

# The Spirit

## DECEMBER 2014

### I Will Light Candles This Christmas

Candles of joy, despite all sadness,  
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch.  
Candles of courage for fears ever present,  
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,  
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,  
Candles of love to inspire all my living,  
Candles that will burn all the year long.

*Howard Thurman*

**Advent is time we set apart every year, to wait on God.** This time of waiting that cradles our longing is our faithful response to a world that is God's gift of a good creation held in tension with the reality of creation's deep brokenness. This longing is not only for Christmas and for the sense of Jesus being born again among us. But more, it is longing for Christ's return; for that time when all our waiting will end; all our longing will be fulfilled in God. When every tear will be wiped away; all pain will end; when death (all deaths: loneliness, illness, and despair) will be no more. It is that promised and already accomplished reality which is God's future rushing back to enfold us in God's life. That is Advent. We're not waiting for 4 weeks to pass. **We**

**are waiting for God's reality of God's peace and God's justice to become our reality and reality for all this hurting world.**

Because our trust and hope are in God in Jesus, we can tell the truth about ourselves and our world; and not only that, we **insist** on telling the truth. Jesus did not sugar-coat the reality he saw. He faced the despair, inequality, and oppression he saw all around him and so we can do no less.

"Faith is needed to embrace more than lingering echoes of days gone by. Faith is needed to address today's cruelties and sadness. Faith is needed to confront warfare, prejudice and unwarranted privilege. **If faith can't address the dark sides**, then it is just ritualized nostalgia. It is an in-crowd affirming itself; it is nice people gathering for pleasing ceremonies and making no discernible difference in the world. If faith sees only itself, then passions will be spent on internal concerns, like budgets, leadership tussles and arcane debates. Institutional maintenance will matter more than integrity and potency. Meanwhile, human suffering will worsen, and **the work Jesus actually gave us to do will remain undone.**"<sup>1</sup>

**This advent take a chance with me. Let us try to open our hearts, not only to the beauty of humanity's generosity and kindness. Let's open our hearts to embrace the darkness, the reality of creation's brokenness. It is only in profoundly knowing the darkness that we can sense the depths of God's gift of Jesus for us. It is only in holding the world's despair and its beauty in tension that we can be strengthened and formed to do God's work with our hands.**

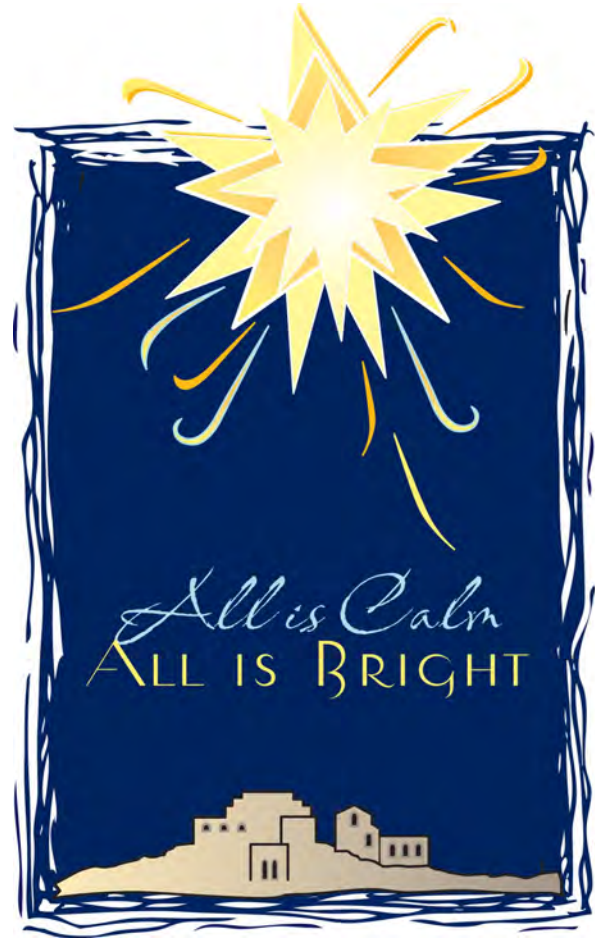
This Advent time can be missed as we hurry through it. It can be missed in order not to feel; not to face the painful tension of beauty side by side with pain. But, that's not what Jesus did. As disciples of Jesus **we are called to live wide awake, paying attention to it all: the ugly and the beautiful because it is all God's world.**

Let's open our hearts, even if only a little, to God loving us; to the miracle of God in our world longing for us to live in that love, for the sake of the world.

