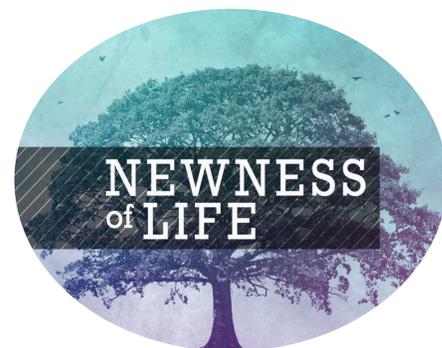


FEBRUARY 2021 • VOLUME 20, NO. 2

ALREADY? AGAIN? STILL?.....by Pastor Amanda Bergstrom

How is it that we seem to have just celebrated Jesus' birth and it is almost Lent already? I am so grateful for the beautiful and faithful Christmas worship services, as so many people contributed to and shared in the online service and parking lot worship services. Thank you for sharing in the good news of Jesus' birth.



And so, I wonder how is it that it is almost Lent again when there are days when it feels like it is still Lent. It feels like it is still Lent each time I come across a tangible reminder of when we last gathered without COVID-19 restrictions, it still feels like Lent when there is so much to grieve and lament.

Lent marks the season of repentance and reflection, preparing for the joy of the Easter season, and it was in the season of Lent last year that life as we knew it shifted so suddenly. How long will this somber experience of pandemic continue?

It seems like forever already, it seems like we're facing the possibility of a more contagious variant that raises concern again, and we know there is still a deep need to care for one another in this trying time. And yet, this is not forever. This season is not forever, this pandemic is not forever, the pain and loss and grief of being physically distant will not be forever.

For even now, there is the promise of spring. Days are slowly growing longer, the weather will eventually get warmer, and we will find more creativity with outdoor distanced gathering opportunities. And vaccines are now being distributed and soon more people will be eligible. There is much to be hopeful for in the days, weeks, and months again. The distance and uncertainty will not last forever, and in the meantime- God remains faithful and present and active in the world, even in such a time as this.

Soon we will begin the Lenten season, and in time we will give witness to something that is forever. The promise of the cross and Christ's resurrection is a promise that we cling to, for God's love in Christ endures.

I pray that God's steadfast love surrounds you with grace in the hope of changing seasons ahead. May the promise of newness of life in Christ hold you and keep you in God's grace, again, and always.

ANNUAL MEETING

SAVE THE DATE!

ANNUAL MEETING SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7 AT 11:00 AM

There will be a congregational meeting on Sunday, February 7 at 11:00 am. We will need a quorum to pass the budget and elect Council members, so please plan on attending. Instructions for joining the meeting via Zoom and voting procedures were sent by mail with a paper ballot to be dropped off at Grace following the Annual Meeting & Ministry Matters.

BUDGET FORUM SUNDAY, JANUARY 31 AT 11:00 AM

There will also be a budget forum on Sunday, January 31 at 11:00 am via Zoom only for those who would like to ask questions about the budget proposal beforehand. Zoom links will be sent with the meeting package.

-The Council and Pastors

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 Elizabeth Eaton, churchwide staff & their families, Bishop Jeff Clements, synod staff & their families, those serving in military conflicts, Arusha Town Lutheran Parish in Tanzania (our companion parish), Scott Bunch serving in the military.

