphant return for the reborn program after a prolonged hiatus, and students showcased their hard work and musical talents in a wonderful lunchtime performance for the school. Adding to the charm of the event, the amazing orchestra teachers, Ms. Hatmaker and Ms. Lewis, treated the audience to a mesmerizing string duet, highlighting their dedication and passion for nurturing musical talent at Grace Lutheran School.



Students performing at Grace School.



Students performing alongside Ms. Lewis.

Grace Lutheran School continues to evolve and embrace new opportunities for academic and creative exploration. The success of the Robotics team, the resurgence of the orchestra program, and the upcoming author visit (see next page) are just a few examples of the school's commitment to providing students with a well-rounded and inspiring educational experience.

Grace Notes is published monthly by Grace Lutheran Church and School, 7300 Division St., River Forest, Ill. It is mailed to Grace members, parents of students at Grace School, and friends of the congregation. This issue was mailed via U.S. Postal Service Bulk Mail on Friday, January 19, with the hope that it will arrive in your mailbox no later than January 26. Copies are also available at Grace.

Deadlines and submissions. The March issue of Grace Notes will be mailed on February 22. The deadline for copy is Wednesday, February 14. Send news to bklaus@graceriverforest.org. Please limit submissions to news relating to Grace Lutheran Church and School, its mission, ministries, and the benevolences the congregation supports. Articles should be no longer than 500 words. Submissions may be edited for length, clarity, and relevance.

Author Lisa Yee to visit Grace School

As a delightful bonus from the recent book fair, the school is set to host an author visit from the award-winning Lisa Yee. Scheduled for Friday, February 23, Lisa Yee will engage students from grades 3 to 7 in a discussion about her latest book, *The Misfit*, released in January. An accomplished author, Lisa Yee's works have captivated readers worldwide, and her visit promises to be an inspiring and enriching experience for our students.

Students will have the unique opportunity to explore Lisa Yee's literary world in advance as her works will be discussed in library class before her visit. This prelude aims to build excitement and anticipation among students, fostering a connection with the author and her creations. Additionally, students will have the chance to purchase a copy of Lisa Yee's book and have it personally signed by the author during her visit. For those eager to learn more about Lisa Yee and her literary contributions, her website (www.lisayee.com) serves as a valuable resource.



GRACE LUTHERAN SCHOOL

7300 Division Street in River Forest 708-366-6900

Admission
Events:

First Look
Friday

February 9
March 22

Drop in
between 9
and 11am

For more
information:

graceschoolrf.org

708-366-6900

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Discipleship: A Life of Study

By Julie Hinz



In November, we discussed prayer as central to our life of discipleship. Today we explore the study of scripture, another element key to our lives as disciples.

Connecting with another, conversing with another, is how we build any relationship. Connecting with God is no different. The study of scripture is how we build lives of discipleship.

“Spiritual study feeds our daily lives of faith and shows us what God wants for us and from us. It challenges us in our discipleship journey.”

