

# GraceNotes



A Monthly Publication of the Congregational Activities of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Newton, NC  
Volume 220, Number 6 June 2017



*Celebrate Pentecost by wearing RED  
on Sunday, June 4th*

*Holy Trinity Sunday  
June 17<sup>th</sup>*



*Remember both your earthly Father  
and your Heavenly Father on  
Sunday, June 18<sup>th</sup>.*

# From the Pastor's Pen.....



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ at Grace,

Imagine if Jesus came to visit your house. What would that be like? What would you cook? Would you grill out and make Jesus some bratwurst? Would you bring out your fancy napkins or make a special pie or banana pudding for dessert? Jesus coming to your home would be cause for a lot of thought and many preparations. You'd certainly be thinking about what Jesus would like in order to please Him.

Jesus did, at times, go to peoples' houses. One day he visited the home of Mary and Martha. When Jesus came over Martha was busy with all the preparations. She wanted things to be just right for Jesus, and her concern was out of love for her Lord. Her sister Mary, however, sat down before all the work was done. She left her sister Martha in the kitchen. After a while Martha got angry. "I'm doing all the work here while you're sitting on your rear!" she said in so many words. You might think that Jesus would have encouraged Mary to get up and help her sister out, but He didn't. "You are distracted with much serving," He told Martha. "Mary has chosen the better part." Mary was willing to put aside the preparations to sit with her Lord and partake of the one thing needful.

We might see Mary as lazy, but if we did then we would miss the point. We might see Martha as the one doing all the work, but if we did then we would miss the point. It was not easy to do what Mary did. It is hard work to put all your work aside and listen to Jesus. It is often easier to work than to sit and listen to Jesus because then all the work is left for later. Mary did a hard thing by putting aside her work to sit at the feet of Jesus.

As a pastor I understand how difficult it is to do what Mary did. As a pastor I am involved heavily in prayer and the devotions during the day. I think I have the best job in the world. There is nothing...absolutely nothing like being in the ordained ministry. And yet I would not be truthful if I said to you that it is easy to sit at Jesus' feet. It is not easy. Even this morning I lined up all the things that I needed to do today and made a schedule of all the work that needed to get done. Here it is nearly noon, the day halfway over, and I have yet to say my daily prayers. Like Martha I have been distracted by the many things to do in my attempts to serve Christ while all along neglecting the one thing needful.

Sometimes going to church also means giving up a morning when you could be getting work done at home. Life is so busy that sometimes Sunday is the only day of the week to sleep in and take a breather. Face it. It is not easy to come to worship. But that is Satan's plan. The more he can convince us that we are not needed in worship, the easier it becomes. Sometimes that's why we make excuses for neglecting the one thing needful. We forget that there is only one thing we really need. These things need to be said as we go into the summer months.

During the summer we get distracted by many things. Like Martha we get our priorities backwards. We put second things first and first things second. But we need worship. You need the forgiveness that Jesus gives. More than something we have to do, it is something we need. Sitting at Jesus' feet is the one thing needful. I hope to see you in worship in the weeks ahead. Don't let Satan and the summer blues steal your joy that is found in worshiping Him.

I look forward to greeting you in worship!

Pr. Gil Gilbert

**WORSHIP ASSISTANTS FOR JUNE**

- ❖ Communion Assistants - Don & Nicky Jarrett
- ❖ Ushers - James Hall, Michael Hall, Jimmy Jarrett, Ted Whisnant
- ❖ Greeter - n/a
- ❖ Altar Preparation - Martha Johnson, Malinda Leatherman
- ❖ Children's Church and Nursery - n/a
- ❖ Offering Tabulators - Tim Eckard, 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 JUNE**



6/04 - Betty Wilfong  
6/18 - Bobbi Wright

6/11 - Lorene Heavner  
6/25 - Carl & Glennie Beam

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 APRIL/MAY 2017**

|                        | 4/23/17  | 4/30/17  | 5/7/17   | 5/14/17  | 5/21/17  |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Learning Hour          | 32       | 41       | 47       | 28       | 42       |
| Worship                | 61       | 85       | 87       | 85       | 77       |
| General Fund Offerings | 4,289.76 | 2,421.00 | 8,789.00 | 1,698.60 | 1,524.07 |

General Fund **Offerings, April 2017** = \$17,023.11  
 General Fund **Expenses, April 2017** = \$19,001.36  
 Difference = \$ - 1,978.25 (expenses exceeded offerings)

Needed Each Week = \$3,257.94

**THE FRED T. FOARD SENIORS** will meet at Noon on Wednesday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, at Sardis Lutheran. Everyone is invited to these gatherings.

