

MY CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEARS WISH LIST

This Christmas and New Year, I wish for peace in every place, Syria being the worst - and also in our city, in our homes, in our hearts. I wish for goodness and justice in every place too.

I wish you could comprehend even a fraction of the depth of God's immense love for you - and for all the other people too.

I wish I could take every one of you to the Holy Land so we could see and walk together where Jesus was born, lived, and died.

I wish we would see other people and ourselves as God sees us, for then we'd have some unity, compassion, and be able to work together for good.

I wish you who are my church family would know my love for you, and for God - and so even if you disagree with me, that you'd know my heart is a good heart that loves and is doing its best, as I assume yours is as well.

I wish every child in Newton and Hickory and even the world, had a crack at an excellent education, fair and kind treatment, and a good chance to thrive in life.

I wish families that are fractured would be healed, and that those who are lonely would find a friend or discover God's personal comfort.

I wish that those who suffer dementia might have a flash of lucidity on Christmas day, perhaps hearing a carol or seeing a tree, or a smiling, loving face.

I wish for Grace Church, and for all churches, that they wouldn't have to sweat over money, and people would be lavishly generous, knowing how generous God has been with us. And I wish every person in the Grace family, and all churches, could discover two regular ways to serve in 2017, one in the church, and one outside to others.

I wish our concern and action for children in need extended through the entire year.

And I wish I could express in words the overflowing gratitude I feel toward God and toward you for the genuinely humbling and marvelous privilege it is for me to get to do this work as a pastor. I am so very blessed, and I wish to be a blessing to you, here at Christmas, when we are in awe of our Savior's birth, and in the New Year, when we welcome God's greatest gift to us: time, time to be, time to love, time to give and to serve God together.

I wish you a very merry Christmas, and a joyful, hopeful New Year. -- Pastor Gil

From the Pastor's Pen...



Greetings and Peace for the New Year,

Well, actually the 'secular' new year. The church's new year began the first Sunday of Advent. About the only thing we do in the Gilbert household to mark the new year, is to eat black-eyed peas, collard greens, sauerkraut, country ham and cornbread. At least we start the year off right with some good eating!!!

However, the question remains the same: What shall we do with this time God has provided for us? Yes, the majority of things we do carry over from last year - our jobs, Social Security, taxes, prescriptions, mortgages, meals, and staying warm. But what would you like to change, add, to subtract, to modify, to improve, and/or to begin. These are things I'm considering for the new year. (Remaining "stagnant" or indifferent just does not fit.)

In that regard, January's schedule has some new items on it you will be interested in. They are in response to your ideas and suggestions over the past year. First, we will be having a Bible study every Thursday morning beginning January 12 at 10:30 AM. This study will focus on the upcoming lessons for Sunday's worship. I like hearing your ideas and interpretations concerning scripture and some ideas will be included in Sunday's sermon. For us to offer this type of Bible study digging into God's Word seems to be the best way to begin the new year!

Secondly, there will be a new ministry designed to teach caregiving. It is the model of the Stephen Ministry which is a one-on-one lay caring ministry specializing in visiting, listening skills, and caring for one another in the congregation and beyond. There will be an interest meeting for all those who desire to be a part of this visitation ministry and training on Monday, January 16 at 10 AM and again at 7 PM at Grace Church. If you are already visiting other members in the congregation, we cordially invite you to be a part of the Stephen Ministry at Grace.

I am excited and passionate about what God has in store for us at Grace. Isn't it a wonderful, grace-filled way for the year to really begin?

See you in worship!

Pastor Gil Gilbert

WORSHIP ASSISTANTS FOR JANUARY

- ❖ Communion Assistants - Ricky & Cindy Bivens
- ❖ Ushers -
- ❖ Greeter -
- ❖ Altar Preparation - Joy Heavner, Jackie Jarrett
- ❖ Children's Church and Nursery - Pat Dietz
- ❖ Offering Tabulators - Ricky Bivens, Mike Pisko

Please be mindful of your commitment to serve. If you are unable to fulfill that commitment, be reminded that it is your responsibility to find someone to serve in your place.