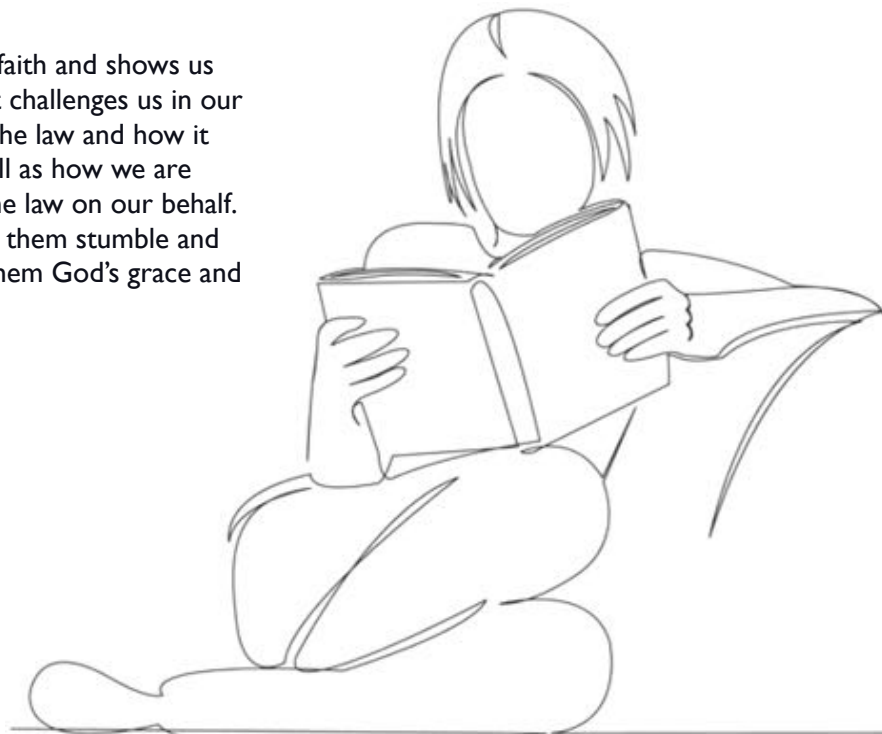
So, how do we study scripture? “How-to’s” are easy to find (just search Google!) but most fail to express the journey of biblical study, which is a lifetime adventure. Like watching a favorite movie or reading a favorite book repeatedly, something new is revealed every time, and your growing faith reveals new truths each time. The Bible is filled with stories of miracles, wars, infighting, faithfulness, jealousy, betrayal, frustration, drama, and love. Something for every reader! Some passages speak clearly to our hearts and others require more context or information. Spending time within its pages can be transformative. Other spiritual sources like inspirational writings of faith, devotionals, and sermons are also good sources for thinking about and knowing God in different ways.

Spiritual study feeds our daily lives of faith and shows us what God wants for us and from us. It challenges us in our discipleship journey. We learn about the law and how it both commands and condemns, as well as how we are saved through Christ’s fulfillment of the law on our behalf. We walk with Jesus’ first disciples, see them stumble and make mistakes, and experience with them God’s grace and

mercy. We encounter sinners and broken people whom God called to lead and serve. Everything we encounter is useful in examining our own lives and our journey into a

relationship with God. The most significant thing about why scriptural study holds a central place in our journey into discipleship is the reality that scripture asks us to stop from the busyness of life, listen to what God is saying, ponder what it means for our “here and now,” and allow the Word to change us.

This is not something we must do alone. Personal study and devotion are good and right, but studying together enhances our understanding and reveals questions we may never have considered. When we study as a community of faith, we share in the wealth of knowledge and insight that everyone brings to the table. We teach each other, connect, and grow together in our mutual discipleship journey. We see how faith draws us together in community and sustains us as we live our lives as Jesus’ disciples. The perfect opportunity for this communal study is coming this February! Join us as we explore *Belonging: 5 Keys to Unlock Your Potential as a Disciple* by Karoline Lewis. (See Pastor Lyle’s article on page 3 for more information.)



Employee Retention Credit

Pastor Lyle



Last year, Grace received notice that our application for the Employee Retention Credit had been approved. The Employee Retention Credit (ERC) is a tax credit for certain eligible businesses and tax-exempt organizations that had employees and were affected during the COVID-19

pandemic. Grace applied for credits totaling \$712,000, of which we have so far received \$678,000. We paid a contingent fee of \$102,000 to an outside firm to facilitate and manage our application.

The Council appointed a committee to propose a plan to best put these funds to work for the sake of Grace's mission. As these are one-time-only funds, the committee decided it would not be wise to use them for the recurring costs of the current operating budget. So, attention was given to ideas that would enable us to deal with predictable large one-time expenses and upgrades in maintaining our property or investments that would yield ongoing returns that can be helpful with recurring costs.

The proposed plan was adopted at the November meeting of the Council. The first action taken was to tithe a portion of these funds to ministries beyond Grace.

10% (\$58,000) has been allocated for benevolence; a portion of these funds have already been distributed to Housing Forward and Lutheran Disaster Response to support ministry to migrants both locally and internationally.