**MEN OF GRACE PRAYER BREAKFAST** will be held on Saturday, June 10<sup>th</sup>, at 9:00 AM at the Blue Moon. We invite all Men of Grace to join us for discussion, prayer, and great food.

**THE GROUP HOME IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD** is in need of *new* pillows and a flat screen TV. Please speak with Pastor Gilbert for further details.

**CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY**, love and prayers are extended by the People of God at Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church to the family and loved ones of Essie Reinhardt in their hour of bereavement. May God comfort all who mourn.

**THE 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY** of Pastor Gil's Ordination will be celebrated on Saturday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>. A dinner will be served from 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM in Fellowship Hall. All are welcome to come and enjoy this wonderful celebration.

**PENTECOST SUNDAY** is June 4<sup>th</sup>. Pentecost is an important day on the Church calendar. It celebrates that day which is recorded in Acts, Chapter 2 and describes the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Christian Church (read Acts 2 in preparation for Sunday). The Praise and Worship Team is asking that everyone wear RED next Sunday.

**THE MEMORIAL GARDEN** project is progressing well. At this time we have requests for 9 of the 12" x 12" bricks that will be placed at the bench locations in the Columbarium area. Order forms are available in the Narthex. Additional orders are being accepted for a few more weeks.

**A GRACE CEMETERY OPEN HOUSE** will be held Saturday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, from 10 AM until 12 NOON in Union Church. Allen Biggerstaff and Tim Leatherman will be there to answer questions. This will be for current plot owners and potential plot purchasers. Updated detailed maps of the cemetery will be available for locating and examining plots as well as all inquiries and questions will be addressed. Unreserved plots will also be available for purchase. The public is invited and welcome.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THOSE THAT HAVE GRADUATED** (or will soon graduate)! We pray God's blessings on you as you pursue His desires for your future.

- ❖ Luke Setzer - graduated in May from Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, NC with a Bachelor of Science Business Administration Degree in Finance. Luke plans to make a career in Finance. He is the son of Todd & Susan Setzer and the grandson of Philip & Melinda Leatherman.
- ❖ Brigit Johnson - graduated from Hickory High School. She will be attending Lenoir-Rhyne University where she will study Criminal Justice. Brigit is the daughter/step-daughter of Ed & Kandra Johnson, the daughter of Brandy Lund, the granddaughter of Gary & Kathy Leatherman, and the great-granddaughter of Harvey & Helen Leatherman.
- ❖ Alyssa McCrary - graduated from Bunker Hill High School. She will be attending Belmont Abbey College, Belmont, NC. Alexis is the daughter of Bobby & April McCrary and the granddaughter of Herb & Libby Travis.

**OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD** needs your help! On Tuesday, June 13<sup>th</sup>, from 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM and Wednesday, June 14<sup>th</sup>, from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM there will be a special time in Charlotte of processing shoebox gifts for needy children worldwide. Their plan is to do 22,500 boxes in 21 hours - more than 1,000 per hour! Don't miss this exciting opportunity to be a part of bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to girls and boys in some of the most remote corners of the earth. Sign up for one or more three-hour shifts with your family, church group, or friends. Volunteers must be at least 13 years old. You can call the office in Boone to sign up at 828-262-1980.

**VBS AT GRACE** will be July 30<sup>th</sup> through August 3<sup>rd</sup> with a meal at 5:30 PM and classes from 6:00 - 8:00 PM. Mark your calendars now!

## BOARD NOTES FOR MAY

Meeting called to order by President Tim Eckard. Herb Travis shared a devotional reading with the Board. Holy Communion was administered and shared.

