

# GraceNotes



A Monthly Publication of the Congregational Activities of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Newton, NC  
Volume 220, Number 12 December 2017

## ANNOUNCING - SPECIAL EVENTS

**Saturday 12/9 - 4:00 PM** Bus trip to McAdenville & Billy Library to view the light displays

**Sunday 12/10 - 4:00 PM** Christmas Program and Baby Jesus Birthday Party in Fellowship Hall

**Friday 12/15 - 6:00 PM** Board Appreciation Banquet (FH)

**Saturday 12/16 - 12:00 PM** Cookie Exchange and Ugly Sweater Party in Fellowship Hall (you MUST RSVP!)

**Sunday 12/17 - 5:00 PM** Candlelight & Communion Worship in Union Church

**Tuesday 12/29 - 5:30 PM** Christmas Caroling to Homebound and Nursing Homes

**Wednesday 12/20 - 12:00 PM** Grace Senior Lunch (FH)

**Sunday 12/24 - 7:00 PM** Candlelight & Communion Worship in Main Sanctuary preceded by Music at 6:30 PM

**MONDAY 12/25 - HAPPY BIRTHDAY JESUS**

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



Dear Brothers and Sisters at Grace...

As we enter into the holy season (Dec. 3) of Advent, it is appropriate to remind ourselves of the purpose of this beautiful liturgical season, according to the Church. Although surrounded by the noisy "Christmas rush" of the secular world around us, it is still possible for each of us to enter into the true Christian spirit of Advent during these short weeks preceding the celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. The spirit of this holy season is indeed one of joyful anticipation, but it is also a time to "prepare the way of the Lord, to make straight His paths". We are to prepare our hearts for His coming.

Hopefully, we can lessen the frantic materialism with which the joyful anticipation of this holy season has been fractured by the commercialism of our day. During that which is supposed to be a time of joyful and peaceful anticipation, we should avoid those distractions which cause us to lose sight of the very purpose of our Advent—to prepare our hearts for the birth of Jesus.

After all, the very word 'Christmas' comes from the old English 'Christ-Mass', and the highlight of this Festival should be the solemn Holy Communion on Christmas Eve. This to be followed by the traditional early rising on Christmas morning in our homes, and the children's excitement opening presents, and giving presents. It is my prayer that good parents will teach their children why we exchange presents and why we are excited on Christmas morning which is the Good News that Jesus Christ, our salvation and Redeemer, has been born!

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I pray that you are never to be led by the false maxims of the world, during the holy Season of Advent, or at any other time. Let us preserve the quiet, prayerful spirit of Advent in our hearts, our homes, and our families. Let us participate in the joy of Christmas and those celebrations and events which lift up our hearts with love, repentance, and gratitude. May our homes be lavishly decorated and brightly lighted with Christmas lights. Let our hearts and voices sing out in joyous acclamation! Let us joyfully send out Christmas greetings proclaiming the momentous birth of our Lord. Let us celebrate the seasons of Advent and Christmas as true sons and daughters of the faith at Grace Lutheran Church! May the prayerful anticipation of the Advent season fill your hearts with the joyful expectation of His coming into the world.

Advent and Christmas Blessings!

Pastor Gil Gilbert

**WORSHIP ASSISTANTS FOR DECEMBER**

- ❖ Communion Assistants - Doug & Jackie Jarrett
- ❖ Ushers - Tim Leatherman, Joe & Lynette Momier, Alan Shull
- ❖ Greeter - Glennie Beam
- ❖ Altar Preparation - Nicole Jarrett, Martha Johnson
- ❖ Children's Church and Nursery - Bobbie Wright
- ❖ Offering Tabulators - Joe Momier, 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 DECEMBER**



- |                           |                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 12/03 - Joy Heavner       | 12/10 - Violet Hatchett |
| 12/17 - Marjorie McDaniel | 12/24 - Joy Heavner     |
| 12/31 - Nicky Jarrett     |                         |

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 memorial for this wonderful gift of beatification of the worship.