Second, the Council acted to put these funds to work for the future of Grace's ministry. So, 54% (\$311,000) has been allocated to the Forward in Faith school endowment fund, which will support excellent, Christ-centered education at Grace for years to come and lower the amount of offering revenue needed to support the mission of the school. The remaining 36% (\$207,000) has been allocated to our capital maintenance fund. This money will help us tend to the coming needs of our facilities in the future so that current gifts can better support mission and ministry. It is a blessing to have these funds to gift beyond Grace and to invest in God's future at Grace.

These monies will help us tend to future needs for ministry. Your continued generosity in supporting current mission and ministry is both needed and appreciated.



January 28

Jesus Schläft, was soll ich hoffen? BWV 81

Jesus sleeps, what can I hope for?

3:00 p.m. Cantata Preview Lecture

Mark Peters, Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights

3:45 p.m. Instrumental Prelude

Kontras Quartet: Eleanor Bartsch, François Henkins, Ben Weber, and Jean Hatmaker

4:00 p.m. Bach Cantata Vespers

Karoline M. Lewis, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, homilist

G. P. Telemann: Ich danke dem Herrn vom ganzen Herzen

Bach Cantata Vespers Chorus and Orchestra

Grace Cantor Michael D. Costello, conducting

Sarah Ponder, mezzo soprano

Ace Gangoso, tenor

David Goversten, bass

February 25

Nimm, was dein ist, und gehe hin, BWV 144

Take what is yours and go away

3:00 p.m. Cantata Preview Lecture

Mark Peters, Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights

3:45 p.m. Orchestral Prelude

Florence Price: Andante Moderato for Strings

Vivian Fung: Pizzicato for String Orchestra

Richard Hillert: Prelude to Evening Prayer

4:00 p.m. Bach Cantata Vespers

Ole Schenk, United Lutheran Church, Oak Park, Illinois, homilist

Max Reger: Dein Wort, Herr, bleibet ewig

Bach Cantata Vespers Chorus and Orchestra

Grace Cantor Michael D. Costello, conducting

Carolyn DalMonte, soprano

Thomas Aláan, countertenor

Ryan Townsend Strand, tenor

January in the Grace Church Library

In a new year there are often plans to “do something better” or “less” or “more.” Usually these involve diet and exercise – but what about our spiritual improvement? The theme for the bibliography this month is linked to awareness. Whether through devotional books or walking along with authors as they share their experiences, we have an opportunity to recognize God’s call in our own lives more clearly when we read and seek awareness.

Check the book list in the Atrium case or in the library for all sorts of books exploring ways to improve our awareness of God in our daily lives and how we might respond to it.

Two summaries:

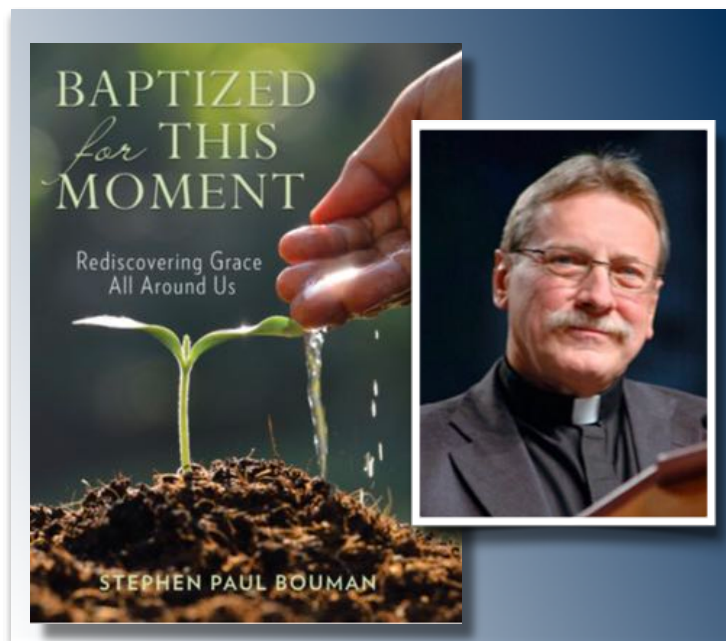
Small Mercies: Glimpses of God in Everyday Life by Nancy Jo Sullivan is a collection of times in the author’s life when she recognized the hand of God. Sometimes in the voice of a friend or an encounter with a stranger. But her takeaway is that God is in the world with us and we will see Him if we look.