FLOWER CHART FOR JANUARY



1/01 - Lorene Heavner
1/15 - Thelma Isenhour

1/08 - OPEN
1/22 - OPEN

1/29 - OPEN

If you wish to give the flowers for a given Sunday, please list your name on the chart in the narthex. *You are responsible for ordering the flowers from a florist of your choice; we do not have a standing order with any florist.* The liturgical color of the day is listed to assist you in selecting flowers appropriate for that Sunday. You should contact the Church Office so that the correct information is placed in the bulleting for that Sunday. Please notify the Church Office the Thursday prior to your selected Sunday. You can call the Church Office between 9 AM and Noon each weekday, leave a note on the desk, or send an email to let us know the occasion or memoriam for this wonderful gift of beatification of the worship.

ATTENDANCE AND GIVING TO OUR LORD'S WORK FOR NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016

	11/27/16	12/04/16	12/11/16	12/18/16
SCS	26	45	42	30
Worship	71	86	84	76
General Offering	1,955.08	6,409.67	4,031.61	2,079.09
Learning Hour	27.00	127.00	12.61	24.00
Building Fund	460.00	425.00	225.00	150.00
Memorial Fund - Joanne Heavner	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00
Memorial Fund - Betsy Rhyne Mazak	0.00	25.00	0.00	0.00
Memorial Fund - Mae Cansler	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00
Memorial Fund - David Lane	0.00	0.00	20.00	25.00
Memorial Fund - David Warlick	0.00	0.00	0.00	50.00
First Sunday Lunch	0.00	206.00	0.00	0.00
Fellowship Hall Usage	50.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Second Sunday Breakfast	0.00	0.00	101.15	0.00
Poinsettia	64.00	136.00	0.00	0.00
Thanksgiving Dinner	164.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Thanksgiving Offering	302.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Christmas Offering	0.00	0.00	0.00	50.00

General Fund Checking Account Balance as of 11/30/16 is \$(21,102.67)
(Brackets indicate a negative balance).

THE FRED T. FOARD SENIORS will meet at Noon on Wednesday, January 4th, at Sardis Lutheran.

FIRST SUNDAY LUNCH will be held January 1st following Worship. The meal of barbeque, slaw, roasted potatoes, rolls, and dessert will be furnished by the Christian Education & Learning Ministry Team. Suggested freewill offering - \$3.00.

MEN OF GRACE PRAYER BREAKFAST will be held on Saturday, January 14th, at 9:00 AM at the Blue Moon. We invite all men of Grace to join us for discussion, prayer, and great food.

SECOND SUNDAY BREAKFAST will be held Sunday, January 8th, at 9:00 AM. Providing the breakfast are Frankie Crouse, Doug & Jackie Jarrett, Martha Johnson, and Scott and Carolyn Whisnant. Suggested freewill offering - \$3.00.

THE GRACE SENIOR/ADULT LUNCHEON GROUP will meet in the Fellowship Hall on Wednesday, January 18th, from noon until 2:00 PM. Please invite a friend and come join the fun and fellowship!

JO DORIS FRYE would like to thank everyone that attended the party in celebration of her 80th birthday. It was a great party. She is especially grateful for the many food donations for Safe Harbor.

A NEW BANNER, just in time for the Advent season, crafted by Tricia Panek has been added to the collection originally begun by Eloise Eckard. We thank Tricia for this gift to her Grace family. (JH)

CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY, love and prayers are extended by the People of God at Grace to the families and loved ones of David Lane and David Warlick in their hour of bereavement. May God comfort all who mourn.

CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY, love and prayers are also extended by the People of God at Grace to the families and loved ones of Jim McRee, Glennie Beam's brother; David Wood, Juanita Haas' brother; Carl Lail, Phyllis Hood's father; and James Kenneth Mull, Cecelia Jarrett Mull's husband in their hour of bereavement. May God comfort all who mourn.

THE 2017 FLOWER CHART is now posted in the Narthex. Please sign up if you wish to sponsor the flowers for any given Sunday. It is your responsibility to contact a florist of your choice to order flowers or use flowers from your garden or other source to make an arrangement. Please notify the Church Office regarding your dedication no later than noon on the Thursday prior to your sponsorship.

OFFERING ENVELOPES FOR 2017 are available on the rear pew of the church. Please help distribute these to your family and friends. If there are no envelopes with your name on, and you desire a set, please contact the Church Office. We also have special children's envelopes to help you begin to teach your unconfirmed child/grandchild good stewardship in the church. If you desire a set of these, please contact the Church Office.

THANK YOU to Jimmy and Geraldine Jarrett for the donation of the candles in the Advent Wreath. They have gladly given them in memory of Mom & Pop Jarrett because they loved Christmas at Grace.

BLESSINGS FROM GOD

Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ~ Luke 6:38

Read II Corinthians 8. Times are tough economically. We hear that giving is down in many churches. The economy of this world is selfish and self-centered. It says, "You need to keep everything for yourself, especially during tough times."

But that is not what Jesus said. The picture that Jesus paints is of a person having the lap of his robe filled to overflowing with grain. The trigger is giving.

God's economy is based on faith expressed in God through giving. The Lord says "Give and it shall be given. As you give to me in faith, I will provide for you. You will be blessed! Trust me!"

Many people are afraid to hear teachings about giving. Pastors and church teachers should be afraid NOT to teach about giving. Why? When we do not teach what the Bible says about giving, we keep people from being blessed. We neglect teaching people about a great way to glorify God. The church remains impoverished. What happens when we preach and teach about giving sacrificially to God? (See II Corinthians 8 and 9). Many pull away in fear because they have not done this kind of giving for years. They simply have not been taught. So when we teach this great teaching, are we afraid of how people will respond? Would they feel like the church just wanted them for their money? Would some people leave the church?

Most of the time, for those who have faith, they begin to give spontaneous testimonies about how God was blessing them as a result of their giving. They became disciplined in giving. They glorified God. The church was strengthened financially. Consistently learn from the Scriptures about giving to God...and God will bless you!

O Holy Father, Give me courage to accept your teaching about giving so we can all enjoy your provision. Amen.

THANKS TO THRIVENT FINANCIAL. This year, Thrivent Financial assisted with funding our special events: the Thanksgiving meal in November, the Christmas Program and the Baby Jesus Birthday Celebration, and the annual Grace Board Appreciation Dinner. We thank them for their support in these programs. In addition, Texas Roadhouse provided some food items for the Board dinner. We thank both of these organizations for supporting the events at Grace. (JH)

CEMETERY CLEAN UP CREW - THANKS!



HIGHLIGHTS OF DECEMBER BOARD MEETING

- Leadership Ministry Board met on December 11 at 4:00 pm with an abbreviated agenda due to the Christmas Program at 5 pm.
- Tim Eckard led the devotions.
- The minutes from the November meeting were approved and accepted.
- The adjusted and proposed Spending Plan for 2017 was discussed and approved. It will be presented to the congregation on December 18 for approval in a Called Congregational Meeting immediately following worship. No other business may be presented.
- There were no Ministry Team reports.
- The Leadership Ministry Board for 2017 will be installed during worship on December 25 (Christmas Day).
- The Leadership Ministry Board Retreat will be held January 13-15 at the Catholic Conference Center. Pastor Marty Ramey will be conducting worship at Grace on January 15 in Pastor Gilbert's absence.
- There being no other business, motion was made and accepted to adjourn.
- Pastor Gilbert closed the meeting with prayer.