**ATTENDANCE AND GIVING TO OUR LORD'S WORK FOR OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2017**

	<b>10/29/17</b>	<b>11/05/17</b>	<b>11/12/17</b>	<b>11/19/17</b>	<b>11/26/17</b>
Learning Hour	28	51	45	41	29
Worship	87	86	75	86	66
General Fund Offerings	1,807.50	6,113.00	1,927.00	2,123.00	1,898.24

General Fund **Offerings, October** 2017 = \$ 12,782.46  
 General Fund **Expenses, October** 2017 = \$ 15,734.32  
 Difference = - \$ 2,951.86 (expenses exceeded offerings)

Needed Each Week = \$3,257.94

**THE FRED T. FOARD SENIORS** will meet at Noon on Wednesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, at Plateau Methodist. Everyone is invited to these gatherings. (LH)

**FIRST SUNDAY LUNCH** will be held December 3<sup>rd</sup> following Worship. The meal will be furnished by the Christian Education/Learning Ministry Team and will consist of chicken pie, coleslaw, green beans, rolls, and desserts. Plan to stay for the food and fellowship. Suggested freewill offering is \$3.00 and it will go to Samaritan's Purse for Disaster Relief. (NL)

**SECOND SUNDAY BREAKFAST** will be served December 10<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 AM in Fellowship Hall. Herb Travis' Learning Hour Class will be serving eggs, sausage, rice, and gravy. Suggested freewill offering is \$3.00 and it will go to Samaritan's Purse for Disaster Relief. (HT)

**THE MEN OF GRACE** will meet on Saturday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, at 9:00 AM at Four Peas in a Pod Restaurant on Hwy. 70 in Conover (in the shopping strip beside Walgreen's and Cook Out).. Bring a friend! (PG)

**THE GRACE SENIOR LUNCHEON GROUP** will meet on Wednesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, from noon until 2:00 PM. Come join the fun and fellowship. All are welcome!

**"GRACE YOUR TABLE"** cookbooks are still available. Just TWO 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.). (KH)

**THE OFFERINGS FOR SAMARITAN'S PURSE DISASTER RELIEF** are still being accepted, however the envelopes are now located in the Narthex. You can also include the offering in your weekly offering envelope clearly marked for Samaritan's Purse Disaster Relief.. These offerings will go to help victims of the hurricanes, earthquakes, or where ever it may be needed. May God move us to continue our support of those in need.

**THANK YOU** for all the gifts, attending the baby shower, and the out pouring of love for our bundle of joy that will be arriving before we know it. We are truly blessed and have felt God's love throughout this journey. With love, Michael, Wanda, and Makayla Hall

**THANKS TO** each one that called and prayed for me while I was sick. I was glad to have everyone think of me. Thanks a lot. Lorene Heavner

**ANOTHER NEW BANNER** crafted by Tricia Panek has been placed in our Grace Sanctuary. Crafting of the banner was labor intensive due to the many colors and placement of the individual fabrics. We thank Tricia for her dedicated work in the continuation of our banner ministry at Grace.



**ELECTED TO THE LEADERSHIP MINISTRY BOARD** On November 5<sup>th</sup> were Ricky Bivens, Gary Leatherman, and Herb Travis each for a three year term, and Martha Johnson and Steve Suther each for a one year term. Their terms will begin 1/1/18. For those going off the Board, Tim Eckard, Mike Pisko, and Carl Beam, we offer our thanks for their service to God and the leadership at Grace.

**PHONE TREE MESSAGES** sometimes do not give the entire message. If this happens, please call the Church Office and let us know exactly what happened. They need to know the phone number, the day, and whether you answered or if it was on the answering machine. If you answer the phone and get the end of the message, stay on the line a little while as the message will often start over from the beginning. We are happy to try to correct these problems if you report them to us.

**CHURCH DIRECTORY UPDATES:**

Floyd Leatherman - c/o Trinity Village, 1265 21<sup>st</sup> Street NE Room 711, Hickory, NC 28601  
New Member - Todd Childers, 3358 Zion Church Road, Hickory, NC 28602

## **COOKIE EXCHANGE AND UGLY SWEATER PARTY**

All women of Grace Lutheran! The First Annual Grace Lutheran Church Cookie Exchange and Ugly Sweater Party will be Saturday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, from 12:00-2:00 PM in Fellowship Hall. What a great way to take a break from the hustle and bustle and enjoy good food, fellowship and lots of fun! Lunch will be provided. We will also be collecting canned goods for Eastern Catawba Cooperative Christian Ministry (ECCCM) and gently used or new coats. Below are some frequently asked questions - this information is also included in your personal invitation to be handed out at church:

FAQ:

**What is a Cookie Exchange?** A Cookie Exchange (otherwise known as Cookie swap) is where you bring five dozen cookies of your favorite Christmas cookie recipe and "swap" for five dozen variety of cookies.

**How many cookies should I bring?** We are asking that you bring 5 dozen homemade cookies. Remember, you will be leaving with 5 dozen cookies with a wide variety of favorites to enjoy or give as gifts for Christmas.