**Old Business:** The process of incorporating the congregation is in progress and is being handled by Thomas Hannah, Esq. The data from Raleigh has been received on disk and contains the Grace history back to its earliest days. This will be a great resource for the archives of Grace.

A report of the Carolinas Mission District held May 19-20 at St. James/Newton was presented. Thanks to Steve and Chris Suther for serving as our delegates.

**Learning/Education:** Campfirmation Week is 7/16-7/22 at Lutherock. Makayla Hall will be attending from Grace with 30 other campers from 5 Lutheran congregations and pastors. VBS is 7/30-8/3 at Grace. Nancy Leonard is the VBS Leader.

**Property/Facilities:** Quotes were received from Startown Carpet Co. on carpeting the sanctuary. This was tabled until further notice. The uneven sidewalk in front of the church has been temporarily repaired and new mortar set. The stumps have been removed and ground up. Thank you, Carl Beam. Work is needed on the parsonage exterior: Trim needs painting, rotting doors need replacing, gutters replaced, trees need to be taken down.

**Praise/Worship:** Remaining Easter lilies planted in Memorial Garden. Training of youth and adults need to be offered.

**Community Outreach:** Group Home being investigated as many questions have surfaced. Senior Lunch will be discontinued for summer. May was last one until September.

**Witness/Evangelism:** No Report

**Stephen Ministry:** New ministry at Grace. Four new SM Trainees (Michael Pisko, Shelia Drum, Herb and Libby Travis) will begin 50 hours of classroom training on June 12. Commissioning will be in September.

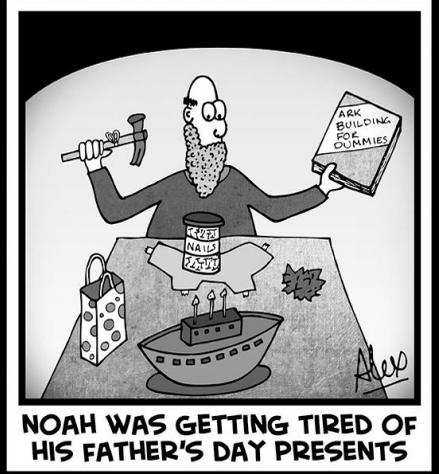
**Fellowship:** Homecoming is August 27. Pr. Gilbert is seeking a guest pastor to preach. The 225 Year Anniversary for Grace will be in January of 2022. Bishop John Bradosky will be asked to preach and to be with us for that special celebration.

**Treasurer's Report:** Received as information. Joys and Concerns were shared. Motion to adjourn made and seconded.

Next meeting: June 11 @4 pm. Devotions: Johnny Moss. Pastor Gilbert closed the meeting with prayer.

## CAKE OR DEATH

by alex baker



**A CHOIR MEMBER RETIRES.** Jimmy Jarrett will add his voice to that of the congregation in singing and participating in services. Jimmy's parents - Clyde and Genieva Jarrett (Poppy and Mom to many of us) were always most supportive of the music at Grace. In the late 90's after his parents passed away, Jimmy joined the choir full time, and has been at his spot on the 3rd row since that time. We continue to have the Jarrett tradition of talented singers - Doug and Jackie on a regular basis, and Jodi Martin for her special music throughout the Church year. Thank you, Jimmy. Feel free to come out of retirement whenever the spirit moves you.

**MORE CHOIR NOTES** - Irene Heavner has spent most of her adult life in the choir. Irene also "retired" a number of years ago, but then returned to help again on Sunday mornings. We are most thankful for Irene's continued participation.

The choir members will soon have a much deserved Wednesday night vacation for the summer months. We continue to count on them for Sunday morning leadership in the worship services. Anyone in the congregation that would like to help out during June and July when choir members go on vacations - please feel free to join. Robes are available in a variety of sizes.

### **STEPHEN MINISTRY BEGINS AT GRACE**

Stephen Ministers are laypeople—Christian men and women—trained to provide one-to-one care to people experiencing a difficult time in life, such as grief, divorce, job loss, chronic or terminal illness, relocation, or separation due to military deployment.

