

# Grace Notes



Monthly Publication of the Congregational Activities of Grace Lutheran Church in Newton, NC  
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## Happy New Year!

### Press On Toward the Goal of Our Calling in Christ!

*Philippians 3:12-16 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.*

Happy New Year Grace Church! As we start a new year, 2025, it is a great time to remember that in Christ we are new creations in Christ and that we can also have a new and fresh beginning. That's why I love St. Paul's letter to the Philippians. It is the perfect letter for us to consider as we begin a new year. We know that Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter. But he did not talk about gloom and doom. No, this letter is called the letter of joy because St. Paul mentions the joy of Christ and rejoicing in Christ many times. Perhaps you have had a difficult year and there are some things ahead that discourage you or frighten you. Perhaps you are just unsure about your future and what will happen. Let's take a lesson from St. Paul on how he trusted Christ. He had hope and joy because he knew that God was in charge of his life and that his life was in God's hands because his life is in Christ. St. Paul said in chapter 1:20 ***For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die.*** Paul is not worried about the future; he knows that his life is in Christ and he only wants to be bold for Christ no matter what!

St. Paul encourages us to press on in faith by letting go of the past and straining forward to what lies ahead, so that you may ***press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*** What do you need to let go of so that you can move forward? What is your goal in life? Our goal is Jesus, to receive His love and salvation, to answer His call and to follow Him, and

to know that Christ lives in us as we are Christ to our neighbor. In chapter 2, Paul encourages the church to press on by being faithful: <sup>13</sup> ***For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*** <sup>14</sup> ***Do everything without complaining and arguing,*** <sup>15</sup> ***so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.*** <sup>16</sup> ***Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless.*** As we look out over the new year, we can be confident that God will bless us in many ways and provide everything that we need.

Here are some goals that we can pursue to seek first the Kingdom of God in 2025.

1. **Priorities** – Seek First the Kingdom of God (Matt.6:33), Jesus said. Put pleasing God ahead of pleasing yourself or others. Seek to do God's will above your own or above other's expectations.
2. **Prayer and Praise**– Let's spend time talking with God, hearing from God, discovering God's will and plan for our lives and His Church. Let's also commit to regularly coming to worship.
3. **Place for your family** – One of our primary callings is to love and care for our family. Let's strengthen our marriages and improve parent/child relationships. And as a church family, let's forgive, reconcile, support one another and work together. Let us love and forgive one another as Christ loves and forgives us!
4. **Purpose and Plan** – We know that God's purpose for us is to proclaim the gospel in word and deed. We are to exercise our God-given gifts for others and share the life-transforming good news of God's love in Christ. (Our plan is to do Time and Talent Response Sheet 2025 in January)
5. **Pour out your life as an offering** – give generously to God's House and to God's purposes and people
6. **Peace of God** – When we have peace with God in Christ, we can experience the peace of God and one another. We need not worry about the future because we know that we and the future are in God's hands. He can give us strength and comfort in the midst of any storm.
7. **Press on in faith!** In other words, keep moving forward, keep growing, keep maturing as we are on a journey of faith. Press on toward the Goal of our Calling in Christ!

On January 5, we begin the new year in worship with the Season of Epiphany. Epiphany means "to make known" or "to reveal" or "a shining forth." Epiphany is a time when we remember that God is made known to us in Christ and God reveals to us that Christ is God's Messiah and our Savior. As God's people we are called to make God known as we proclaim the good news in word and deed. Making Christ Known by letting our light shine will be the theme of our worship services in January and February. I look forward to all of the great things God has in store for Grace Church and all of His people in the new year and beyond. I am blessed to serve as your pastor and I am so thankful for all of you, blessed by your friendship in Christ and our partnership in the gospel. I am especially thankful for all of your prayers, love, and support in the death of my daughter Elizabeth Grace Hefner. I am also blessed to serve with a great staff: Kristi and Sandi! I am very excited about the new year and all that God has in store for us!

***God bless you and keep you, In Christ's Service, Pastor Doug Hefner***

## WORSHIP ASSISTANTS FOR JANUARY

✠ Lector	Stormy Shull
✠ Ushers	James Hall & David Wilfong
✠ Communion Assistants	Herb & Libby Travis
✠ Altar Preparation	Herb & Libby Travis
✠ Offering Tabulators	Alan Shull & Sheila Drum

*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

1/5	OPEN	1/19	OPEN
1/12	OPEN	1/26	OPEN

If you wish to place flowers on 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. Please notify the Church Office by the Tuesday prior to your selected Sunday to ensure correct information is printed in the bulletin.

## ATTENDANCE AND GIVING TO OUR LORD'S WORK FOR NOVEMBER & DECEMBER

	11/24/24	12/1/24	12/8/24	12/15/24	12/22/24
Sunday School	7	9	15	12	16
Worship	50	36	46	41	55
General Fund Offerings	\$1650	\$5015	\$2210	\$1415	\$3320

Needed Each Week = \$3,268.54

**General Fund Offerings, November 2024 = \$10,764.00**

**General Fund Expenses, November 2024 = \$13,406.96**

**Difference = -\$2642.96 (expenses exceeded offerings)**

## **A Christmas Message from Bishop Dan Selbo:**

Dear Pastors, Congregations, Partners in Ministry, Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Greetings in the Name of our God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit – as we look forward to the celebration of our Lord’s birth at Christmas and His glorious return when the Father will call us all home to be with Him forever!