**Do I need to RSVP?** Yes! In order for this event to be a true exchange, all recipients must RSVP to Karen Gilbert or Nicky Jarrett no later than December 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Do I need to provide the recipe for the cookies I plan to bring?** **Please, Yes!** Give your recipe to Karen Gilbert or Nicky Jarrett. A small cookbook will be compiled and given out as the attendees at the conclusion of the event that includes the recipes of all cookies.

**Will there be a Cookie contest?** **Yes!** There will be awards given for 1) Most creative, 2) Most festive, and 3) Most original. Attendees will be voting for the winners of each category.

**Will lunch be provided?** Yes, lunch will be provided along with dessert (So you can take all your yummy cookies home).

**Do I need to bring a large container for the cookies I take home?** No, a container will be provided for you for safe transit home.

**What is an Ugly Sweater party?** An Ugly Sweater party is where you wear the ugliest sweater (or any other garment) you can find or make.

**Will there be an Ugly Sweater contest?** Yes! There will be 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners. Attendees will be voting for the winners.

**What else do I need to bring?** We will be collecting canned goods and new (or gently used) coats for Eastern Catawba Cooperative Christian Ministry (ECCCM).

**Who can I contact for additional questions?** See Karen Gilbert or Nicky Jarrett.

**CANDLELIGHT WORSHIP SERVICE IN UNION CHURCH** will be Sunday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, at 5:00 PM. This annual tradition is a time to worship with a communion and candlelight service in this historic building. Music echoes throughout the structure, and the setting is especially peaceful as daylight turns into darkness. Bring friends and family to this special time when we worship our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

## **THE GETHSEMENE GARDEN GROWS**

Many worshipers have commented on the beautiful garden and statue of the praying Jesus which welcomes each person as they enter Grace through the side entrance. It continues to add to the beauty and reverence of our church.

Karen Gilbert has taken great care to trim the mums following the first frost. Just before Thanksgiving, she planted 73 tulip bulbs around the vacant areas of the garden and this should be a beautiful spring array of colors come Spring. Thanks to Juanita Haas for supplying the tulip bulbs.



## **ASK MORTIMER, THE CHURCH MOUSE!**

Feel free to ask Mortimer, the Church Mouse, any question about the church, theology or why we do the things we do in worship. You may put your question on the Worship Today Form, email the Church Office, or leave a note in the Church Office Mailbox. Maybe his answer to your inquiry will appear in the next newsletter.

*Question: What is the correct way I should receive the Holy Communion?*

*Mortimer's Answer:* There is no perfect way to receive Holy Communion, but there is a preferred way to receive the bread and wine. In receiving the bread/wafer, one should hold their hands out in front of them with opened palms turned upward. This represents an openness to receive, as should your heart be open to Christ. Many come and pick the bread/wafer like it is some type of appetizer! The open palm allows the pastor/celebrant to place the bread/wafer in your palm, thereby decreasing the possibility of missing or fumbling with the wafer with your fingers. In receiving the wine (if individual cups are used) it is preferred and more reverend to receive the cup with both hands, and not casually, as one would take a cup of water from the buffet. I hope this helps. But as for me, I eat the cheese right from the trap!

See you in Church this Sunday!

**CHRISTMAS IS AROUND THE CORNER** and Toys for Tots have placed Collection Boxes at Grace again this year. One is in the Narthex and one is downstairs. The deadline for this collection will be Sunday, December 17<sup>th</sup>. Please be so kind to fill these boxes with **NEW** and **UNWRAPPED** gifts for children of all ages in Catawba County. These children will thank you and so will the USMC. If you wish to make a financial contribution you can donate online at [www.toysfortots.org](http://www.toysfortots.org). Over 97% of your donations goes to their mission of providing toys, books, and other gifts to less fortunate children. Less than 3% is spent on fundraising and overhead.. (JH)



**CHRISTMAS LIGHTS BUS TOUR** will be Saturday, December 9<sup>th</sup>. The Grace Bus will depart the parking lot around 4:00 PM and will travel to McAdenville (Christmas City USA) to drive through to see all the thousands of lights and house decorated with candy cane sticks and snowmen. Then on to the Billy Graham Library where the library campus will be filled with lights and dazzling displays. We will eat at the Library (Graham Dairy Bar) or if the group desires, can go to another location to eat supper. Join us for a great evening of fun and getting in the Christmas spirit. Make your reservation (limit of 14) by calling the Church Office, putting your name on your Worship Today Form, or contact Herb Travis.

