

JANUARY 2026 ▪ VOLUME 26, NO. 1

Happy New Year, Grace Lutheran Church. I pray that this time of rejoicing in the joy of Christmas and the hopes and dreams you carry for 2026 offer a time of intentional reflection and prayerful anticipation that sustains lives of faith in action.

In the month ahead, Grace's finance committee, church council, and congregational meeting receive financial estimates of giving paired with ministry funding requests to prepare a budget for ministry in 2026. Please make plans to join in the upcoming budget forum and annual meeting, and look for the annual report that is prepared each year to reflect and prepare for ministry possibilities.

We are blessed by the gift of living among God's faithful people in this community. The time shared over the past year, distributing food, sewing quilts and other items, volunteering for worship, calling for conversation and connection, visiting with home communion, tending to the grounds where we gather, teaching the faith, extending grace and compassion to others, and sharing in acts of service and fellowship are a tremendous gift and blessing.

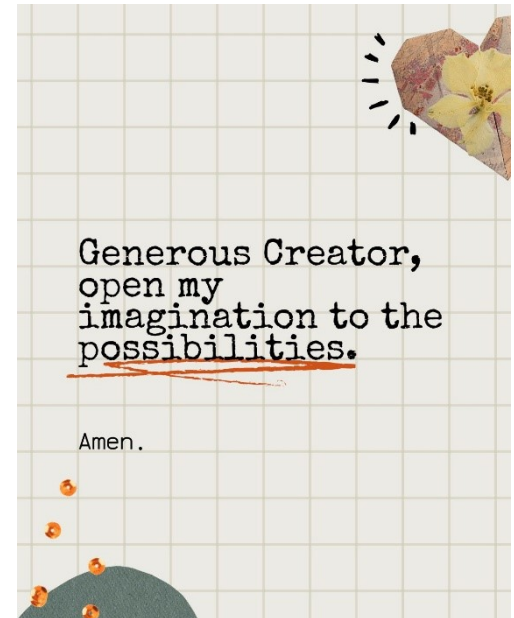
In addition to your financial offerings in support of Grace's mission, the people of Grace Lutheran Church continue to respond generously through additional giving opportunities — to the Woodstock Food Pantry, WACM Direct Assistance Program, Northern Illinois Synod, and ELCA World Hunger.



Thank you for your generosity in giving. The Thanksgiving Food Drive gathered together six full bags of donations to restock the Blessing Box, in addition to cash donations, and 561 pounds of food were delivered to the Woodstock Food Pantry. Your generosity through Christmas Family Sharing provided boxes full of donated items and gift cards for Turning Point and Family Health Partnership Clinic, and over \$1,300 in ELCA Good Gift donations.

Thank you, Grace Lutheran Church, for your faithful and generous sharing. We each have so much to offer, and together, are gifted and entrusted with the responsibility of stewarding God's generosity by responding faithfully to God's call to love and serve God and neighbor. Blessings on the year ahead of gathering in community to share God's grace.

*Peace,
Pastor Amanda*



Prayers

Home Communion

If you are unable to gather for worship and would like communion to be brought to you at home, please reach out to the church office. Grace has a team of home communion ministers who visit and bring communion from worship to you.

Senior Phone Calling

If you are interested in joining the senior calling team or are a senior who would be interested in learning more about this ministry of conversation and prayer, please call the church office.

Prayers

Please lift up these petitions in your prayers—To become a praying member of the Friends in Prayer, please submit name and e-mail address to dklabunde@gracewoodstock.org.

World: Bishop Yehiel Curry, churchwide staff & their families, Bishop Stacie Fidler, synod staff & their families, those serving in military conflicts, Arusha Town Lutheran Parish in Tanzania (our companion parish)

Woodstock: Pastor Amanda Bergstrom & her family; Grace Staff; Grace Council

Health Concerns: Wayne Aavang (son of Joy Aavang and brother of Barb Aavang), Charlie Bell (friend of Jamielynn Wedoff), Butch Borchardt (friend of Barb Aavang), Marlene Botts, Barb Carmichael, Jim Davis, Patrice Dunn, Marshall and Paige (Behrens) Fink (great granddaughter of Joy Aavang and great niece of Barb Aavang), Connie Fischer, Robert Giron (brother of Patty Kozlow), Tom Goggin, Christy Goodman (sister of