This month at Grace, Pastor Gilbert, who has attended the two-week Stephen Ministry Leadership Training Course, will begin training 4 Stephen Minister Trainees (Michael Pisko, Shelia Drum, Herb and Libby Travis) and several other Stephen Minister Trainees from other area Lutheran congregations. The Training Classes will be held every Monday evening at 6 pm and will include 50 hours of intense training on listening skills, confidentiality, grief counseling, hospital visiting, caring for other members and many other topics.

Stephen Ministers come from all walks of life. Their commonality? A passion for bringing Christ's love and care to people during a time of need. Since 1975, more than 650,000 people from more than 12,000 congregations and other organizations have been trained as Stephen Ministers. In September, these Stephen Minister Trainees will be commissioned in a special worship at Grace. Encourage them and pray for them as they go through their training.

### **REQUEST: COVENANT OF CONDUCT**

It has come to the attention of staff and the Executive Committee of the Leadership Board that there is much chattering and gossip going on amongst some of our members at Grace, for the most part, which is negative and untruths. Is this the way we behave as Christians? Some find the need to talk about the personal business of members who been led to leave Grace. A former member recently contacted the Pastor and voiced their request that they not be discussed by members of Grace, why they left, and the purpose behind their leaving. This is a reasonable request and an acknowledgement that God is working in their life as they moved on to another congregation. In light of this, it would be beneficial for every member to refer back to the Covenant of Conduct which was constructed and approved by the Leadership Board at its Annual Retreat in January and distributed to all members. (See below for a copy of the Covenant) Read it carefully. Also listed are a few of the many scriptural references that prohibit gossip and unnecessary talk about others:

## COVENANT OF CONDUCT

In order for our congregation and Leadership Ministry Board to deal effectively with issues within the congregation, and to maintain good relationships within the Christian Community at Grace, the following guidelines are to be followed:

1. Every member of our community is free to express his or her opinions about the ministry.
2. Opinions about other persons or programs led by other persons shall always be shared according to the Biblical wisdom of Jesus found in Matthew 18: 15 'If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. 16 But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector.'
3. Members are invited to share their opinions directly with their leaders (Board members, staff, pastors, volunteers) in conversation that is mutually uplifting of our ministry.
4. When members of the congregation express an opinion to one another, the other member shall ask: "What would you like me to do with this information?"
  - a) If it regards another person reference Matthew 18: 15-17.
  - b) If it regards a point that can be dealt with respond: "I know someone who might be able to help you with that."
  - c) If it regards something needing Board attention, see #5 below.
5. If a member desires information be shared with the Board the following may be said:
  - a) If the person is willing to share the concern in person: "I can see that this is important to you. I think you should share it with the whole Board. Our next meeting is set for ... Call our president and she/he will gladly make time for you on our agenda."
  - b) If the person is unwilling or unable to share the concern in person: "I can see that this is important to you. I would like to share this concern on your behalf with the whole Leadership Board. I can only do so with your permission to use your name when I share this information. Do I have your permission to do that?"
  - c) If the person is unwilling to publicly air their concern at all: "I'm sorry, I know this is important to you but I will not share your concern with others as we do not deal with anonymous letters, gossip, or opinions in this congregation."
6. When our leaders come together to guide our congregation we fully expect them to:
  - a) Pray and call upon the presence of our gracious God.
  - b) Reflect upon and discern the will of God for our congregation.
  - c) Model cordiality, hospitality and patience with one another.
  - d) Represent and strive for our communal good rather than personal agendas.
  - e) Deal with disagreements honestly, openly and with loving-kindness.
  - f) Listen carefully to others' concerns and seek to understand them clearly.
  - g) Model Matthew 18: 15-17 in all their dealings with others.
7. As God's children in Christ we shall: Care as we have been cared for, share as we have been gifted, forgive as we have been forgiven and love as we have been loved.

**Proverbs 20:19** - He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with one who gossips.

**Psalm 34:13** - Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.

**Proverbs 11:13** - He who goes about as a gossip reveals secrets. But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.