Pastor Val

"My, how busy we become when we lose sight of how God loves us."

*Julian of Norwich*



# DECEMBER 2014 CALENDAR

## ALL SAINT'S DAY

- 3 WEDNESDAY 6-7 p.m. CHOIR & HAND BELLS**
- 7 SUNDAY 10:00 A.M. WORSHIP**  
**12:00 p.m. BEL AIRE COMMITTEE MEETS**  
**6-8 p.m. YOUTH GROUP@1st PRESBY.**
- 9 TUESDAY, 10:00-12:00 a.m. Pastor's Group**  
**6:15 p.m. Church Council**
- 10 Under the Bridge Sandwiches**  
**6:00 p.m. CHOIR & HAND BELLS @AGLC**
- 13 SATURDAY YOUTH GROUP "FEAST FOR ALL" at 1st PRESBYTERIAN 5:00 -7:30**
- 14 SUNDAY, 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP**  
**11:00 a.m. FELLOWSHIP; SUN SCHOOL**  
**12:15 p.m. FAITH 101**  
**3:45 p.m. CAROLING & CHILI FEED & YOUTH GROUP**
- 17 WEDNESDAY, 10:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m. BISHOP'S GATHERING @ AGLC**
- 21 SUNDAY, 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP**  
**11:00 a.m. FELLOWSHIP; SUN SCHOOL**  
**12:15 p.m. FAITH 101**
- 24 WEDNESDAY, 6:00 p.m. CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE**
- 28 SUNDAY, 10:00 a.m. WORSHIP**  
**11:00 a.m. FELLOWSHIP**

# DECEMBER

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7

**Pastor:** Rev. Val Metropoulos;

**Liturgist:** Laura Carle; **Worship**

**Assistant/Reader:** Dee Erickson;

**Communion Assistant/Acolyte:**

Jenifer Kaufman; **Ushers/Greeters:** Bob and Mary Ellen

Salmon; **Depositors:** Mike & Karen Barkstrom;

**Fellowship Hosts:** Louise Paul, Paula Elder, Maurita

White and Dorothy Stephens

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

**Pastor:** Rev. Val Metropoulos; **Liturgist:** Hank Bilder-

back; **Worship Assistant/Reader:** Vicki Mitchell;

**Communion Assistant/Acolyte:** Laura Carle ;

**Ushers:** Dennis & Donna Morissette; **Depositors:** Mike

& Karen Barkstrom; **Fellowship Hosts:** Cathy Hanson,

Kathy Wehage and Ray & Jean Hodge

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21

**Pastor:** Rev. Val Metropoulos; **Liturgist:** Keith Lile;

**Worship Assistant/Reader:** Elaine Lokken;

**Communion Assistant/Acolyte:** Carmon Shaw;

**Ushers/Greeters:** Theresa Kaufman and girls;

**Depositors:** Maurita White & Helen Ekland **Fellow-**

**ship Hosts:** John & Doris Tieder, Gene & Eileen

Schermer and Mark & Trish Smalley-Safstrom

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

**Pastor:** Rev. Val Metropoulos; **Liturgist:** Hank

Bilderback

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28

**Pastor:** Rev. Val Metropoulos; **Liturgist:** Laura Carle;

**Worship Assistant/Acolyte:** Sarah Channel; **Reader:**

William Rabung; **Communion Assistant** Jenifer Kauf-

man; **Ushers/Greeters:** Darrel & Elaine Lokken; **De-**

**positors:** Gene & Eileen Schermer; **Fellowship Hosts:**



## HYMN FESTS

The first Sunday of each month, we gather at 9:45 to sing some of your favorite hymns. Kris Burns provides the music. You can request your favorite hymns .... and we will sing them! The Hymn Fest happens the first Sunday of each month. (**December 7**) "*Singing hymns are prayers to God's ear.*" **PLEASE JOIN US**



## UNDER THE BRIDGE Food Needs

Please bring bread, lunchmeat, makings for sandwiches, to the church by December 15th. We will be preparing sandwiches for the Under the Bridge ministry. We will be serving sandwiches on Wednesday, DECEMBER 17TH.