Jennifer Robbins), Marie Grob (family member of Kevin & Carrie Jarnecke), Becca Guenther (niece of Gretchen & Claude Hutchens), Tamasa Gutierrez (mother of Patty Kozlow), Cindy Hertrampf (sister of Tammy Hansing), Dan Hess, Gloria Holy, Denise Hoover, Wayne Japp, Anne Johnson, Nicholas Karasch (nephew of Jamielynn Wedoff), Tiffany Kurth (niece of Sue & Al Beckman), Elminster Lovejoy, Hudson May (great grandson of Karen Klabunde), Amanda McNally (grandniece of Diane Baker-Lockwood), Ben Miller (nephew of Mary Johnson), Natalie Miller (sister to Mary Johnson), Kem Moran (friend of Barb Aavang), Jenny Perrone (friend of Cindy Walters), Joe Pienschke, Dorothy Potoczky, Ila Randolph, Sheila Readell, Jayne Reicher (great niece of Barb & Wayne Japp), Herb & Bev Renner (brother & sister-in-law of Ken & Gladys Renner), Nick Resek (son of Tammy Resek-Goggin), Diane Rouse (cousin of Lisa Washkowiak), Orest Rychtytzkyj, Ryan Rychtytzkyj, Nathaniel Shipp (family friend of Brian Meyers), Ann Sinnett (friend of Shirley Berna), Kathy Stone, Samuel Sweeney (nephew of Melissa McMahon), Brian Tobin (grandson of Enn Teetsov), Marilyn Vanskike, Mary Widmayer, Caitlin Wilcox (niece of Anne Johnson)

Sorrow: Marjorie Bannister

Joy: Elena Bellavia

Prayer Requests

If you wish to add a prayer request for the newsletter, please call the church office at: **815-338-0554**.

Your prayer concern will run for one month and may be renewed. Submissions to the *Friends in Prayer* email may be submitted by telephone to the church office or via email to kim@gracewoodstock.com

Due to confidentiality laws, hospitals no longer notify churches or pastors when a member is hospitalized.

If you or a member of your family have a medical procedure planned or is admitted to the hospital, please call the church **(815-338-0554)**.

Sunday Book Club

Sunday Book Club will be held each Sunday in January in the parlor after the church service. We will continue with award-winning Chris Fabry's 2023 book "Saving Grayson." Contact Paul Lockwood or Beth Miller for more information.

--Sally Sheahan

Pinochle

Wednesday afternoon Pinochle will not be meeting during the month of January. Games will resume on the first and third Wednesdays of February, at 1 p.m., in room 101 on the lower level.

--Sally Sheahan

Music Position Retirement

It is with sadness, but great appreciation of her many years of service, that we have received the retirement request of Janice Burns as our Organist and Interim Coordinator of Worship and Music, effective June 1, 2026.

Jan has shared her musical talents as our organist for over 26 years. A celebration for Jan will be planned for later next spring.

GRACE FOR TODAY—The deadline for the **February 2026** newsletter is **January 15**. Please send articles to Kari Gippert at kgippert@gracewoodstock.org, or the church office. Questions: Call the office at **815-338-0554**.

Worship this January

"What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people." John 1:3b-4

After the recent snowstorms and cold on the Sundays in Advent, we hope to see you soon in worship this January. Gather around Jesus, the light of the world that shines life and light to all.

In early January, you are invited to pick up a star word and a blessing for the home to observe Epiphany traditions to bless the year ahead.

We gather for worship on Sundays at 9:00 a.m. as a faith community, and continue to give thanks for A/V Team volunteers who make worship accessible via the [YouTube livestream](#) or the posted worship videos on our website.

Thank you to all who volunteer their time in support of weekly worship. If you have questions or would like to learn more, please reach out to people listed below, or call the office if you'd like assistance in signing up for an opening.

- If you have questions about volunteering as an [Usher](#), [Greeter](#), [Reader](#), or [Communion Assistant](#), please contact Fay Wilson.
- If you'd like to join in sharing a children's sermon message, please contact Nyjiela Sirreayah
- There are currently four people who facilitate worship by being audible in the sanctuary and accessible via livestream. If interested in joining this A/V team rotation, please contact Bill Nattress.
- The altar guild teams are setting up before or cleaning up after worship, and there's room for you to join or form a team. To learn more, please contact Karen Reinhard.

New Year, New Music Gatherings ... In the new year ahead, you are invited to consider trying a new musical group. Each of Grace's vocal & bell choirs and band meet a couple times before participating in worship. Here are the upcoming first rehearsals for the new year, reach out to Jan Burns or directors with any questions.

Choirs	Ages & Typical Rehearsals	1 st Rehearsal in 2026	Director
Cherub	Age 3 – 1 st Grade Youth Vocal Choir; 2 <i>Wednesdays</i> 5:30-5:45 p.m.	January 21, 5:30 p.m.	Cindy Meyer
Joyful Messengers	2 nd – 5 th Grade Youth Vocal Choir; 2 <i>Wednesdays</i> 5:45-6:15 p.m.	January 28, 5:45 p.m.	Cindy Meyer
Laudate	7 th – 12 Grade Youth Vocal Choir; 2 <i>Sundays, usually</i> 10:00-11:00 a.m.	February 1, 8:00 a.m.	Carrie Filetti
Chancel	Adult Vocal Choir; 2 <i>Wednesdays</i> 7:00-8:00 p.m.	January 7, 7:00 p.m.	Carrie Filetti
Revelation Ringers	Adult (+7-12 th Grade) Handbell Choir; 2-3 <i>Wednesdays</i> 6:00-7:00 p.m.	January 7, 6:00 p.m.	Terry Aavang
Grace Tones	Youth & Adult Contemporary Band; 1 <i>hour weekday evening rehearsal</i>	First week of January	Jon Bergstrom

Grace Needs a Volunteer Treasurer: Would You Be Willing?