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

Health Concerns: Charlie Bell (friend of Jamielynn Wedoff), Mary Sue Boerner (friend of Paul Lockwood & Diane Baker-Lockwood), Myron Callihan (brother of Susan Payton), Jim Davis, Nancy Davis, Lori Dechant, Patrice Dunn, Robert Giron (brother of Patty Kozlow), Tom Goggin, Hal Goodman (friend of Bob & Janice Laird), Becca Guenther (niece of Gretchen & Claude Hutchens), Tamasa Gutierrez (mother of Patty Kozlow), Denise Hoover, Nicholas Karasch (nephew of Jamielynn Wedoff), Steve Kosmen (loved one of the Koehn family), Elayna Kuipers (friend of the Wedoff Family), Anna Larsen (sister of Al Henniges), Elizabeth Lynd Loser, Amanda McNally (grandniece of Diane Baker-Lockwood), Kem Moran (friend of Barb Aavang), Collene Nelsen (cousin of Debbi Lynd), Gloria Ogle, Andrea Paetsch (aunt of Debbi Lynd), Linda Page (friend of Joe Evanoff), Georgia Petersdorf (sister-in-law of Gladys Renner), Pat Peterson, Carol Raffel, Carol Rank, Shawn Rank (son of Carol Rank), Barbara Readel, Sheila Readel, Jayne Reicher (great niece of Barb & Wayne Japp), Herb & Bev Renner (brother & sister in law of Ken & Gladys Renner), Jessie & Sue Robertson (friends of Ron, Mary & Kimberly Koehn), Maria Rossini (family friend of Heidi Olsen and Tammy Goggin), Nicholas Ruffino (brother of Nathan Ruffino), Joan Russell (mother of Sheri Conover), John Rust (Aavang family friend), Colton Sciluffo (infant son of a friend of Joy Oberman), Nathaniel Shipp (family friend of Brian Meyers), Ann Sinnett (friend of Shirley Berna), Andrea Strayer (mother of Lisa Wahkowiak), Dave Sundby (brother-in-law of Deborah Evanoff), Samuel Sweeney (nephew of Melissa McMahon), Josh Tillman, Brian Tobin (grandson of Enn Teetsov), Bev Visconti, Addie Jo Wedoff, Nick Wedoff, Esther Wienke, Ruth Zirves

Sorrows: Ginny Stroh (mother of Fay Wilson)

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 week and may be renewed. Submissions to the *Friends in Prayer* e-mail and phone teams may also be submitted by telephone to the church office or by e-mail to Gracewoodstock.org. 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 office.

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER—The deadline for the March newsletter is **February 15th**. Please send articles to Lauren Kleinjan at lkleinjan@gracewoodstock.org, or the church office. Questions: Call the office at 815-338-0554.

LOVE DURING A PANDEMIC.....by Pastor John Cunningham

February is the month of Valentine's Day, but the love I'm thinking of is deeper and wider than romantic love, as wonderful as that is! In fact, it's the foundation for such love.



The most familiar way we hear about it is from John 3:16 (and 17!):

“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. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (New Revised Standard Version)

During January we have been celebrating the Epiphany season. It's a time for considering our mission that was given in baptism, when we are forgiven and receive new birth into life as a child of God. Baptism is both an extremely personal affirmation of God's love for us, and a welcome into the whole people of God as we join countless sisters and brothers in Christ throughout the world and through time.

In the same way, the mission to which we are called in baptism is very personal and also for the community and the world. It even extends beyond people to loving care for the natural world. After all, God created it (as John's gospel reminds us from the first verses).

There has been a lot written about how to care for ourselves during this pandemic. As Christians we can affirm that and also affirm ways we can care for others and for our world. These can be in ways both big and small – and sometimes the “small” make a big difference!

So, as I just heard again the other day, even a little exercise adds up compared to sitting on a couch (or at a computer). Even brief moments of enjoyment – watching birds or a sunset or appreciating a picture or music, brings peace. A phone call, email contact, or even a text can extend joy and brighten someone's day. And of course, as we have heard countless times, wearing a mask and physical distancing are both self-care and caring for our neighbor. All of these are signs of love for the world God created, which includes each of us!

We can pray for ourselves as we keep coping, and then we can continue with prayers for family and friends; prayers for our church, our community, our state, and our nation; prayers for others throughout the world. Our prayers might be for healing, for comfort for the many who have suffered the death of loved ones, for justice, for guidance, for wisdom in caring for our world—as well as expressing our gratitude. God's love is evident in the countless blessings we receive day by day, including God's grace and the love of others (and pets, for those who have them!)