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12-29-2014
MY NEW YEARS RESOLUTION THIS YEAR IS
TO DO THE THINGS I SHOULD HAVE BEEN
DOING LAST YEAR

The Back Pew - Jeff Larson



We sing 'Onward Christian Soldiers'
on Sunday, then go AWOL on
Monday. - Max Lucado

FIRST SUNDAY LUNCH AND SECOND SUNDAY BREAKFAST

It is time to begin preparing for 2017. Those listed below are ones that served those months the past year. Please look at the list below and contact the Church Office by email, a phone call, or a note on the desk to verify that you will prepare the meals, or sign the list on the bulletin board across from the Pastor's Office. If you will **NOT** be serving again, we need to know that as well so another group can be recruited. It has been requested that the menu for each meal be listed in the newsletter and bulletin. They are due in the office by the 22nd of the month prior to the event. (KH)

	FIRST SUNDAY LUNCH	SECOND SUNDAY BREAKFAST
January	Christian Education/ Learning Ministry Team	Frankie Crouse, Doug & Jackie Jarrett, Martha Johnson, Scott & Carolyn Whisnant
February	Chancel Choir	Harvey & Helen Leatherman & family, Dan & Tricia Panek
March	Leadership Ministry Board	Jo Doris Frye, Randy Frye, Dennis Leonard Family, Bobbie Wright
April	Christian Education/ Learning Ministry Team	Pastor Gil & Karen Gilbert Easter Breakfast 4/16/17 - Dennis & Nancy Leonard & Family
May	Mr. Biven's Learning Hour Class	Pastor Gil
June	No Lunch Served	No Breakfast Served
July	No Lunch Served	No Breakfast Served
August	No Lunch Served	No Breakfast Served
September	No lunch - Labor Day	Learning Hour Classes - Rally Day
October	Christian Education/ Learning Ministry Team	Carl & Glennie Beam, Lorene Heavner, Gary Leatherman, Dan & Tricia Panek
November	Chancel Choir	Pastor Gil & Karen, Joy Heavner, Don & Nicky Jarrett, Mike & Debi Pisko
December	Christina Education/ Learning Ministry Team	Biggerstaff's

TO KEEP UP WITH THE LATEST NEWS around the Church there are several online resources. If you do not have access to the internet maybe a family member or friend could show you some of the resources. The following links are very informative.

- North American Lutheran Church - NALC <http://thenalc.org>
- Carolinas Mission District <http://carolinasnalc.org>
- Carolinas Lutheran Women <http://carolinaslutheranwomen.org/>
- Women of the NALC - WNALC <http://thenalc.org/congregationally-focused-womans-ministry>
- Samaritan's Purse www.samaritanspurse.org

ANNUAL REPORTS are due in January. If you are a ministry team leader, coordinator of any event, or other leader at Grace please begin preparing your yearly report. A report will be published in 2017 so please provide the information of the many ministries that took place in 2016 at Grace.

THE PRAISE AND WORSHIP MINISTRY TEAM has a "wish list". If anyone plans to throw out any artificial poinsettias, red bows, or red candles consider bringing them to the church. We can always use items such as these for decorating during the holiday season. (JH)

FROM CAROLINAS MISSION DISTRICT DEAN, Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder: The Great Commission Society of the NALC is holding a conference on the nuts and bolts of church planting this coming January. It's in Atlanta – our neck of the woods – and thus an excellent opportunity for our congregational mission teams. Full details are provided below.



The NALC Missions Office is excited to announce the speakers for the upcoming church planting and renewal conference being hosted in Atlanta, Georgia, on January 5-6, 2017.

The Rev. Dr. Gemechis Buba, the Rev. Dr. Richard Dalton, the Rev. Trina Petersen, and the Rev. Wendy Berthelsen have generously agreed to share their time and gifts. Each of these exceptional leaders will focus on different aspects of the metaphor "Plant, Grow, Bloom." Some are gifted at preparing and analyzing the soil. Others are gifted at continuing to care for/tend the soil after "planting." Each presenter will concentrate on the nuts and bolts specific to their respective areas.