Calling All Bean Counters:
Our congregation needs a
Treasurer.

Do you have a background working with numbers? Or owning/operating a business? Would you like to work with dedicated staff and volunteers? Are

you willing to serve beyond the offering plate?

Knowledge of QuickBooks is useful, but training will be provided. You don't need to be a Council member or go to the meetings but will be required to prepare periodic

reports for the Council and congregation.

If you are interested in this volunteer position and would like to find out more, please contact a Council member or the office.

--Nancy Kreznor, council president

Mark Your Calendar

Grace's Annual Meeting will be held on Feb. 1, 2026, at 10:15 a.m. in the sanctuary & via Zoom. A **Budget Forum** will be held on Jan. 25, 2026, at 10:15 a.m. in Grace Center.

Save the Date

Save the date and join congregations from across the Northern Illinois Synod for the 2026 Congregational Resourcing Event on March 7, 2026, in Sauk Valley Community College. More information will be released this month. <https://nisynod.org/programs/cre>.



By the grace of God, we can gather in Jesus' name to worship God, we can teach the faith with our children, we can care for neighbors, we can support each other through life's journey, and we can proclaim the good news of Jesus to a weary world.

As you have communicated your giving intentions for the year ahead, the finance committee is now preparing a budget for ministry. *If you have not yet completed an Estimate of Giving Card, would you consider returning your giving estimate to the church office?*

Together, we can live into Grace's mission and ministries in 2026 and beyond as we strive to faithfully share God's grace. Thank you for your response to God's generosity.

Sewing Circle: 2025 Year-End Update

Thank you to Grace Sewing Circle members for all your hard work, and thank you to the congregation for sharing your gifts of sheets, fabric, pillow stuffing, batting, yarn, thread, and Thrivent Action Team cards. Because of your generosity, our sewing circle was able to help many people this year, both locally to 9 nursing homes in the area, plus 3 other charities, and globally through Lutheran World Relief.

We distributed twice this year, in April and again in November, with our 2025 year-end stats being the following: Locally distributed items were 272 lap quilts, 94 crocheted blankets, 102 small pillows, 67 neck pillows, 508 walker bags, 180 wheelie bags, 178 cell phone bags



Some of the quilts Grace's Sewing Circle distributed in November.

and 260 poly bags. Lutheran World Relief received 205 quilts from our group this year. Praise God!

Our group works together on creating all of our items for distribution, with several people working on different stages of each item. Some of our members do work at home and others just work during our twice monthly meetings. Others of us do both. Our members

"come when they can, leave when they must" and are welcome to do as little or as much creating as they wish resulting in a wonderful example of working in community to Share God's Grace.

Our group continues to meet on the **first and third Tuesdays** (of the month (this month: **Jan. 6 & 20**) from **8:30-noon** and we always **welcome new members**. We have projects for sewers and non-sewers alike, and also kits and other projects that you can do in the comfort of your own home and at your leisure. **Come and join us!** Any questions, please contact Tammy Hansing or the church office.

--Tammy Hansing

Grace Lutheran Church Constitution Revisions

Our church council recently approved the required 2025 Churchwide Assembly amendments to constitutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Although the majority of the amendments were grammatical corrections, one important change was adding "proclaiming God's love for the world" to the list of

expectations for pastors and deacons. Our final step is to have congregational approval of these required changes at our February 1, 2026, Annual Meeting. The highlighted changes can be found on a copy of our current constitution posted on the council bulletin board in the narthex.

Sunday School

This month, we're exploring stories from the New Testament all about the life and ministry of Jesus. Children will learn about His birth, His baptism, His teachings, and His miracles — like calming the storm, healing the blind, and welcoming children. These lessons help kids see who Jesus is and how much He loves them, Sunday School meets on Jan. 11 & 25 for class following worship.

If your children are interested in joining Sunday School classes, we look forward to seeing you soon!



Grace is offering scholarships for the elementary students to attend camp this summer. [Click here](#) to learn more or talk to Director of Youth Education, Nyji, or Pastor Amanda for more information.



Confirmation

Grace's seventh & eighth grade confirmation students continue to gather around stories from the Old Testament this semester, as we welcome guest teachers for sharing and learning together.