## DECEMBER CELEBRATIONS

### BIRTHDAYS

- 4 Paula Elder
- 10 Shawn Dickson  
Loyd Gill  
Jeannette Green
- 11 Gloria Bilderback
- 14 Betty Jo Bastin  
James Green  
Ann Hodge
- 17 Karen Barkstrom
- 18 Dorothy Stephens
- 20 Mitzi Ludwig
- 24 Karen Bilderback  
Hans Stegemoeller  
Jan Van Hoven
- 27 Stephanie Kaufman
- 30 Cathy Kallio  
Molly Rabung

### ANNIVERSARIES

- 27 Leif & Lynn Tangvald

### PRAYING FOR.....

**Dan Fackrell, Tim Olden, Molly Johnson, Evelyn Ellingsen, Alva Day, Eleanor Knapp, Nicole Claussen, Pam Thorson, Al Carlberg, BJ Bastin, Richard Kraiger, Doug George, Gwen, Karuna Johnson, Shelbie and**

**Dan Offrink and their daughters, Don Stubb, Nicole, Aileen Long, Ginger Cameron, Richard, Peyton Willis, Melvin Thompson, Melissa Smiley, Gloria Bilderback, Kenny Broussard, Dana, Larry Freeman, Kari Maynard Baretich, Trish Safstrom-Smalley, the family of Larry Fredericks, the family and friends of Nancy Miller, Tici, Paul Franco, Gene and for those who are unhoused, and for long-term caregivers Carol Stubb & Jack Bastin; for the young people and workers at the youth center.**

## THANKS WE HAVE RECEIVED

### **To The Scholarship (Endowment) Committee,**

Thank you very much for awarding me the scholarship from the church. It will help me financially here at the University of Idaho while I study forestry. My classes and everything else have been going good this fall. I hope you all have a great fall and thank you very much again for awarding me the scholarship Sincerely, Luke Oswald

### **Dear Amazing Grace,**

Thank you for always thinking of us and keeping us in your prayers! Your generous gift helps put families in decent affordable homes and gives them a chance to succeed. Many Blessings, Larry Burgher

**Thank you to all the wonderful parishioners at Amazing Grace** as all of you are so truly AMAZING!! We are so grateful for all the yummy food you have shared with us over the past few weeks with all your events going on, the kids have absolutely love it, of course, especially the sugary items! One boy sat down and ate 4 hamburgers in a row saying he "had to" because they were so yummy. You all are truly the best. We also send a big thank you to all of you that have individually brough by wonderful supply donations of hats, gloves, hand warmers, toothbrushes, cleaning supplies, snacks, etc., you all truly rock and we are so happy to have your generosity! One last comment, Gene was great on the radio today, he sounded like a real pro! Good luck on the fundraiser, the Lions do such wonderful things!! Erin Pankey, Catholic Community Services

**All of us Kairos volunteers want** to thank you sincerely for your hospitality this weekend. Our day in SCCC yesterday clearly was Spirit-led with many wonderful evidences of His presence. Do to our very welcome "home" Friday night. We went in well rested and able to do God's bidding. May God bless you richly for your support of this ministry through Kairos. - The Retreat Team

Did someone say  
**CHANGE.....**  
be of good cheer!



Be still and know that I am God

*For almost a year we have been beginning our service with a minute of silence. What is happening during that time for you? Are you comfortable and wanting more silence or are you uncomfortable and experiencing a dis-ease with the silence? This time for silence is about emptying our thoughts and minds of the clutter—quieting ourselves to hear God's gently quiet voice speaking to us.*

*This past year a fresh Spirit has been blowing through Amazing Grace and that brings **CHANGE**. Our Worship committee and the Liturgical Arts Team have been examining what is essential in worship. One area we are working on is creating a space in the sanctuary of physical simplicity to allow more room for the sacred to enter. At times you may have noticed the removal of certain items on the back altar, but other times we add something back -creating a sense of celebration and specialness during certain Sundays in the church calendar year or special services.*

*Simplicity rids us of all distractions, leaving our hearts and minds for God to enter. Simplicity also allows us to focus more on God and connect with what God wants us to do. We are prayerful as we consider any change and whether that change adds to our focus on God or does it distract? This has included the wonderful sound of the hand bells and choir singing and playing from the back of the sanctuary.*

*Amazing Grace Council and other teams are working on behalf of what this congregation identified through a prayerful process during the transition and call process.....and **CHANGE** is never easy. In an ever changing society where only one in five attend church and less than 2% in the Pacific NW we need to do our part to avoid becoming marginalized by society but remain relevant and bring **HOPE** to a hurting world.*

Peace, Diane Hanson



## SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School is right after worship. Each week we'll all be in worship (so that we can all experience the holiness of worship together and young people

can learn how to worship.) Then we head up to the Parish Hall where we'll move to the new Sunday School room.