Baptized for this Moment by Stephen Paul Bouman starts out as a journal of sorts. We follow Pastor Bouman through his experiences following the September 11 attack on New York, where he was living and working. By sharing his real-life journey, he gives helpful commentary regarding how we can deal with current and future tragedies. Whether the disasters are global or personal, the healing process can be the same. “Show up. Listen. Tell stories. Pray.”

The later chapters in this book are a direct challenge to the church. How can we bring a Christian voice to the public square? How might we generate interfaith dialog in our communities to mitigate bias and hatred that often lead to tragedy? Given current events, this book is right on the mark.



Pictured: Cover of “Small Mercies: Glimpses of God in Everyday Life” and author Nancy Jo Sullivan. From www.wineconference.org



Pictured: Cover of “Baptized for This Moment” and author Stephen Paul Bouman. From <https://www.stlukespr.org/about-st-lukes/leadership/>

As always, you can find a complete monthly list of the church library’s book recommendations and arrivals on graceriverforest.org>Grace Links.



Learn more and purchase tickets at graceful2024.givesmart.com

Grace Wine Donation Event

In preparation for the annual school fundraiser, A Graceful Evening, Please join us in Fellowship Hall on February 4, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. for appetizers, wine and drinks. Please bring a bottle of wine (pricepoint of \$30 or more) to donate to the Wine Pull for A Graceful Evening.



If you cannot attend but would like to donate wine you may drop it off at the front desk at Grace. If you have questions, please contact Karen Lareau Patel at karen_lareau@hotmail.com.

Thank you for supporting Grace Lutheran School!



GriefShare Support Group

Help and encouragement after the death of a spouse, child, family member, or friend

Thursdays, January 18 – April 11
9:00 – 11:00 am

Grace Lutheran Church
7300 West Division, River Forest

GriefShare is a special weekly seminar and support group designed to help you rebuild your life after losing a loved one. Our group is led by caring people who have experienced grief and can help you through the difficult days ahead.



We know it hurts, and we want to help.

To register: call 708.366.6900 or
email gracechurch@graceriverforest.org

GriefShare Seminar Series

The current GriefShare seminar series began on Thursday, January 18, 2024. You can join the course at any point, and all are welcome. The sessions are held on Thursdays through April 11, from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. in the church library except as noted below.

Your bereavement experience may be recent or not so recent. Whether you are grieving the loss of a spouse, child, parent, sibling, grandchild, other family member, or a friend, and no matter what the cause of your loved one's death, you will find encouragement, comfort, and help by being with others who understand what you are feeling. The course includes video sessions, online materials, and a workbook.

- January 18: Is This Normal? (conference room)
- January 25: Your Grief Journey
- February 1: Loneliness & Sadness
- February 8: Self-Care
- February 15: Fearful & Overwhelmed
- February 22: Anger (conference room)
- February 29: Regrets
- March 7: Grief & Your Household
- March 14: Grief & Your Friendships
- March 21: Questions for God (conference room)
- March 28: Stuck in Grief
- April 4: Hope & Resilience
- April 11: What Do I Live For Now?

To register: go to GriefShare.org, click on Find a Group, and use the River Forest zip code (60305) to locate our group; call 708-366-6900; or email gracechurch@graceriverforest.org. For further information, contact facilitator Linda Bernard at 773-259-4720. You can join the seminar series at any point, and all are welcome.

PRAYERS

This month, we celebrate with **Oliver Randall Wood**, son of **Josh** and **Julia Wood**, who was baptized on November 26, 2023.

We pray for those who mourn the death of **James Scherer**, who died on December 20, and John Craig, who died on January 12.

Prayer list: the weekly prayer list can be found in the worship bulletin on Sundays. Contact Esther Armstrong (eamstrong@graceriverforest.org) to be included on the published prayer list.

Confidential prayer chain: please contact Kathy Lucht (kathy.lucht@gmail.com) to be added to the confidential prayer chain if you have private concerns.

