

GraceNotes

A SEASONAL PUBLICATION OF GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

a place for you

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Morning Star



O Morning Star, how Fair and Bright— Philipp Nikolai.

The title of this beautiful hymn sums up these seasons so beautifully. I am often struck by the dawn, which I strongly associate with Sunday mornings, as I am usually at church before the sun comes up. There is a quiet anticipation of

the coming day. I am also reminded of my recent trip to Germany where jet lag could often cause one to be awake in the dark—confused as to the time. Much of our life is lived in just such moments.

We have watched the horrible attacks in Paris on TV, which bring to mind similar assaults in Beirut and elsewhere. We have been reminded reluctantly of student stress, mental health issues, and teen suicide in Palo Alto through a very prominent national article in The Atlantic. We watch as housing costs increase, like an oven warming up, with excitement and/or angst. In the midst of all the world swirling around us, we are also painfully reminded of our own issues and worries. These are the jet lag moments that find us awake in our sleep tossing through medical, financial, relationship, parenting, family, employment issues in ways that cause us to wonder if the dawn is ever coming.

Our bodies, both physically and emotionally, tell us that the dawn is coming. It pulls us, in a way. Our faith is the same. Christmas and its time of preparation and waiting (Advent), and perhaps most notably, the journey of the Magi teach us these things. We doubt, we question, and we are afraid, however, at the same time, we long, we hope, and we love.

In these seasons of darkness and light, may you not be trapped alone by the world's news or your own news with the feeling that the days are only growing darker. Trust your body, trust your heart, and take courage. The dawn will come, and the Morning Star is Fair and Bright!

Peace,

Rev. Matthew A. Smuts, pastor



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COVER PHOTO

Light one candle by Elizabeth Hood

Time to Prepare



**Adult Education
and Spiritual
Formation Committee:**

Geri Horsma

Frances Harris

*Sabine Kabel-Eckes
(Council Liaison)*

Pastor Matt

Adult Forum has wrapped up a wonderful fall series on the Reformation Heritage and, most recently, a terrific series on the Gospel of Luke that is setting the stage for readings in the next lectionary year. Coming up this winter are Advent adventures: starting with discussions November 29, followed by Christmas music with Tim Getz, Claire Anastas will speak of her life in Bethlehem, and the ever-wonderful Christmas pageant. Be sure to mark your calendars.

Also, please keep the recipients of gifts from the Angel Tree in mind. They and their families are among the neediest here in Silicon Valley. If you haven't yet selected a gift tag for that needy person, please grab a card from the tree and enjoy shopping. Be sure to keep them in your prayers this season of giving.

We're also recognizing and thanking our dedicated Chairperson, Barbara Pitkin, for her leadership and expertise on the Adult Education and Spiritual Formation committee. Barbara is cycling off the team to focus on other interests at Grace.

All are welcome to join Adult Forum. We meet Sunday mornings from 9:45-10:30 in the Chapel (near the library in the Ed Wing).

Questions? Please contact the office or Pastor Matt.

Bethlehem, We Care!

Text by Martha Meyer

The star shone on Bethlehem two thousand years ago. The stars still shine in Bethlehem: and they are living stars—the young men and women students at Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture.



Raffle Items

- San Francisco Opera tickets for “Carmen”
- 1/3 carat diamond stud earrings
- Rick Steve’s Travel Package
- A gorgeous quilted table runner with 12 matching napkins by Autumn Bea
- A tour and tasting at the Schweiger Winery in St. Helena
- Dinner for ten at The Mazza Castle in Pacifica

DAR AL-KALIMA UNIVERSITY not only provides them a safe place, but trains them for a productive career in the culinary arts, hospitality industry, tourism, broadcast journalism, film making, jewelry design, and the decorative arts. Dance and musical training enrich their lives and feeds their souls.

This Advent, the goal of Bright Stars of Bethlehem, San Francisco Bay Area Chapter, is to fund ten scholarships at \$3,600 each. Here’s how the people of Grace can do their part.

We can buy raffle tickets: one for \$10 or three for \$25. There are six exciting items (see above).

Our Social Ministry Committee has chosen to put contribution envelopes in the pew racks for your use on December 6, 13, and 20. Look for the colorful “Bethlehem We Care” envelopes and make your Advent gift at Grace.

Thanks to a generous challenge gift of \$20,000, your gift will, in effect, be doubled. This is a good and wonderful thing! Advent is for sharing.