We know that faith is taught best in the home and that children learn best from parents and grandparents, aunts

and uncles. Amazing Grace understands its role as one of supporting families in teaching and living the faith in our whole lives, not just Sunday morning. That means **YOU ARE ALL INVITED** to stay with your child, learning together. **EVERYONE IS INVITED INTO THIS TIME AS WE LEARN TOGETHER, THE YOUNG BRINGING THEIR FRESH VISION AND SENSE OF WONDER; THE MATURE BRINGING THEIR EXPERIENCE AND WISDOM.**

We'll hear the Bible stories in a new way in Sunday School and then learn more deeply what they mean for our lives through activities and arts, song and sign language.

Watch for future events and other ways that Amazing Grace hopes to support you and your family in growing in faith together.

## Sunday Times

Sunday Times for Jr and Sr High Youth will **meet this month, Sunday, December 7th. We will meet after church from 11:15 to 11:45.**

Help yourself to refreshments from coffee hour and join us in the Youth Room downstairs to start the year off, make some decisions and receive what blessings God has in store for us this year.



## COMMUNION BREAD RECIPE

We always want to bring our best to worship. If you are interested in baking bread for the Lord's Supper, here is an easy recipe. Please let us know in the office that you're bringing bread. **THANK YOU!**

Sift together 3 times:

- 2 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 cup white flour
- 1-1/4 tsp. baking powder
- 1-1/4 tsp. salt

Stir in 4 tsp. oil. Set aside

Mix wet ingredients together until dissolved:

- 3/4 cup & 2 TBS very hot water
- 3 TBS honey
- 3 TBS molasses

Add wet to dry ingredients and mix well. Should be

slightly sticky. Do not knead.

Divide into 4 balls; flatten each into a 1/4 inch thick disk. Score each

Bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes. Remove, brush top with oil. Bake another 5-8 minutes. This recipe makes 4 loaves and most Sundays we use 2.

## **ALL IS CALM, ALL IS BRIGHT...**

*Our Advent and Christmas theme this year is **ALL IS CALM, ALL IS BRIGHT**. Each Sunday in Advent continues to move us on the journey towards the Light of Christ. Please join us **December 24<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm for the Christmas Eve Service**.*

*This will be a time to join together as one church family and an opportunity to invite and welcome others to Amazing Grace Lutheran Church. Come prepared to celebrate the Birth of Christ with special music in a dramatic and beautiful setting.*

Peace, The Worship Committee

## **BEL AIRE PROPERTY UPDATE**

A team has been created consisting of Dee Erickson, Mark Ostwald, Kristine Finazzo, Karen Barkstrom and Rich Vroman. Our task is to come up with 3 viable options for the property and propose them at the annual meeting in January.

You are all invited to give input!!! All ideas are welcome. Please be prayerful for all of us as we work on this task.



## **SPREADING HOLIDAY CHEER!**

We are looking forward again to gathering as a group for an evening of Christmas caroling and delicious chili! Five Star has generously donated one of their vans again. We will return to

the church for chili after visiting some of our homebound and nursing homes.

We will be leaving at 4:00 p.m. so please be at the church by 3:45. We hope you can join us!



## **CARING CUPBOARD**

### **Helping Grays Harbor's Needy Youth**

Our food bank Sunday that takes place on the 1st Sunday of each month has transitioned to donations of food and items for needy youth. This has been newly labeled as the "Caring Cupboard".

This is your opportunity for one stop donations for needy youth:

gloves, ponchos, socks and ear muffs  
disposable razors, deodorant and feminine pads/supplies  
pop top food items and canned food  
non perishable food  
cup-a-noodles  
packaged cheese or peanut butter and crackers  
individual apple sauce cups, apples and oranges  
fruit and granola type bars  
peanut butter and jelly and bread  
cookies or candy  
bottled water flavorings and coffee  
toothbrushes and toothpaste,  
combs, and hair brushes,  
mini-Kleenex packs, hand cleaner, soap and lotion  
umbrellas and stocking hats

Clean out your drawers from small lotion, shampoo, conditioner that you picked up as you traveled on vacations, add a few items to your cart as you shop for your own needs and help the needy youth of Grays Harbor! Thank you for your help!