**Psalm 141:3** - Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.

**Ephesians 4:29** - Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth.

**Proverbs 16:28** - A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends.

**Exodus 23:1** - You shall not bear a false report. Do not join your hand with the wicked.

**James 4:11** - Do not speak against one another, brethren He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.

**James 1:26** - If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

**1 Timothy 5:13** - At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention.

Let us agree in our hearts to re-affirm this Covenant - NOT to gossip, slander, or talk about others in a negative light - and especially if we do not know if it is an untruth or not. That's how troubles in a congregation begin and is the beginning of a slow and painful death for many congregations.

**CATAWBA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES** wants to raise awareness of a movement going on in our community. Right now in Catawba County, there are 224 children in foster care and they have a desperate need for foster parents. They currently need at least 40 MORE foster families to be able to house all of Catawba County's foster children. Their goal is to have 100 foster families by 2020. May 21<sup>st</sup> was their 2nd Annual Foster Care Sunday. The purpose of this event was to get people talking about the need for foster parents and that the County needs families to care for our own community children. If you would like more information please contact Megan Burns at 828-695-4553. We can all remember these children and their many needs in our prayers.

**FLOWER VASES** of the small or bud vase sizes would be greatly appreciated. Our supply is almost depleted due to the generosity of all in sharing their flowers with the members on our prayer list. Please give your donations to Joy Heavner.

**"GRACE YOUR TABLE"** cookbooks are still available. Just THREE cookbooks remain at \$15.00 each. Please contact the Church Office if you wish to purchase one. All proceeds go to the Sanctuary Project Fund (carpet, painting, removal of bee hives, etc.).

**THANK YOU FROM ECCCM** - Thank you for your donation of 427 pounds of food during the month of April, 2017 to the ECCCM Charlie Bunn Food Pantry! With the expansion of the Student Hunger Prevention Program we are feeding more people than ever. Our annual distribution rate increased from 1.4 million pounds in 2015 to 1.56 million pounds in 2016. It is through your generosity that we have been able to meet the growing demands of hunger in Catawba County.

**THE PREGNANCY CARE CENTER** in Hickory has a special campaign between Mother's Day and Father's Day for prayers and funds. Contact Janet Shores, Assistant Director, at 828-322-4272 extension 108 for ways you can help.

## DO YOU KNOW YOUR LAY SHEPHERD?

At the Leadership Ministry Board Retreat, each Board member took on an additional role as a Board member and leader in the congregation – the role of Lay Shepherd. A Lay Shepherd is one who is assigned a number of members in the congregation (a flock) and is responsible for communicating with his/her flock on a regular basis. The goal of Lay Shepherding is to insure good and encouraging communication within the congregation between member (sheep), Lay Shepherd, Board and Pastor. See below for a listing of all Lay Shepherds and their flock:

|                                     |                              |                                |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Pastor Gil Gilbert, Shepherd</b> | <b>Herb Travis, Shepherd</b> | <b>Ricky Bivens, Shepherd</b>  |
| Carl/Glennie Beam                   | Dale/Sandra Beal             | Sheila Drum                    |
| Ricky/Cindy Bivens                  | Ann Campbell                 | Darrell/Debbie Feimster        |
| Tim Eckard                          | Jo Doris Frye                | Troy/Heather Feimster          |
| James Hall                          | Michael/Wanda Hall           | Kenneth Heavner                |
| Peggy Hall                          | Violet Hatchett              | Rachael Heavner                |
| Bill/Joy Heavner                    | Herman Heavner               | Scott/Deanie Houser            |
| Jane Johnson                        | Don/Nicky Jarrett            | Jacob/Tawanna Jarrett          |
| Floyd Leatherman                    | Martha Johnson               | Nell Leatherman                |
| Joe/Lynette Momier                  | Philip/Melinda Leatherman    | Peggy Leatherman               |
| Johnny/Jane Moss                    | Allen/Trudy Leonard          | Reid/Betty Lynch               |
| Michael/Debi Pisko                  |                              | Matthew Speagle                |
| Alan/Stormy Shull                   | <b>James Hall, Shepherd</b>  | Mike/Sharon Whalen             |
| Herb/Libby Travis                   | Jerry/Debra Hefner           |                                |
| Charles Wilfong                     | Faye Lane                    | <b>Michael Pisko, Shepherd</b> |
|                                     | Paul Leonard                 | Joshua/Amanda Burris           |
| <b>Tim Eckard, Shepherd</b>         | Ted Whisnant                 | Nathan Hoyle                   |
| Randy/Elizabeth Frye                | Scott/Carolyn Whisnant       | Jonathon Jacobs                |
| Irene Heavner                       | Jack/Betty Wilfong           | Josie Jarrett                  |
| Lorene Heavner                      | Clayton/Stephanie Wright     | Eric/Jodi Martin               |
| Grady/Lula Ingle                    | Martha Young                 | Aaron/Jodie Moss               |
| Kevin Ingle                         |                              | James/Christine Norman         |
| Betty Matheson                      | <b>Johnny Moss, Shepherd</b> | Michael Norman                 |
| Marjorie McDaniel                   | Jeffry/Kristie Bivens        | Dan/Tricia Panek               |
| Debbie Michael                      | Gene/Frankie Crouse          | Wayne/Sandra Powell            |
| David/Iris Sigmon                   | Angela Isenhour              | Todd/Susan Setzer              |
| Steve/Chris Suther                  | Dwight Isenhour              | Joe Whisnant                   |
| Shirley Warlick                     | Tony/Thelma Isenhour         |                                |
| Jeffery Warlick                     | Wyatt Isenhour               | <b>Carl Beam, Shepherd</b>     |
|                                     | Tim Leatherman               | Allen/Sherry Biggerstaff       |
|                                     | Dennis/Nancy Leonard         | Bobbie Brendle                 |
|                                     | Jennifer Leonard             | Randall/Glenda Childers        |
|                                     | Joshua/Jennifer McConnell    | Ed/Kandra Johnson              |
|                                     | Steven/Brenda McConnell      | Gary/Kathy Leatherman          |
|                                     | Jonathan Moss                | Helen Smith                    |
|                                     | Chad/Stephanie Russell       | Bobbie Wright                  |
|                                     |                              |                                |

|                             |                             |  |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Alan Shull, Shepherd</b> | <b>Joe Momier, Shepherd</b> |  |
| Jennifer Aldridge           | Mary Biggerstaff            |  |
| Juanita Haas                | Pat Dietz                   |  |
| Allen/Kay Hatchett          | Doug/Jackie Jarrett         |  |
| Janice Helton               | Jimmy/Geraldine Jarrett     |  |
| Bill Jarrett                | Todd/Kim Jenkins            |  |
| Larry/Brenda Jarrett        | Harvey/Helen Leatherman     |  |
| Rebecca Speagle-Rogers      | Brian/Jill Matthews         |  |
| David/Belinda Wilfong       | Ronnie/Penny Miller         |  |
| Alicia Wilfong              | Barry/Kim Parker            |  |
|                             | Shelly Scronce              |  |

**THE NALC NEWS FOR MAY** is available in the Narthex. There is also a copy posted on the bulletin board beside the Pastor's Office. This issue includes information on the nominees for NALC Executive Council, changes to Bishop election process that will be considered at the NALC Convocation in August, graduates from the NALS, the launching of Holy Families! initiative, and many other articles. The Bishop's letter is entitled "Jesus Goes Ahead of Us". Take a copy and read about different ways the NALC is responding to God's word. The newsletter is also available online at [www.thenalc.org](http://www.thenalc.org).

**CHURCH DIRECTORY UPDATES:**

- Mary Biggerstaff - still at Trinity Village but in Room 409A.
- Jonathan Moss - 2108 Sheffield Road, Raleigh, NC 27610

**HOLY LAND TOUR UPDATE:** We currently have 16 persons who are interested in going to Israel for the 2018 Holy Land Tour and following the Footsteps of Jesus with Pastor Gil and Karen. As of June 1, 2017, it is now being made available to all Lutheran congregations in Catawba County and surrounding areas. Seats will fill fast. Make your reservation today! If you would like to see where Jesus walked and see the land of his ministry, life, death and resurrection, contact the Church Office for a brochure and details

**UPDATE FROM FRANKLIN GRAHAM:** "I spent Easter with persecuted Christians in Iraq and saw firsthand the destruction and death ISIS has caused in Mosul, the nation's second largest city.