**CHRISTMAS CARD "MAILBOXES"** are now available. There will be folders in the back pew of the church to put Christmas cards in for those that **regularly attend worship**. No addresses are needed as *nothing gets mailed*. It is asked that you place the cards for your friends in their folders. It is also requested that you check YOUR folder on a regular basis and take home any cards you may have received. This is a way for you to save some postage while you send greetings to your church family.

## **WHY WE DON'T SING CHRISTMAS CAROLS DURING ADVENT**

This first answer to this question is obvious – the Babe in Bethlehem is not yet born! Christmas hymns are to be sung during the season of Christmas - not Advent. Advent is a time of anticipation, expectation and waiting. It is not a time of celebration as the culture would have us think. As stated in the Lutheran Manual on the Liturgy:

*"The Church Year begins with Advent, a season of preparation. To allow Advent to have its fullest dramatic impact, congregations must defer Christmas music and hymns until Christmas Eve and the 12 days of the season of Christmas which follows. The richness of the Advent symbols and themes must not be obscured by the Christmas season."*

As we can plainly see, the culture has brainwashed us into believing that it is indeed Christmas. It must be - because all the malls and stores are decorated, the tree lots are selling Christmas trees, there is even Christmas music on the radio. True! But that is of the world. That is the culture in which we live. It is not the Church. And if we follow that false hood, then the integrity of Advent is lost. Jesus calls us to be in the world but not of the world. The Church is to be the one place that is true to the Scripture and to the precepts of the seasons.

Advent is a very important season of the Church Year. It proclaims Jesus' coming to this world again to defeat Satan, death and sin. It reminds us that we are to be getting ready, to be prepared and to anticipate his coming at any moment. We are to be in the "advent" of His coming. But some say, we want to sing Christmas hymns in worship during Advent. This says that we have truly adopted the mindset of the culture which says get out all the Christmas decorations, put Christmas sales ads in the newspaper and let's make it Christmas NOW! And they do that the week after Halloween! The problem is that is theologically wrong – totally wrong and inconsistent with the Lutheran Church which is a liturgical church. When we say we want to sing hymns other than Advent hymns during Advent, it then becomes about what we want, and not about what the Church teaches, nor what the season of Advent is about. If anyone is teaching you any different, or is bending to the voices of others who do not understand the reason for the season, they are totally wrong.

During the season of Advent at Grace, we will sing Advent hymns, rightly so. And as we sing these hymns, if we pay attention to the words, we will become aware of why we sing Advent hymns. It will build our anticipation of Him coming again. And when we gather on Christmas Eve and the weeks following, we can sing with joy and happiness that He has indeed come into our hearts, just as he did some 2,000 years ago. So we do not want to rush Christmas! We believe that it is in God's perfect timing that He comes and will come again.

**MAKAYLA HALL** has completed her Confirmation studies and affirmed her Baptism Sunday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, making a public profession of the faith into which she was baptized. We rejoice in Makayla's desire to profess her faith and take on adult responsibilities in sharing the Lord's mission here at Grace and beyond.



**THE STEPHEN MINISTERS** were Commissioned Sunday, October 29<sup>th</sup>. They are Sheila Drum, Linda Hewitt (St. Mark's, Claremont), Michael Pisko, Herb Travis, and Libby Travis. We pray God's blessing on them as they minister to those in need.

**WE WELCOME INTO MEMBERSHIP** at Grace, Todd Childers. We pray he will continue to be a committed disciple of Jesus Christ. Take time to introduce yourself to him and welcome him into the Fellowship.



## **BOARD NOTES**

(from the monthly meeting in November)

**Devotions:** Given by Joe Momier followed by the sharing of the Lord's Supper by Pr. Gilbert.

**Absent:** Mike Pisko and Carl Beam, both excused.

Minutes approved and corrected. Correction was Spending Plan amount for 2018 changed from \$173,418 to \$173,718.

### **Old Business:**

▶ Painting of the parsonage and downstairs classrooms to be finished by next Friday (11/17/17). Electrician was called to repair short found in downstairs wiring. Lights on side and front porch are now operable and ceiling fan installed on side porch (purchased by pastor). The outdoor church sign repaired as it no longer turned on and off. Photocell was worn out and was replaced by a timer.

▶ Christmas Child Shoeboxes are due tomorrow for pickup. Pastor Gilbert will deliver them to the collection site. 62 is the total number and more to be added before delivery.

▶ Girl Scout leaders have requested a key to the Fellowship Hall. All info was updated and given to the Church Office (Kathy).