- William and Joan Rabung and Lynette Lile for the Youth Group meal on November 2nd.
- Gary Morean for his wonderful auctioneer skills during the annual fundraiser on November 30th. Thank you also to Nicole Evanson and Madi and Mari Rabung!
- All the generous folks who donated items and pies for the auction on November 30th.
- Bob Salmon for building the manger in the altar area.
- Amy Ostwald for the beautiful artwork for the Advent Season in our bulletins, the December SPIRIT and our newspaper ad..
- Susan Bylund for her many years of faithful service and for sharing her retirement party with all of us who have come to know and love her.
- Gene Schermer, Ray Hodge, John Tieder, Roger Shaw and Mike Barkstrom for the installation of the bright new door for the church office.. Thanks to the Wednesday guys for disposing of all of the electronic JUNK in Pastor Val's office.



THANK YOU for sharing your poinsettias to help decorate the church for the Advent and Christmas seasons! You may bring them anytime and take them home for your own celebration after Christmas Eve service.



### ANGEL TREE

**We have the opportunity to make Christmas brighter for a few youth in our community. One 5 year old girl's family missed the deadline for Salavation Army Christmas so her big sister who is a student at Grays Harbor Community College, asked if we could help her have a few gifts.**

She loves anything Disney Princess (Frozen especially) she wears a size 6/7. She also love books and Doc McStuffins.

**The Youth Center** has asked for help with gifts for several young men. They would like:

- A. Men size Medium Oklahoma City Thunder long sleeve or sweatshirt (teen boy)
- B. Men size Medium Chicago Bulls long sleeve or sweatshirt (teen boy)
- C. Men size Small Seattle Sounders long sleeve or sweatshirt (teen boy)
- D. Men size Medium Oklahoma City Thunder long sleeve or sweatshirt (teen boy)

The Youth Center Accepts donations directly or you can check the GHYC Amazon Wish list.

The Youth Center would LOVE an electric skillet for the kitchen as well as NEW COMFORTERS FOR THE SIX TWIN BEDS (SOLID COLORS PREFERABLY BLACK,, RED, BLUE, BROWN, GREEN, GREY OR ORANGE, JUST NOT WHITE, PLEASE.)

Be watching for information about donating to any of these needs.

# Amazing Grace Lutheran Church Council Meeting Minutes

11/11/14

Present: Pastor Val, Mark, Chris, Kristine, Coleman, and Mike

Quorum was established.

Prayer tasks assigned

Motion made and seconded to approve the agenda and the minutes.

Treasurer report reviewed and OKed.

✦ Mutual Ministry Committee: Mark, Diane, Keith, Arlene and Pastor Val

✦ Fellowship hall use: there is useful information guide being developed so people will know what to do and how to do it and what is expected of them.

✦ Bel Aire property. A team is being developed to come up with 3 viable options for the property. The team members are Mark Oswald, Dee Erickson, Kristine Finazzo, Karen Barkstrom and Rich Vroman.

✦ Secretary position: a job description is being written including qualifications. Susan Bylund is retiring the middle of the month. Theresa Kaufman will fill in until a person is hired. She will work M-F 3pm-5pm and some weekend work. Typically the office has been open M-Th 9-4 with a 1 hour lunch 12-1. Pastor Val will made available the times she will typically be in the office.

✦ Budget committee will meet Tuesday November 25<sup>th</sup>. The committee consists of Mark, Diane, Chrissy, Mike and Pastor Val.

Benevolence choices: These will be reviewed by a committee of Mike, Kristine and Pastor Val (prayerful for one more) we will look at the possibility of rotating some benevolences every 3 years.

## Fellowship:

✦ the pie Auction is November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

December 6<sup>th</sup> pm. PLU concert. There are 2 vans available to transport to the PLU Christmas concert. Attendees will chip in to pay for the rent of one van and gas. It was noted that the Sunday 3pm tickets go extremely fast.

✦ December 14<sup>th</sup>: Caroling and chili feed. There is one community van available and the other will need to be rented for \$75.

✦ Holden Village women's retreat: registration opens November 15<sup>th</sup>. The retreat will take place February 6.7.8.9.