When a group of Grace members traveled to the Holy Land, we met Claire Anastas of Bethlehem’s Holy Star Gifts. She will be our guest speaker at the Forum on December 13. Come to the Chapel to hear her up-to-date description of life in Bethlehem today. There will be a question and answer time, as well as a display of her hand-crafted wares for sale.

LEFT

Dar al-Kalima University

RIGHT

Raffle items benefiting Dar al-Kalima

Requests for the Heritage Fund

From now until December 31, the Endowment Committee is accepting requests from congregational committees for funding from our Heritage Fund. This Fund, valued at more than \$280,000, makes grants to non-budgeted needs in the Grace community

In the past, we have funded Grace youth programs, community programs like Bay Area Anti-Trafficking Coalition, and international programs such as Dar al-Kalima University in Bethlehem and Lutheran World Federation.

Request forms are available in the church office. The deadline for consideration is December 31.

Endowment Committee: Amrette Butler; Dan Logan; Martha Meyer; Don Ostrus; David Vroom; Don Zepp; Pastor Matt Smuts, ex officio; and Jane Garvey, Council Liaison. ■

Making a Time for Gratitude

Making a Place for Grace—our vision for building, creating, marching forward! But in the middle of doing, we must stop, look around, and be grateful! Stewardship, after all is from the heart. At its finest, stewardship is about what God has done for us. At Grace Lutheran, we are thankful and grateful for many who give time, share talent, give money. At this celebratory time of year, let us be grateful for a God who guides us, blesses us, and leads us in making a place for His grace! ■

CALENDAR/TAX YEAR END GIVING

This calendar/tax year is ending soon, although it only marks the half-way point of our own fiscal year. Make sure any intended 2015 giving is postmarked or given on or before the 31st of December. Additional gifts help us to kick off the second half of our year on January 1 in good position. If you have questions about stock gifts, be in touch with Gretchen in the office at office@gracepa.org ■



To participate in the Angel Tree Project:

1. *Pick up tags between November 29 and December 6 from the Angel Tree in the narthex.*
2. **You must sign out the tags that you take so that we know who has which tags!**
3. *Please select and purchase one or two gifts per person. In order to be sure that family members receive roughly equivalent gifts, plan to spend about \$30-\$50 total per person.*
4. **Wrap your gift and securely attach the gift tag.** *Gift cards can be placed in a sealed envelope, with the gift tag securely attached.*
5. *Gift receipts are welcome, as they facilitate exchanges, but are not required.*
6. **Please deliver your gift(s) to church no later than Sunday, December 20,** *so that they can be delivered on time.*
7. *Keep the second gift tag (with gift ideas) at home, as a reminder to pray for that person during the holidays.*

Thank you for your generous demonstration of God's love!



4:00 pm • 6:00 pm • 9:00 pm | December 24

Christmas at Grace

10:00 am | December 25

Christmas Eve 9pm?

What are you doing at 9pm on Christmas Eve? Perhaps you will be coming to the last of our three Christmas Eve services at Grace! After several years of smaller (<40) attendance at the 11pm service we are testing the premise that there might be interest in a service that is after dinner, but not so late as 11pm.

This year, our services will be fairly similar to one another at 4pm, 6pm, and 9pm. While similar, they will not be the same. Our 4pm services will feature our Children's Choir and have youth and children in other capacities as well. Our Adult Voice Choir and Bell Choir will be at our 6pm service with our 9pm service featuring single vocalists and musicians.

We will also be continuing with our Christmas Day service at 10am as always. We are very excited about these opportunities and look forward to seeing you on Christmas Eve and Day!

Don't hesitate to be in touch with any questions.

*Peace,
Pastor Matt*



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2	0	1	6

GRACE NOTES LIVE ~ a concert series
 Grace Lutheran Church • 3149 Waverley Street • Palo Alto, California 94306 • (650) 494-1212 • www.gracepa.org

September

19
SAT
3:00 pm

Sibelius for the Whole Family
 Jussi Makkonen, cello and
 Russamari Teppo, piano

October

9
FRI
7:30 pm

The Choirs of Stavanger Cathedral, Norway
 Oddgeir Kjetilstad and Jorunn Lovise Husan, conductors
 Ivan Sarajishvili, organist

December

5
SAT
2:00 pm

Messiah Singalong
 (Christmas portion)
 Scot Hanna-Weir, conductor
 Tim Getz, organist