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

▶ Pastor Gilbert shared with the Board concerning the policies of the Grace Cemetery. It seems that some think that if they own a plot, they are considered members of Grace Church. This is totally inconsistent with the NALC Constitution of Grace, as well as the recording of new members into the congregation. The Board has asked the Cemetery Team to clarify the policies and procedures for those who purchase plots in the cemetery/columbarium. The situation concerning a previous situation at hand was discussed and the Board was satisfied that the issue had been resolved.

▶ A Bus Tour is planned for December 9<sup>th</sup> for McAdenville Lights (Christmas City USA) and lights at the Billy Graham Library. The bus will stop for supper.

▶ The Leadership Appreciation Dinner will be held December 15<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM in Fellowship Hall. This is to recognize the members of the Leadership Board (and spouses/special guests) for their service and support of Grace. This annual event is sponsored by the staff at Grace; Gil/Karen Gilbert, Joy/Bill Hefner, Kathy/David Hefner.

▶ Attention and discussion was given to the recent attacks on churches throughout our nation. Jason Reed of the Catawba County Sheriff's Dept. will be contacted to come to Grace and present a program on safety and security. Board members, as well as members of the congregation will be invited to attend.

### **PROPERTY/FACILITIES:**

▶ We have a rodent problem and the exterminating company will be contacted.

▶ One (1) pew from Union Church was sold. The remaining pews are available to any member of the congregation.

▶ Fabric to cover the new chairs in Union will be purchased. The relatives of the Essie Reinhardt Memorial Fund have designated those funds be used for the chairs.

▶ Discussion addressing the audio system and microphone for the podium was heard. Pr. Gilbert suggested purchasing a new lectern microphone and it was approved. What we are currently using is not a lectern microphone. Nell Leatherman has suggested using the Memorial Funds for Donald to update and repair the speakers in the nursery as well.

### **COMMUNITY OUTREACH:**

Reminder for all to bring canned goods in November and December for EEECM Food Pantry.

### **STEPHEN MINISTRY:**

Four Stephen Ministers were commissioned and have received their assignments.

## **FELLOWSHIP:**

Board will do lunch in January. It was also decided that the lunch/breakfast schedule be changed to FIRST Sunday Breakfast and SECOND Sunday Lunch beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **CEMETERY:**

The Team will research and bring to the Board clarification and better understanding with the policies and guidelines for non-members/members owning plots in the Grace Cemetery.

## **STAFF SUPPORT:**

There will be a meeting on November 30<sup>th</sup> at 11:45 immediately following the Connections Bible Study class.

## **FINANCE:**

The Spending Plan for 2018 as proposed by the Leadership Board was voted upon and passed at the Congregational Meeting on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

## **OTHER BUSINESS:**

The Girl Scouts (Brownies) that meet regularly in Fellowship Hall have requested that a new age group (Daisy) be added to their growing troop. Pr. Gilbert will be meeting with the leaders of the Daisy Group to sign the NALC agreement pertaining to the Constitution.

► There being no further business, the motion was made and seconded to adjourn.

► Next meeting is December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017 immediately following worship. Devotions: Pastor Gilbert

## **ALL OF US NEED TO BE CHRIST-CENTERED**

In the October issue of the NALC Newsletter, there is a very worth-while article by Pastor David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop. In his Ministry Matters article, Pastor Wendel gave insights into his visits with some NALC Council/Board meetings. To the leaders of these congregations he asks some very poignant questions. How much time is spent in Bible study and prayer, compared to discussing the budget or spending funds? Most Boards shared that they only spend a minute or two on devotions found on the internet or some tidbit found in a devotional booklet. After further discussion, they came to the conclusion that they had lost their focus on Jesus.

Wendel says this is an all too common experience. Lutheran Congregational Board members think that the Board meetings are about doing the required business of the church, managing income and expenses, paying the bills, keeping the doors open. There is no time for in-depth Scripture and prayer. This is not to criticize our congregational leaders. It is simply to point out the reality of our misdirected institutional mindsets, calling pastors and church leaders to once again be Christ-Centered – focused on the Word of God in our midst, immersed in Scripture, to again hear the Gospel, which is truly the power of God unto salvation for everyone who has faith.

There is no hope for the NALC other than our hope in Christ. Let us (the entire congregation) live our Christ-centeredness by being people of the Word of God, reading the Word, studying and meditating on the Word, discussing it as we walk alongside each other in life. Let us learn Scripture so well that it is on our ears, minds and lips as we rise and as we lie down each day. Let our Board meetings be consumed with the Word of God and prayer, so that we spend less and less time on building and budget. Let us pray that God will continue to reveal that to us as he revealed it to blessed Martin Luther. *Well said, Pastor Wendel!*

**THE ADVENT DEVOTIONAL**, written by Pastor David Wendel of the NALC, is available in the Narthex and online. It is titled "Waiting for the Lord: An Advent Walk Through the Psalms". This is a great resource to guide your walk through Advent as we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ.