FELLOWSHIP

Yoga at Grace

Yoga classes with Ackli are held from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in Fellowship Hall every Thursday. Everyone is welcome. You do not need prior yoga experience. Classes are gentle and focused on alignment for strength and flexibility. Bring a yoga mat and a beach towel or blanket. Please dress comfortably. If you have questions about class or yoga in general, please call Ackli at 708-516-2701.

Grace Notes mailing crew

This newsletter crew will be at work again on Thursday, February 22, at 9:30 a.m. in the church library. Contact Marlene Hallman (708-562-5476) or just come!

Cornerstones

Bible study for seniors on Wednesdays. Join us in the church library for fellowship at 10:00 a.m. and Bible Study at 10:30 a.m. On February 14, 21 and 28 (Ash Wednesday and Wednesdays in Lent,) join us for fellowship at 10:00, Bible Study at 10:30, and Morning Prayer at 11:30 a.m. On February 14 and 28, lunch will be served in Fellowship Hall at 12:00 p.m. Contact Esther Armstrong at earmstrong@graceriverforest.org for more information.

Moms of Littles

Mothers with children of any and all ages, infants through teens, meet at 6:30 p.m. at Grace on the first and third Thursdays of the month for community and support. Contact Sabrina Maggio (sabrina.maggio713@gmail.com) for updates.

Theology on Tap

Community and monthly conversations about faith and life. The next meeting is Friday, February 23, at 7:00 p.m., offsite. Contact Pastor Troy for more information or to be added to the email list. (tmedlin@graceriverforest.org)

Men of Grace

The Men of Grace group meets on the fourth Saturday of the month at 9:00 a.m., in the youth center. The next meeting is February 24. Email Pastor Troy for more information (tmedlin@graceriverforest.org).

Dads of Grace

The Dads of Grace gather offsite for evenings of fellowship on the fourth Monday of every month. The next meeting is February 26. Email Pastor Lyle (dlyle@graceriverforest.org) for updates.

Retired Leaders

The Retired Leaders group meets monthly to discuss a wide breadth of topics. The next meeting is February 13. All are welcome! Email johnlhalvorson@yahoo.com to be added to the mailing list and to learn more.

Finding Hope

This group for people with chronic illness meets on the second Friday of each month at 10:00 a.m. The next meeting is February 9, in the church library. Contact Judie McDonnell for more information (judie.mcdonnell@att.net).

Moms of Teens and Young Adults

The Moms of High School Teens and Young Adults group fosters community among women whose children are growing up into adulthood. Contact Beth Reynolds (708-751-2196) to be added to the group's email list.

Knitting Group

This month, the knitting (and crocheting) group meets on February 20, 1:00–2:30 p.m. in the church library. Beginners are welcome! Contact Karen Eckstein (ecksteinkaren2@gmail.com) with questions.

Religion in Literature

The Religion in Literature group will meet on Friday, February 16 at 7:30 p.m. for a discussion of Dante's *Inferno*. To be added to the email list please contact jill.baumgaertner@wheaton.edu. All are welcome!

BUILDING HOURS

Building Hours:

- **Monday through Friday:** 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- **Sunday:** 8:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Weekends and evenings: open for scheduled activities.

PASTOR'S EMERGENCY PHONE

Call 708-689-3032 for emergency pastoral care on weekends, or when the Grace building is closed.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

Grace Lutheran Church General Fund
July 1, 2023 through January 10, 2023 (28 Sundays)

Church budgeted contributions
\$1047,000 (\$37,400 per week)

Church actual contributions
\$844,000 (\$905,000 last year at this time)

Church giving as of January 10, 2024: \$203,000
(19% behind budget, and \$61,000 (7%) behind last year.
The current deficit is \$112,000 (\$18,000 deficit last year through January 31.)

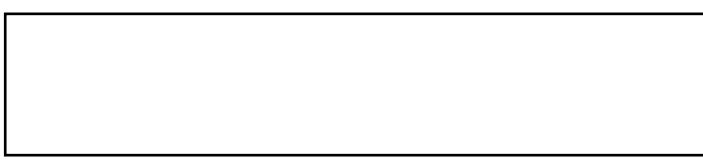
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