Every year, in the weeks leading up to Christmas, my thoughts go back to years ago when, as a child, I shared in the Sunday School ministry reenactment of that first Christmas. There were readers, narrators, class recitations, and some of the more familiar Christmas carols. As the program went on, the characters of Mary and Joseph, the baby Jesus, the shepherds, the wise men, and the angels all appeared, playing their parts.

We all had a part to play, whether we liked it or not, even if it was simply singing in the chorus. I remember, one year, wearing a bathrobe as part of the costume. Another Christmas Eve, I remember getting sick and running quickly off stage. Another Christmas, I was one of the sheep. In real life, in relation to Jesus, I still am.

The best part of the Christmas program, as a child, was when it was over and the teachers handed out cookies. We might have received something healthier, as well. I can’t remember. All I remember is that it was fun. We were all there. We all had a part to play. And everyone’s part was important.

Have you ever thought about what it might be like to transfer the Christmas story role-playing of childhood into our adult lives? It’s not as complicated a transference as you might think. Just as I used to ask, “What part am I going to be given in the Christmas pageant?” I should now ask, “What part am I now playing in the Christmas narrative in real life?” Because, you see, like it or not, all of us have a part in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christmas story.

We can no longer be Joseph or Mary, or one of the Wise Men or the shepherds or the angels. Not in real life. That first century event is over. It’s happened. It’s history. The characters in the story have all lived and died. They were individual people with a unique role in a different time and place. But the event of the birth of Christ is such a dynamic and eternal reality that we, all of us, still play a part in it. We cannot avoid it. We are not mere spectators, acting out our pretend part in the play. It’s a real, down-to-earth involvement for each of us.

It’s a question, I believe, we all should be asking ourselves every year. “In the Christmas cast of characters, who am I? What is my part?” Consider the options. Maybe God has given you the privilege of, in some way, being like one of those beautiful figures at the Bethlehem

scene. Like the shepherds who made haste to see the Christ Child and, as Luke tells us, "...made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child." (Luke 2:17). Maybe your part is to return to your daily vocation, as they did, "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen." (Luke 2:20). Maybe we, like the Wise Men, realize that our own human wisdom is not enough. It comes up short. As a result, we acknowledge our need for God's wisdom. In so doing, we become wise men and women. It says of them, "Then, opening their treasures, they fell down and worshiped him." (Matthew 2:11). Could that be you? Could that be us?

Go even deeper. Maybe your calling is to be like Joseph, who humbly accepted the announcement that came to him concerning Mary, his betrothed, who was with child, and who did as the angel commanded. (Matthew 1:24). Could your role even be like that of Mary, in humble trust, realizing that Jesus continues to be born in us today? (Luke 1:38).

The point is simple. The Christmas narrative continues. You have a part in it, a specific part, a part no one else in this world can play. You are unique, as am I. You have been gifted with certain abilities, a certain part in history to play that is shared by no one else in this world. If you don't play it, it won't be played. If you don't respond to the message of Christmas in your life, that part of the story will be left out.

As we come to the close of another year in the history of our world, another year in our shared history as a church body, and to another year in our own individual lives, the call to be disciples of Jesus who live out our faith each day and, in so doing, work to make disciples of others, has never been greater. Our world needs to hear the message of Christmas as much today as ever. We need to boldly proclaim what God has done for us in Christ. Not in a spirit of superiority or power, but in a posture of love and grace.

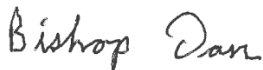
Many of us may never again play a part in a pretend reenactment of that first Christmas story. But all of us have been given a part in the real, down-to-earth story of God's coming to us in Jesus and it's meaning in our world and for our lives today.

What is your part? Who, in this story, are you called to be? Who in your life needs to hear what God has done for all of us in Jesus? You may not wear a bathrobe or a scarf or carry a staff or offer gifts. But you have been called. Your part is not pretend. Your purpose is to be the light that points to the True Light.

Don't let this Christmas come and go without responding in humility to your Creator. The one who made you as you are. The one who has called you to be who you are. The one who has given you a part to play in His saving and redeeming work.

It continues to be a joy and an honor to serve as your bishop. Know that my prayers are with each of you as we live out and celebrate the story of Christmas!

In Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bishop Dan".

Bishop Dan  
North American Lutheran Church

**NEW BIBLE STUDY FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL:** Join us in our new study entitled, “The Call: The Life and Message of the Apostle Paul” by Rev. Adam Hamilton. Part of the study will be a short clip that is filmed in the Holy Lands to help us better understand Paul’s mission journeys and his message to the Church in His 13 letters or epistles. You will be amazed to see the actual places where some of St. Paul’s ministry occurred. For example, you see the river where St. Paul preached to the women (Acts 16) and Lydia came to faith and was baptized thus giving birth to the Philippian Church. If you are interested in the class please let Pastor Doug know so that he can order you a book. Also, if there is any interest in offering this Study at a different time during the week, like a morning or an evening, please let Pastor Doug know.