**WE WISH TO THANK** Jodi Martin and Jill Matthews for their coordination of the Fall Festival event. In addition, thanks to Gary Leatherman for providing the hay ride trip around the community. And of course thanks to all who provided treats - in or out of their trunks!



## **FIVE COMMON REASONS CHURCH LEADERS SHY FROM LEADING**

I just can't seem to get enough of Joshua. Among the many reasons Joshua is my favorite biblical character other than Jesus is his uncanny leadership. For example, in Joshua 1, he transitions from becoming Moses' servant to becoming the leader of Israel. It's an amazing thing to read. Joshua was one incredible leader.

We have many incredible leaders in our churches today. But, perhaps more often than we admit, some church leaders stop leading. I have spoken with hundreds, probably thousands, of them over the years. I hear common themes of why they put their leadership in neutral. Here are the five most common reasons:

1.They are weary of conflict and criticism. These leaders have died the death of a thousand cuts. They know when they provide real leadership, the critics and naysayers will come out of the woodwork. Some of the leaders have resigned their positions because they led. They thus move into a defensive posture.

2.They don't know how to lead. Joshua had the mentorship of Moses for a generation. He was instructed. He was prepared. He was ready. Many of our church leaders know their Bible. They know theology. But they have never been trained or mentored to lead.

3.They overreact to autocratic leadership. We all know examples of when the pastor becomes a dictator instead of a leader. Sadly, that reality takes place in some churches on a regular basis. So some pastors decide they will never be a dictator. That's good. But some pastors take it to an extreme and fail to exert leadership at all. That's bad. Some feel that the pastor is a dictator because the people resist change. Most of the time, the pastor is not a dictator, but only a strong leader, doing what God has led him to do. Don't confuse the two.

4.They don't have people speaking into their lives on a regular basis. Any good leader seeks the counsel and wisdom of others. Unfortunately, pastors can become loners as they live on the islands of their own ministries.

5.They always seek consensus. This is a death nail for pastors and for congregations. I want to be careful with my words here. It is wise to seek input and counsel. It is a good thing to listen to some outside voices. But every leadership decision ultimately needs a leader deciding. We can't always lead by committees, consensus, or critics. It is cliché to say, "The buck stops here," but the buck does have to stop somewhere. A pastor received a note from a member about an issue in one family in the congregation. The note said "we need to take this to the congregation and let the congregation decide." Wrong! We do not do things by consensus in the church. It is a theocracy, that means led by One. His name is above all names.

When leaders fail to lead, a leadership vacuum follows. And any vacuum will be filled. It might be filled with a culture that turns inwardly looking after its own needs. It can be filled by disparate, divergent, and disagreeing voices. The people of Israel certainly went through that period: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (Judges 21:25). Or the vacuum can be filled with individuals or groups who insert themselves for their own power and agenda.

Some church leaders view leadership as an endeavor to be delegated to others. Such is a path toward an inward focus, competing groups, disharmony, muddled direction, and overall frustration. It's basic. Church leaders must lead!!!

- Thomas Reiner, Church Advisor

**THE GLASS JAR** that is out every Sunday for your donations to help provide items for the Learning Hour classrooms has been a blessing. A new table for the pre-school classroom (#0) has been purchased from these funds. Thank you to all the children, youth, and adults that have contributed to this fund. We pray the contributions will continue.

**EACH YEAR CHRISTMAS CAROLING** to some of our senior members and to those members in assisted living facilities is an important event. December 19<sup>th</sup> is the date scheduled for this year. Please plan to meet at the Church by 5:30 PM. (The only requirement is to wear something colorful, and a big smile.) This is the time to add smiles to the faces of some members who can no longer get out and about during this holiday season. And our senior members simply enjoy the singing visits. The van will be taken so there will be plenty of room for many carolers to attend. Gift bags items will be delivered. Any donations for the gift bags can be left in the Church basement the Sunday prior to this event.

**THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PROGRAM** will be held Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, at 4:00 PM in Fellowship Hall. The Grace Congregation, friends, and neighbors are invited to attend this annual event. Following the program, there will be a Baby Jesus birthday party complete with pizza, cake and ice cream. Donations of candy and fruit are most welcome for the gift bags for the children and youth. Please bring a canned food item for the local Food Pantry to the Christmas Program. Thrivent Financial is participating with funding again this year.