Prayer is one way we can extend our caring out into the world. There are other ways as well, such as donations large or small, of time, items, or money. One opportunity for those of us who don't need stimulus checks is to donate that amount. Children can make cards to send to elderly people who may feel alone. Some people are making and donating masks. People are finding ways to use talents and interests to serve others. (One note about monetary donations: the online Good Gifts catalog of our church includes specific examples of ways small and large gifts can provide health care, livelihood, and education in life-changing ways.)

We might also spend some time learning about needs and ideas for addressing them. How can we do our part to make this a better, more just, sustainable world—locally, for our nation, and globally? What are we learning during this pandemic, that will be helpful in the future?

GRACE SEWING CIRCLE IS GOING STRONG AND NEEDS DONATIONS—Grace Sewing Circle is again looking for donations from the congregation of the following: sheets, lightweight blankets, batting, yarn, fabric and if anyone would be so inclined, use of Thrivent funds to purchase batting. These ladies are very prolific and are enjoying creating things for local nursing homes and Lutheran World Relief. Please contact one of the following people to donate or to join us: Marge Birk (815) 338-0958, Faith Watkins (815) 245-7977 or Tammy Hansing (815) 338-5387.



BUILDING ENTRY & COVENANT OF CARE—At Grace we are asking everyone who enters the building to commit to care for one another through posted guidelines and entry procedures. All staff and building guests are to practice health safety precautions, including wash/sanitize hands, wear a mask, and stay a minimum of six feet apart. If you test positive for COVID-19 within the next two weeks of being in the building, you commit to informing the church office ASAP. We ask everyone to review three screening questions about COVID-19 diagnosis, exposure, and symptoms within the last 14 days each time you arrive at the building. Please call the office first at (815) 338-0554 if you need to stop by during the week.

2021 CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCING EVENT—You are invited to save the date & look for more information as the Northern Illinois Synod has begun to plan the 2021 Congregational Resourcing event as an online Resourcing Event, to be held on **March 13, 2021**. Current plans include an online gathering for worship and workshops around various ministries.

BULLETIN & PRESENCE LIGHT SPONSORS— We currently have openings available for Bulletin Sponsors and Presence Light Sponsors. Even though we are not in the church building, this ministry continues and it still allows for use to celebrate, grieve and honor people and occasions with our church family. Please contact Carrie or Denise if you are interested in sponsoring.

CHRISTMAS FAMILY SHARING THANK YOU—While it DID look different this year, your support of our Christmas Family Sharing ministry remained so very generous. We received heartfelt thanks from our ministry partners, Turning Point and Family Health Partnership Clinic. Your generosity allows them to continue to help our neighbors many of whom have been significantly impacted by this pandemic. Thank you for Sharing God's Grace.

PHISHING SCAM REQUESTS— Grace's pastors, staff, and leaders will never text or email you to request gift cards or fund transfers. A number of nearby church members have received phishing emails or text messages that seem personalized and appear to be from a pastor or staff member. Please call the church office or talk to a pastor or staff member in person if you receive an odd request; thank you!

TRANSFIGURATION ART—Oh how we will miss the festive traditions of full Dixieland Jazz worship services & Chili Fest this year. As we prepare for Transfiguration Sunday, February 14, we invite you to help prepare for worship with your artistic contributions. Please see emails from Grace for more information and coloring sheet options to be created and then dropped off to the front entrance by February 7th.



SUNDAY SCHOOL—Thank you so much for reading these words today! As we all continue to follow after Jesus while we adhere to our current building restrictions, I would like to invite you to contribute some of your light in this world with the youth of our church. We are currently offering Sunday school once a month via Zoom meetings. We would love for this circle to get bigger and bigger! Please contact Jen Freeman at jfreeman@gracewoodstock.org for the invitation to join the teachings that Jesus sent us out to share with others.

LENT— On Ash Wednesday, February 17 this year, messy, dusty, signs of the cross remind us of mortality and repentance for sin as we enter into the forty-day season to journey towards the promise of the cross and good news of Easter. Again and again we sin and fall short, again and again God forgives and meets us where we are with love.