The students are encouraged to pray for 30 people in 30 days and share every week who has been on their minds and hearts. Thank you for sharing in worship, service, and prayers for our students and families.

YSJ Looking for Adults to Join Coordinating Team

Kirsten Green has served with other volunteers as adult leaders for Grace's high school youth group, Youth Standing With Jesus (YSJ), and is looking for 1-2 new adults to join the coordinating team. YSJ has gathered for service



opportunities, Wednesday night drop-ins, and summer trips such as the ELCA Youth Gathering. Please let Kirsten Green or Pastor Amanda know if you'd be willing to learn more about supporting high school youth group at Grace.

Grace Office Looks For Volunteers

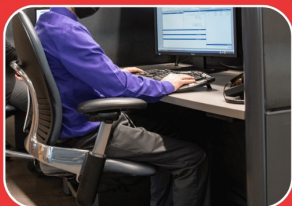


The Grace office is looking for volunteers to join our ongoing teams to assist us on a regular basis. See below for details:

- ➔ Counters (weekly): Monday @ 9:30 a.m. or Tuesday if a holiday
- ➔ Data Entry (weekly): Either Mondays noon-2 p.m.; or Tuesdays 9 a.m.-2 p.m.; Tuesdays noon-2 p.m., only if a holiday
- ➔ Newsletter Prep (monthly): 4th Tuesday of the month at 12:30 p.m.--Wednesday if a holiday.

Learn More Call:

Church office at
815-338-0554



People in Need Forum

In addition to participating in and hosting the Woodstock Area Community Ministries' Direct Assistance Program, Grace's office staff are grateful for the many organizations offering important resources and referrals in our community.

Each January, McHenry County College hosts an important forum and gathers a resource document of community agencies. To learn more, visit <https://www.mchenry.edu/pin/>.

The 2026 People in Need Forum will be held Saturday, January 31, 2026. You are invited to learn about the abundance of resources and support available to you and others. Exhibitors showcase essential community resources available to help those in need and present workshops on topics such as teen dating, senior issues, caregiver resources, LGBTQIA+, substance abuse and addictions, and human trafficking. **The event is free and open to the public.**



Presence Light Sponsors:

January 4:

- In memory of Marlene L. Teuber and in honor of Robert W. Teuber; given by Robert B. Teuber.

January 11:

- In memory of Carol Phillips; given by Mike Phillips.

January 18:

- Given to the Glory of God.

January 25:

- To the Glory of God; given by Doug & Mary Noe.

Bulletin Sponsors:

January 4:

- Given to the Glory of God.

January 11:

- Given to the Glory of God.

January 18:

- Given to the Glory of God.

January 25:

- To the Glory of God; given by Doug & Mary Noe.

eGiving Options

In addition to weekly offering envelopes, Grace provides electronic giving options. Please give in the way that is most convenient for you and let us know if you have any questions.

Give Online at our website or via our QR code



Give by Text by texting **877-698-3604**

Enter the 10-digit number (877-698-3604) and the amount you wish to donate, then press send, and follow the prompts to complete your donation.

Give through Vanco Mobile App by downloading the app

- Go to the App Store or Google Play and search “**Vanco Mobile**” to quickly find and download the app for free.
- Search “**Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church**” to select Grace in Woodstock, IL, then select Give to select an amount, General Operating Fund, and frequency, and the app will prompt you through completing your donation.

Give through automatic withdrawal program. To participate, please complete an enrollment form and return to the church office to schedule pre-authorized electronic funds transfer (EFT) from your bank account. You can change, stop, or temporarily hold your giving by contacting Grace's church office four business days in advance of a scheduled contribution.

*Please contact the church office (815-338-0554),
if you have any questions.*

**Visit the Grace website for the most up-to-date information for all
that is happening at Grace! gracewoodstock.org**

GRACE STAFF & COUNCIL

Lead Pastor

Rev. Amanda Bergstrom
abergstrom@gracewoodstock.org

Office Coordinator

Kim Smith
ksmith@gracewoodstock.org

Financial Secretary

Carrie Fiorina
cfiorina@gracewoodstock.org

Communications Coordinator

Kari Gippert
kgippert@gracewoodstock.org

Director of Youth Education

Nyji Sirreayah
nsirreayah@gracewoodstock.org

Organist & Interim Coordinator of Worship & Music

Jan Burns

Music Group Directors

Terry Aavang, Jon Bergstrom,
Carrie Filetti, Cindy Meyer

Building Supervisor

Ken Zank

Custodians

Chris & Kim Ethridge

Council

Carlos Acosta, Michelle Anderson,
Brian Gerloff, Carrie Jarnecke,
Nancy Kreznor, Luigi Licastro,
Michael Liedtke, Mary Noe,
Adele Petersen, Jeremy SchAAF

Treasurer

Jane Gerloff