**POINSETTIA ORDERS** are due **Thursday, December 7<sup>th</sup>**. Order forms are in the Bulletin or you may call the Church Office (704-462-1035) to place your order. The cost is \$9.00 per plant. We currently have orders for 17 poinsettias, with our target goal being 30. Remember these plants can be taken home following the Christmas Eve Worship and would make a great gift. If you receive this after the order due date, please contact the Church Office as soon as possible and we should be able to get your order placed.

**THANKS TO** David and Belinda Wilfong for placing the Manger Scene on the Front Lawn of the Church. The Wilfong's not only store the building pieces at their home but they also haul it to the Church and spend lots of time putting it together. After the Christmas season they take down the stable and return it to their home for storage until the following year. THANKS David and Belinda.

**THE 2018 OFFERING ENVELOPES** will be available next Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup>. Please pick up your envelopes from the back pew and if you can help to deliver and others that would be very helpful. 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.

**THE CHURCH OFFICE** at Grace will be closed Christmas Day through Thursday, December 28<sup>th</sup> so that Kathy can travel to Pennsylvania to spend time with her family. Emergency calls should be directed to Tim Eckard, President at 828-464-5645. All e-mails will be monitored during the Christmas break. She will be in the Church Office Friday and Saturday, December 29<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup>.

**THE CAROLINAS MISSION DISTRICT** has a new treasurer. Kathy Hefner of Taylorsville, NC, has taken on the responsibility. Special thanks to Kathy for being willing to accept this task, and to Debbie Rinehart, our former treasurer, for years of diligent service and a job well done.

**PASTOR GIL & KAREN** will be on vacation December 26<sup>th</sup> - January 3<sup>rd</sup>. Pastor Mike Warfel will be our Guest Pastor on December 31<sup>st</sup>.

This is based on those that served in 2017, and in some cases for many years prior.

**PLEASE  
CONFIRM  
WITH  
THE  
CHURCH  
OFFICE  
IF YOU  
WILL OR  
WILL  
NOT  
PREPARE  
THE  
MEAL IN  
2018**

	<b>FIRST SUNDAY BREAKFAST</b>	<b>YES/NO</b>
January	Frankie Crouse, Doug & Jackie Jarrett, Martha Johnson, Scott & Carolyn Whisnant	
February	Harvey & Helen Leatherman & Family, Dan & Tricia Panek	
March	Jo Doris Frye Family	
April	Easter Breakfast 4/1/18 - Dennis & Nancy Leonard & Family	
May	Via de Cristo Ministry	
June	No Breakfast Served	
July	No Breakfast Served	
August	No Breakfast Served	
September	1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday is Labor Day weekend, usually did Rally Day Breakfast the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday in September by the Learning Hour Classes	
October	Lorene Heavner, Gary Leatherman, Dan & Tricia Panek	
November	Pastor Gil & Karen, Joy Heavner, Don & Nicky Jarrett, Mike & Debi Pisko	
December	Herb Travis' Learning Hour Class	

	<b>SECOND SUNDAY LUNCH</b>	<b>YES/NO</b>
January	Leadership Board Ministry Team	confirmed
February	Chancel Choir	
March	Leadership Ministry Board	
April	Christian Education/Learning Ministry Team	
May	Mr. Biven's Learning Hour Class	
June	No Lunch Served	
July	No Lunch Served	
August	No Lunch Served	
September	previously no lunch in September as First Sunday is Labor Day weekend & Rally Day Breakfast was the Second Sunday	
October	Via de Cristo Ministry	
November	Chancel Choir	
December	Christian Education/Learning Ministry Team	

## TEN MISTAKES CONGREGATIONS MAKE DURING THE ADVENT/CHRISTMAS SEASONS

(by Thomas Reiner, Church Advisor)

Christmas is a wonderful time of the year. Some would even say it's the most wonderful time of the year. While it still has its wonderment, Christmastime has a tendency to be stressful as well—especially in the church. Unfortunately stress can lead churches to poor planning, bad theology, and poor attendance. Here are ten such mistakes to avoid in your church this Christmas:

1. **Missing the focus.** This may seem basic, but please keep Advent (season of preparation) and Christmas (the birth of Christ) as separate points of focus in your church this year. Everywhere people turn at Christmas, they see Santa, presents, and all the other material trappings of the holiday. The church should be one place where people can be reminded of the seasons of Advent followed by Christmas - coming of the Christ.
2. **Decorations outpace invitations.** We talk a lot about outward focus vs. inward focus. This is the Christmas version of that tension. While nothing is inherently wrong with decorations, when members are more focused on what the church looks like than whom they're bringing with them, there's a problem. Be reminded that it's more important to focus on who's in the pews than what's on the walls.
3. **Scrooge serves on the greeter team.** Make sure you not only have enough people volunteering for Christmas Eve service (because you'll likely have larger crowds), but also make sure you have the right people in the right places. No one wants to meet Scrooge as they walk into your church building.
4. **Scheduling too many events.** December is a whirlwind of a month. School and work, Christmas parties, church parties, church events, local Christmas parades, shopping, travel, and much more make for a jam packed month. With everything your members have going on, it might be better to simplify the church's Christmas schedule and host a few special events than to have the church calendar packed with events that stretch families and resources thin.
5. **Not appreciating volunteers.** The easiest way to keep volunteers is to let them know they are appreciated, and Christmas makes that easy. A small token of appreciation goes a long way with those who keep your ministry going week to week.
6. **Not equipping families.** I appreciate churches that make available advent devotionals for families. This is a great way for families in your church to start (or continue) family devotional times. There is a wonderful resource written by Rev. David Wendel, Assistant to the Bishop, that can be used for individuals, families and to point us all to the coming Christ.
7. **Ignoring community needs.** Want to make an impact on your community? Meet the needs of the homeless and those in the community at Thanksgiving and Christmas. There are countless ways this can be done. It simply takes asking different groups in the community what is needed.
8. **Showcasing the congregation instead of Christ.** Christmas productions can easily become more about the church than the Christ they should be displaying. Many congregations are cutting back on Christmas events and productions because the productions have become the ends instead of the means, especially if they are not well attended and a few are doing it because 'we've always done it that way!' You need to know when enough is enough—that's a necessary call if you are going to grow as a congregation.

9. **Failing to follow up.** You'll have guests at Christmas. If you don't, well that's another problem. What's important is how you follow up with those new to your church. If you fail to follow up with guests, you'll probably not see them next year—or ever again. Don't miss out on prime opportunities to share the gospel with new attendees by failing to follow up with guests.
10. **Using bad theology.** Sentimentality often breeds bad theology. We see it at funerals all the time, and Christmas is no different. Christmas is the most sentimental of holidays and often leads to inadvertent theological aberrations. Be vigilant to guard your theology from the pop culture sentimentality often associated with Christmas.

### **DISASTER RELIEF UPDATES FROM NALC**

From Mary Bates, Director for NALC Disaster Relief:

Please note that Pr. Eddie Perez's congregation of Iglesia Christiana San Pedro in Miami has the greatest financial need: \$40,000 damage to the church roof. They are without insurance, as the the \$100,000 annual premium was beyond their means. Donations may be sent directly to:

Iglesia Christiana San Pedro  
3360 W. Flagler St.  
Miami, FL 33135-1198

Courtesy of Pr. Dieter Punt, CMD Disaster Relief Coordinator:

**Texas** – 70 families are in need. FEMA money has been awarded, insurance payments are coming in, and volunteer teams are being booked . One sight, Peace in Lutherburg, has been filled through January 2018; other sites in Texas have availability for volunteer teams. Progress is moving along.

**Florida** – FEMA is starting to award money, but insurance payments are behind as many resources were tied up in Texas. In some cases, NALC disaster response has helped paid deductibles for families to start the rebuilding process. Volunteer crews will be needed in earnest, most likely after the first of the year.

**Iglesia Christiana San Pedro** in Miami needs at least 50 Spanish bibles; you can ship them directly (address above).

**Puerto Rico** - The NALC has a container of relief supplies ready to go (90 percent filled), and is waiting on Resurrection Lutheran in Puerto Rico to get the necessary permit to receive it without running into red tape.

**California Fires** - Many areas have sustained significant fire damage, and it is still too dangerous for insurance workers or relief crews to get in. We will provide more updates as soon as possible.

**US Virgin Islands** - The NALC currently has no presence on the ground but is working on shipping basic necessities to the Island.

#### **Current needs:**

- New toys for Christmas
- Holiday decorations (folks rebuilding their houses and lives don't place these on a high needs, of course, and they're greatly appreciated).
- Gift Cards

If your congregation is putting together a volunteer team for either Florida or Texas, schedule your trip any time by calling Mary Bates at 740-509-1132!

# Grace Notes

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church NALC  
4536 Hickory Lincolnton Highway  
Newton, NC 28658

**YEAR END REPORTS** will be due January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018. If you were in charge of a Ministry Team, event, Board Officer, or other functions of Grace Church, please submit a report of the 2017 activities to the Church Office so they can be included in the Annual Report. That report will be distributed early in February.