**ASHURE MINISTRY** – The disciples of Grace donated **1720 pounds** of food to ASHURE Ministry in 2024. Thanks be to God for your generosity in feeding those less fortunate in our local community.

**ASHURE MINISTRY FOOD ASK** for the month of January is canned soup or broth. We are doing great things at Grace in helping feed the hungry in our own community. Let’s try to donate 2,000 in 2025! That would be around 170 pounds per month. We can do it! Let’s come together to help reach this goal!

**FRED T. FOARD SENIOR LUNCHEON** will be held at Ebenezer UMC on Wednesday, January 8<sup>th</sup> at 12:00pm. All are invited!

**THE GRACE PRAYER BREAKFAST** will be held on **Saturday, January 11<sup>th</sup> at 9:00am** at Four Peas in a Pod Restaurant on Highway 70 in Conover. Great food and great fellowship! Please come and bring a friend!

**THE UNHANGING OF THE GREENS** will take place on Saturday, **January 11<sup>th</sup> at 11:00am after the Prayer Breakfast.** This includes taking down the tree and sanctuary decorations. We need your muscles and appreciate your help!

**STEPHEN MINISTRY SUPERVISION** will be held on **Monday, January 13<sup>th</sup> at 6:00pm.** For more information or any questions, please reach out to Herb Travis (704)240-7359.

**THE GRACE PRAYER LUNCHEON** will be held on **Wednesday, January 17 at noon in the Fellowship Hall**. This is a time for any adults from Grace and the community to come together for food and fellowship! The menu for January is assorted soups, sandwiches and a surprise dessert. Please give Betty Wilfong a call at (828) 461-6604 for any questions.

**THE NEXT MEETING OF THE LEADERSHIP MINISTRY BOARD** is scheduled for **Monday, January 20<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm.**

**DUE TO EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES**, there was no Leadership Ministry Board meeting in December. We would like to thank Todd Childers for his time serving in this capacity. He has graciously volunteered to continue serving as Financial Secretary, though his term on council has ended. We would also like to welcome and thank Gary Leatherman for his willingness to serve for the upcoming term.

### **Season of Epiphany Worship Schedule for 2025**

#### ***9:30am Sunday School 10:30am Worship Service with Communion***

**January 5<sup>th</sup>: Day of Epiphany- Jesus –Light of the World and Priest, Sacrifice, and King, Isaiah 63:7-14, Psalm 111, Galatians 4:4-7; Matthew 2:1-23.** Worshipping God and hearing God's Word -What a great way to start the new year! As we anticipate the new year ahead, like the wise men or magi, we too will be led by the light of Christ. So come let us adore Him and honor Christ with the gift of a life lived for the Lord in thanksgiving and worship. At this service we will install the council members for the new year.

**January 12<sup>th</sup>: The Baptism of Our Lord, Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Romans 6:1-11; Luke 3:15-22**  
In Jesus' baptism we learn what our baptism into Christ death and resurrection is all about. We are God's baptized, Spirit-filled people. We will remember our baptism and recall what it means to be the baptized people of God.

**January 19<sup>th</sup>: 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, Sanctity of Human Life Sunday** Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 128; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11. As we remember the Sanctity of Human Life Sunday today, our gospel reading is about the start of a family, a wedding in the town of Cana (John 2:1-11). This passage is a beautiful reminder of how God cares about families and wants to bless us. Jesus and the disciples are present, and the wine runs out. Wine is a symbol of joy and promise. In other words, when Jesus brings forth the new wine, he reminds us that through His blood there will be a new covenant that will bless us and our families and bring for everlasting joy.

On this Sunday we will lift the importance of the Sanctity of Human Life and what we can do to support life in our community. If possible, we may have the director or a volunteer from the Pregnancy Care Center of Catawba County come give us more information about their ministry. As we get closer to Jan. 19, I will let you know what their needs are, and we can respond in some way to bless this important ministry.

**January 26<sup>th</sup>: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany, Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19:[1-6] 7-14; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:16-30.** In Luke 4:16-30, Jesus is in worship and reads a key passage from Isaiah about his appointed purpose: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to proclaim the time of the Lord's favor." Then Jesus began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." We will look at what Jesus said (summary of His mission of salvation) and how the people of his town responded. Understanding Christ's mission helps us to better understand His call to mission for His Church.

**Sunday, February 9** is the date of the Super Bowl. In the past I have encouraged the churches to remember it as "Souper" Bowl Sunday. Souper Bowl is a ministry started years ago to receive a collection or have a fundraiser to help with local and world hunger. Perhaps we can have a Chili Cook Off Competition and enjoy lunch that day as we receive gifts for the needs of the hungry. Members will vote on their favorite chili with their donation; the chili with the highest amount of donations wins the contest. All the gifts will go to help the hungry. This is just one idea that we can think of over the next few weeks.

## Grace Notes

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