Dee and Pastor Val are working on scheduling an advent making event.

## Worship:

There is a liturgical arts team meeting 11/12/14. They are working on Advent liturgy. The current liturgy has been a nice experience. It is wonderful to have many people involved in the service.

## Property:

✦ The men's group finished installing the door to the office. It is a wonderful addition.

✦ The men's group is also working on patching the hole in the door downstairs.

✦ The men's group is replacing breezeway ceiling tiles.

✦ Roger has made a case for music so it isn't stacked on the piano. Great addition.

✦ The organ room is getting some finishing touches.

There was a new bid on the breezeway project. The previous bid was about 18 months old. The maximum for the project was approved at \$4000. Hopefully the price will be less. This was motioned, seconded and voted approved

### **Outreach:**

✦ Caring Cupboard- the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month. It will be an opportunity to bring all sorts of donations for needy youth in the community. Kristine will sort it and see that it gets to the appropriate group. The hope is to actually transform some of the unused closets downstairs into a place where we store our donations. They will be available to the groups in need.

✦ Spare change for bus tokens: WOW, the spare change in the coffee can turned into 58 bus tokens for Youth in the community. Thank you! The coffee can is back on the counter ready to receive any spare change and dollars.

We will have more hard copies of the newsletter available to take and read. The printing costs are quite low. It was discovered that some people admitted they don't like reading it on line and would enjoy a printed version. It has such wonderful information that having printed copies available seemed like a good solution.

### **Youth Group:**

Approximately 5 Presbyterians and 2 Lutherans are having fun. It is a great group and they encourage many more to join in.

**Confirmation:** Tuesday 3:30-5pm. Jeni Kaufman and Kylie Weiberg are attending

### **Sunday School:**

It is going well in the time slot after the service. All kids and families are welcome to attend.

### **Living Stone Prison Ministry**

Pastor Norm from living stone will preach and be available to answer questions at coffee hour Sunday November 16<sup>th</sup>.

Pastor's report:

To get

Meeting adjourned really late

Respectfully submitted,

Kristine Finazzo

Filer-inner



## **PASTOR'S REPORT - October 2014**

**WORSHIP LEADERSHIP** 4 Sunday worship services - Chose hymns and liturgy  
1 Funeral service; 1 Graveside service  
Sermons – prayer, study, reading, writing  
Prepare liturgy weekly so it connects with Narrative Lectionary  
Prayer  
Study for Narrative Lectionary 2014/2015  
Monthly meeting with worship leadership - Kris, Hank and Diane  
Coordinate musician set-up mikes, chairs, music books  
Bake communion bread

**ADMINISTRATION** Council meeting monthly – plan and prepare  
Newsletter – Write content; proof and design  
Prepare bulletins with secretary for worship 4 Sundays  
Meet with Ministry Team leaders as needed  
Meet w/ Youth Center director monthly  
Coordinate with Kairos speaker; Living Stones pastor  
Host Synod Gathering with Bishop  
Plan, help lead Council Retreat  
Diagnosing and addressing software and technology issues/needs  
Office administration

**PASTORAL CARE/COUNSELING** End of life care for individual and family; funeral preparation  
Homebound and assisted living visits  
Grief counseling community member's family  
Individual counseling

**OUTREACH/VISITATION** Plan w/ Pacific Care for youth outreach  
Jesuit Volunteer support  
Housing Coalition meeting monthly  
Pastor's group – meets monthly to plan and coordinate ministry  
Coffee Ministry – meet to chat about life/faith as often as possible  
Facebook page – outreach through social media.  
Quilters – monthly or twice monthly  
Outreach group – discernment of outreach possibilities  
Care of creation – local individuals interested in working w/churches

**BUILDING AND MAINTENANCE** Set up mikes/chairs for musicians  
Set up; clean up for adult study 3 times week

**YOUTH AND FAMILY** Background checks process  
Sunday School – led Bible Song once; support leaders as needed  
Meet with leaders of S.S. and Sunday Times  
Teach Faith 101 3 times a week – book study; writing Short/Sweet version  
Lead Youth Group w/ Pastor Doug  
Teach confirmation  
Plan and coordinate Prayer Partners with Carmon Shaw  
Affirm. Baptism meeting with family and individual

## **STEWARDSHIP**

**OFFICIAL ACTS** (Baptisms, funerals, weddings) Affirmation of Baptism – Madi Green  
Funeral – Nancy Miller  
Graveside service – Larry Fredericks