Once again, we invite you to the discipline of Lent- self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love.

ASH WEDNESDAY— Worship will be livestreamed on Wednesday, February 17 at 12 P.M., and then the video will be available online at any time after that. Blessings on your time set apart for worship as we enter this season.

ASHES— Ashes will be pre-packaged and available for you to pick up if you would like to have ashes from prior years' palm leaves at home for worship on Ash Wednesday. You are welcome to pick up ashes on February 7, when you drive to Grace after the Annual Meeting & Ministry Matters meeting (via Zoom beginning at 11 A.M.). After February 7 ashes will be available for pick up from a bin outside the main entrance.

LENTEN DEVOTIONALS— We will also have printed copies of a daily Lenten devotional available for you to pick up on February 7, and then available for pick up from a bin outside the main entrance. We hope you will incorporate daily devotions in your Lenten practice this year. You can also request a tablet/computer version of the devotional by emailing Denise in the church office (dklabunde@gracewoodstock.org).

SUNDAYS— Worship services continue to be livestreamed on [Grace's YouTube channel](#) at 9 A.M. on Sundays. You can subscribe to the channel and turn on notifications to be alerted each time the livestream begins, or you can find the YouTube channel to worship at a later time. Worship service videos will continue to be posted to the Grace website later each day for you to worship when you are able.

BEING CHURCH—LENT MIDWEEK GATHERINGS—What does this mean? Does being the church matter? This Lent, we invite you to gather on Zoom on Wednesdays at 7 p.m. We will share 30 minutes together around Holden Evening Prayer & conversation and reflection on being church together. Please see Constant Contact emails for the Zoom link, and contact Ron (rfredriksen@gracewoodstock.org) if you would like to participate in reading scripture, praying, or leading conversation.



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| February 24th, 7 P.M. | We are church. |
| March 3rd, 7 P.M. | We are Lutheran. |
| March 10th, 7 P.M. | We are church together. |
| March 17th, 7 P.M. | We are church for the sake of the world. |
| March 24th, 7 P.M. | What difference do we make? |

Presence Light Sponsors:

February 7

In memory of Dick Boehmke's birthday on Feb 6th, given by Betty Boehmke

February 14

In memory of my husband, Virgil Boal, given by Laura Boal

February 28

In honor of our 54th wedding anniversary, given by Ken and Kathy Zank

Bulletin Sponsors:

February 7

To the glory of God for Russ Freeman, on what would have been our 69th wedding anniversary, on February 2nd, given by Donna Freeman.

February 14

In memory of my husband, Virgil Boal, given by Laura Boal

February 28

In honor of our 54th wedding anniversary, given by Ken and Kathy Zank

We currently have many openings available in 2021, for bulletin & presence light sponsors

Even though we are not in the church building yet for our services, this ministry continues. It is a great way to celebrate occasion's, and honor or grieve loved ones with your church family. Please contact Carrie or Denise in the church office if you are interested in sponsoring. 815-338-0554

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

gracewoodstock.org

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

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 4 business days in advance of a scheduled contribution.

Give Online at our website: www.gracewoodstock.org

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

1. **Get Started:** Enter the 10-digit GivePlus Text number (877-698-3604) and the amount you wish donate, then press send.
2. **Register:** You will receive a registration link. Click the link and enter your contact and payment information. Tap "Process."
3. **Give:** After registration is complete, you will receive a verification text as well as a receipt via email.
4. **Repeat:** For future giving, simply send a text with the amount you wish to give, and it will process automatically.

Give through Give+ Mobile App by downloading the app

- Download the FREE app on your Apple or Android phone by searching for "GivePlus Church" in your app store
- Make one-time or recurring donations using your debit/credit card or checking/savings account
- Securely and conveniently manage donations using Touch ID/Fingerprint, PIN or password
- Log in or donate as a guest

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Building Supervisor/Ken Zank

Custodians/Chris & Kim Ethridge

Officers & Council

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