This conference is an excellent opportunity for those who are interested in planting a church, those already involved in a new start, and for those in the midst of renewal of a congregation. Register today, as the discounted hotel rates are only available through the first week of December!

In addition, Dr. Gemechis Buba will host a free webinar on church planting and renewal on December 7th at 11:00 AM EST. More information is available at <http://bit.ly/2bGwjxS>.

For detailed speaker bios, general information, hotel reservations and registration, please visit the updated <http://nalcnetwork.com/plant-grow-bloom> website or contact Grace Church Office.

WE SURPASSED OUR GOAL! Since Thanksgiving, we have been gathering canned goods for the local food banks and set a goal of gathering 150 pounds. Joy has delivered over 155 pounds of food to those in need and we sincerely thank you all for your donations.



THE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE IN THE UNION CHURCH held Sunday, December 18th, was extra special this year with participation by some of our younger members of the Grace family. Katie and Matthew Whalen sang "Angels We Have Heard on High"; Meredith Martin sang "Away in a Manger", followed by an old Favorite, "Holy Child Within A Manger", sung by her Mom, Jodi Martin. The Grace choir performed "The Colors of Winter". We thank Doug Jarrett for assisting with communion, and Jacob Jarrett for taking care of usher duties. (JH)

THANKS TO MANY. As 2016 comes to an end, it's time to say special thanks to the Grace Choir for their dedication week after week leading the Church Services. We thank them also for the many hours of practice on special music, and for being present to support bereaved families at funeral services. This year three new faces joined the choir, and we are indeed blessed to have them join in and lift up their voices in song. Lectors also play a vital role in the weekly services as they read the Lessons. This year we were blessed to have some new readers, and we thank all of them for their enthusiasm as they convey the messages to the Grace family. Thanks also to the communion preparation teams, the ushers, the greeters, and the nursery and children's church leaders. It takes many, many people to bring everything together, and we thank everyone for their continued participation and support. (JH)

MORE THANKS. There are a multitude of activities throughout the church year that require more than office telephone duty, and our Administrative Assistant multi tasks constantly preparing bulletins, fliers, and special event announcements. We thank Kathy for all of the areas that she covers. With her attention to detail, and efficiency, we are indeed blessed to have her as part of the Grace family.
Praise and Worship Ministry Team

FROM FAYE LANE AND FAMILY: Thank you so much for all the thoughts, prayers, cards, phone calls and food. The family is so blessed by you, our Church Family. We appreciate all you have done. May God bless you each and everyone.

ECCCM SERVES many in our community and the Grace Family contributes much to help their ministry. Because of your generosity, ECCCM was able to help Ann with utility assistance, food, and financial coaching. Because of you, Ann is getting back on her feet. Many like Ann have been blessed by your generosity.

THE CATAWBA REGIONAL HOSPICE says to the members at Grace: "Over the years we have been privileged to partner with local churches in support of our mission. Charitable donations to Catawba Regional Hospice ensure the provision of our services to everyone who needs us regardless of their ability to pay. Your generous support as a Hall of Faith partner helps us maintain that commitment. To honor your participation in this mission of caring, a professional photograph of your church is prominently displayed on our campus for visitors and others to enjoy."