**VACATION** 0 days of vacation in October

**CONTINUING EDUCATION:** Centering Prayer retreat

**Upcoming dates:** Nov. 16 Pr. Norm Arnold guest preacher (Living Stones prison at Shelton)  
Nov. 17-20 (Mon – Thur) training in Chicago to coach first call pastors

# THE TRUE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS

**By Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton**

I remember this jarring image: It was the Christmas Eve candlelight service at my home congregation. A banner depicting Mary and Jesus in the manger had been hung from the ceiling at the front of the nave completely obscuring the large suspended cross. I had seen that banner on Sunday mornings, but on this Christmas Eve in the semidarkness something else appeared. A spotlight that illumined the cross now shown on the banner with the effect of making the outline of the cross appear as the background of the Christmas scene.

The cross on Christmas? I didn't want the crucified Christ casting a shadow on the Christ child. Christmas is about angels and shepherds and the babe, lying in a manger, not betrayal and death. I didn't like it.

Christmas can be such a fraught season. It is forced to carry so much emotional freight. We must be merry. We must be filled with good cheer. We must be home surrounded by family. We must turn our lives into the happy endings of every TV Christmas special. There is a certain drivenness to get everything done, to get everything perfect by the stroke of midnight on Dec. 24.

Secular culture reflects this. "A Christmas Carol" and "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" are stories of redemption. The song "I'll Be Home for Christmas" and the film "Home Alone" are filled with wistful longing. I remember a "M\*A\*S\*H" episode where the doctors in the operating room turned the clock back to 11:59 p.m. on the 24th so a young soldier's death wouldn't be recorded on Christmas.

But what are we longing for?

Certainly we want peace in our homes and in the world. We want love and a place to belong. We want life and the end of all the deadly things in the world that bring death and destruction. We want reconciliation. We want rest. We want hope. We want the assurance that all of this means something. We want to know that someone cares. And so we try to accomplish all of those things and squeeze it all into the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. No wonder we can find ourselves exhausted and empty on Dec. 26. The mall scene the day after Christmas – returning broken toys and ill-fitting or unwanted sweaters, the picked-over look of marked down Christmas decorations and wrapping paper – is the retail version of the reality of a broken world that doesn't know peace or love or hope. Except ...

The hope of Christmas is fulfilled on Good Friday. The cross is part of Christmas. "Nails, spear shall pierce him through, the cross be borne for me, for you; hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, #296). All of our Christmas glorias are realized in Jesus' glorification on the cross. We have peace. We have hope. We are loved. And not just at Christmas.

The cross is *the* Christmas gift. Through it God reconciles and heals. Through it God's love is made known and in God's love we are known and have our home. And it is a *gift*. We don't have to spend our energy and time hoping to attract the gift or the Giver by making everything right by Christmas. If we aren't physically at home, if our lives have not turned into the happy endings of TV Christmas specials, if we are estranged from family, if we are not merry, even if we should die, this gift of life has come to us.

Let's be gentle with ourselves and each other this Advent and Christmas. Let's not fret about imperfect lives and incomplete holiday preparations. We won't ever get it completely right. That's God's work. It is the best gift exchange ever. Martin Luther wrote: "Is not this a beautiful, glorious exchange, by which Christ, who is wholly innocent and holy, not only takes upon himself another's sin, that is, my sin and guilt, but also clothes and adorns me, who am nothing but sin, with his own innocence and purity? And then besides dies the shameful death of the cross for my sake ... that I may live with him eternally." ("Luther's Works," Vol. 51)

Good Christian friends, rejoice!



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[www.amazinggraceaberdeem.org](http://www.amazinggraceaberdeem.org)

*"The Church where Grace Happens!"*



## **AMAZING GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH**



**VISION: A welcoming place  
where grace happens!**

**MISSION: To experience  
and share God's love through  
worship,  
education and community.**

### **VALUES:**

**Radical Hospitality**

**Passionate worship**

**Intentional faith  
development**

**Risk-taking mission and  
service**

**Extravagant generosity**



**Ministers:** The People of Amazing Grace

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**Liturgists:** Hank Bilderback, Keith Lile &

Laura Carle, Jeannette Green

**Musicians:** Kristine Burns, Geri Stubb,  
Sandy Lloyd, Doris & Jan VanHoven, Hiedi

Seelke,