Mosul is the Biblical city of Nineveh, where Jonah preached and God brought one of the greatest revivals in all of history as the entire city repented of their sins. Christians there trace the roots of their faith back to the first century.

When ISIS captured Mosul in 2014, they used the blaring speakers on mosques to order all Christians to leave town in 30 minutes, or else die. Muslims then looted their houses and shops, leaving little but bare walls covered with graffiti declaring, 'You love life, we love death,' and 'We have come to drink your blood.'

Today, almost all the Christians are gone from the Plains of Nineveh, and yet the bloodshed continues. ISIS is fighting to the death against Iraqi-led forces seeking to liberate Mosul, and every day civilians are being killed or maimed by mortars, shrapnel, and cold-blooded snipers who shoot women and children in the back or use them as human shields.

I visited the Emergency Field Hospital that Samaritan's Purse operates on the outskirts of Mosul. I met a father and his 4-year-old daughter who were trying to escape through an ISIS tunnel when

they stepped on a land mine. Their legs were shattered, his right leg had to be amputated, and she suffered such severe burns that she was crying in pain. The fact that they survived is a credit to our dedicated surgeons, nurses, and staff who are on call 24/7 and are prepared to deal with the most horrific injuries. Not only do they provide expert trauma care, but they also pray with and minister to each patient in the Name of Jesus Christ.

Also in the hospital were several ISIS soldiers wounded in the battle for Mosul. Just as Jesus healed all who came to Him, we care for these men unconditionally. Our hospital is in a secure facility protected by concrete blast walls, and they are not going anywhere until we turn them over to Iraqi authorities.

Until recently, 100,000 Christians lived in the vicinity of Mosul. Today, almost none are left. Respected British journalist Piers Morgan is exactly right when he describes ISIS's crusade as nothing less than a "genocidal attack against Christians and Christianity."

Where have all those Christians gone? Many were slaughtered, and many more are living as refugees. I met some of them in the city of Erbil, less than two hours from Mosul. This is a Kurdish area that has stood strong against ISIS and still welcomes and respects Christians.

On Good Friday, I visited the Ashti camp in Erbil, where 1,200 Christian families displaced by ISIS live in converted shipping containers and prefabricated shelters. I met there with Sister Diana, a refugee herself who oversees a clinic that we help to supply with medicine.

The Saturday before Easter, we visited the town of Qaraqosh, where ISIS burned the church, used the altar for target practice, and shot the cross off the ceiling. As I walked through the ashes, I bent down and picked up a charred page from an Arabic bible. My dear friend Pastor Ami Dagher from Lebanon translated it as a passage from John 20, where Jesus convinces Thomas that He has indeed risen from the grave. *'Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe'* (John 20:27, ESV).

Amazingly, I found an Operation Christmas Child shoebox in the ruins of the church! It was sooty and empty, but it was a reminder that not too long ago, there were happy children in this church. Someone lovingly packed this box and prayed over it, and God used it to show one little boy how much He loves him. It hurts to think what might have happened to this boy.

That shoebox is a reminder of the power and reach of Operation Christmas Child. Over the years, Samaritan's Purse and our partners have given out more than a million shoeboxes in Iraq alone, and 146 million worldwide. Your shoebox gifts enable us to take the Gospel to places we could never go otherwise.

On Easter Sunday, Sami translated as I preached the Good News of Christ's resurrection at the Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Erbil. Many in this congregation have endured persecution yet remain strong in their faith. I was encouraged to hear that dozens of Muslims families come to this church and are seeking to know more about Jesus. Pray for their salvation.

After seeing how ISIS has wiped out Christian towns, it did my heart good to see a thriving church like this in Iraq. In fact, the congregation has outgrown its rented facilities. I promised them that Samaritan's Purse will build them a new church along with a community center on land donated by the city. Erbil is the largest city in the Kurdish region and is a strategic location for spreading the Gospel.

At Samaritan's Purse, we praise God for the opportunity we have right now to bring the hope of the Gospel to the doorsteps of ISIS. Thank you for your prayers and generosity in support of our work in the Middle East and all around the world. May God bless you."

# Grace Notes

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