GRACE CHURCH FAMILY, we wish to express our heartfelt thanks to you for the loving support and prayers given to us regarding the death of Kenneth Mull. The food, cards and phone calls were all a display of your kindness to us at this time of pain and sorrow. We know we have a Savior to give us hope and continually love us. We hope we can be an example of Kenneth's honesty, integrity and quiet spirit he displayed in his life. We know you will continue your prayers for us. "God has given us eternal life and this life is his son." 1 John 5:11

- Cecelia & John Mull Family, Emily & Jason Stewart Family

THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PROGRAM had excellent attendance this year. The program, which included a segment of The Christmas Window, Other Meanings of Christmas, and Teach the Children, had plenty of songs, a few laughs, and some great costumes as worn by Stormy and Alan Shull. Thanks to all participants - Jodi and Meredith Martin; Jill, Jackson and Lauren Matthews; McKenna, Haley, and Allison Russell; Shelly and Michael Scronce; and Stormy and Alan Shull. Thanks also to Doug and Jackie Jarrett for their work on the set, and the treat bags. Weeks of practice but it was all worth it! Great performance. (JH)



NEW YEAR'S PRAYER. I cannot believe that this year, 2016, is over. I can remember when 1999 was turning into 2000. Everybody was scared that the world would end and all computers would stop working. Well it is now 17 years later and we are still going! I hope that all of you had a good year. I know some of you will say no, because you lost loved ones. But you did not lose them; you know where they are, in Heaven. Instead of making a new year's resolution, I want to offer up a prayer. I ask for forgiveness, for not doing the things I could and should have done. I am so thankful for having friends and family that love and support me. If I never have anything else, this will be enough. I ask the Holy Spirit to shine a light into all those dark places, so that people can choose good over evil. I ask for the strength, courage, and knowledge to continue on in my life's journey and be able to do the things that my God wants me to do. I ask that everyone just open up their hearts and let Jesus in, he will change your life forever. I know that this will be scary and confusing to some. Can God give me more money, a new car, another job, better grades in school or a longer life? God knows what we really need and when we need it. I ask that all those who are hurting both physically and mentally to be touched by his healing hand. I ask for his blessings on this congregation, community, and especially our church. May it continue to be a bright beacon in the years to come. Thanks to all of you at Grace that do what you do. And now we say goodbye to 2016 and hello to 2017. I pray for a year that will be filled with joy and peace for everyone.
- Ricky Bivens

"SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE". North Carolina Lutherans for Life would like to invite everyone to attend a pro-life seminar "Speaking the Truth in Love" on Sunday, January 22nd, 2017. The seminar will be from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m. at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Conover, with refreshments following the seminar. The featured speaker will be the Rev. Michael Salemink, the Executive Director of Lutherans for Life. The seminar will stress how we can change the hearts of people about life issues with the powerful message of God's love. For more information please call Pastor Ron or Betty Orovitz at 828-324-6710.

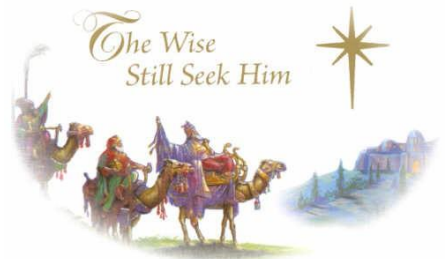
IT IS SUCH A BLESSING to serve God and his people at Grace. I truly appreciate the many lovely cards, kind words, and gifts you blessed me with this Christmas season. I do enjoy being among you and hope I can serve for years to come.
- Kathy Hefner

EPIPHANY IS CELEBRATED JANUARY 6TH

Epiphany is the day we celebrate the visit of the Magi, or the Wise Men. Not much is known about these visitors other than what Matthew records in the first book of the New Testament. We know they were from the East and studied the stars. We also know that they had some knowledge of the history and prophecies concerning Israel. They followed a star to Bethlehem, but contrary to the popular Nativity scenes, they probably arrived a year or two after Jesus' birth.

There is no mention of the number of wise men, although it has been assumed that there were three based on the three gifts of gold frankincense and myrrh. Religious tradition has even given them names: Balthazar, Caspar (or Gaspar), and Melchior.

We do know for a fact that wise men came and worshiped Jesus. It was an important enough event for Matthew to add it to his account of the birth of Jesus. This was God announcing his long-awaited son's arrival on the earth to the Gentile world. And it provides further confirmation of God's universal love.



Grace Notes

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