January

10
SUN
3:00 pm

Sonos Handbell Ensemble
 James Meredith, conductor

February

27
SUN
4:00 pm

Shades of Love: Beloved Opera Arias
 Angelique Zuluaga, soprano,
 and others

March

19
SAT
7:00 pm

California Lutheran University Choir
 Wyant Morton, conductor

April

17
SUN
4:00 pm

A Baroque Afternoon
 Angelique Zuluaga, soprano,
 and others

May

22
SUN
4:00 pm

Annual Grace Music Spring Concert
 Grace Chancel Choir and friends

Come and Sing, or Simply Listen

December

5
SAT
2:00 pm

Messiah Singalong
 (Christmas portion)
 Scot Hanna-Weir, conductor
 Tim Getz, organist

On December 5, we will have a Sing-along of the Christmas portion of Handel's Messiah. With no rehearsal but only a spirit of adventure, anyone who wants to sing along with our choir will be most welcome.



We will have scores available, but bring your own if you have one! We will be directed by Scot Hanna-Weir, a member of Grace who is also the conductor of the choirs at Santa Clara University and the Santa Clara Chorale. Scot is a terrific musician and loads of fun as well, so it should be a very memorable afternoon.

Dr. Scot Hanna-Weir leads the Santa Clara Chorale as their artistic director and is also Director of Choral Activities at Santa Clara University, where he oversees the choral program, directs the SCU Chamber Singers and Concert Choir, and teaches other courses within the music department. As a conductor, singer, pianist, and teacher, Scot Hanna-Weir is known for his insatiable desire for artistic excellence and his deep connection to the personal joy of music making. Comfortable in a variety of genres and styles, Hanna-Weir is a frequent collaborator as conductor, clinician, singer, and pianist with soloists, choirs, composers, and ensembles from a variety of backgrounds and traditions.

Dr. Hanna-Weir holds a Doctor of Musical Arts in choral conducting from the University of Maryland, a Master of Music in choral conducting from the University of Wisconsin, and a Bachelor of Music in choral/general music education from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.





Tim Getz, Director of Music Ministry

January

SONOS

Sonos Handbell Ensemble
James Meredith, conductor

3:00 pm



On January 10 we will hear a concert played by Sonos Handbell Ensemble. Sonos is one of only a very few professional handbell groups in the entire country, and our own Gretchen Rauch is one of its members. This "Twelfth Night" performance will feature music from the ensemble's December East Coast tour.

On the cutting edge of a 300-year old medium, Sonos Handbell Ensemble has toured 24 years from coast to coast and half way 'round the world bringing their unique virtuosity and compelling visual presence to astonished audiences of young and old. By joining forces with Grammy winning artists like composer Libby Larsen, the Kronos Quartet, the San Francisco Girls Chorus and Grammy-nominated mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade they have expanded the range and reach of the instrument far beyond what most thought possible. Appearances on PBS, Japan's NHK, NPR, classical stations around the world plus teaching workshops, masterclasses and their multiple recordings have raised the bar for what is expected from handbell artists. Garrison Keillor said it best on "A Prairie Home Companion".....

"Thanks, Sonos, for raising the level of our little family radio show from the comic to the cosmic to the something beyond."

A native of North Carolina, Sonos Artistic Director James Meredith received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Tulane University. He has been a musical partner with mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade and dramatic soprano Olivia Stapp. As a solo pianist, vocal and instrumental accompanist and conductor in America, Europe and Asia, his work has brought him into contact with such artists as Elly Ameling, Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, Eleanor Steber, Evelyn Lear, and Gerald Moore for whom he has played masterclasses. Recent concerts with Ms. Von Stade include an appearance on Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" reaching a National Public Radio audience of over two million listeners. He has been conductor of the Oakland Symphony Chorus, been on the faculty of Merritt College and taught master classes at Holy Names College and San Jose State University. As a trained, professional musician in the classical musical community, he brings a high standard to his work with handbells.



Some people call this time of year the "Season of Music," and in many ways, it is!

First, on December 5 at 2:00 pm, we will have our Sing-along of the Christmas portion of Handel's *Messiah*. With no rehearsal, but only a spirit of adventure, anyone who wants to sing along with our choir will be most welcome. Come either to sing or just to listen! Admission is by free-will offering and proceeds will benefit Grace's music program. Bring your own score if you have one; if you don't, they will be available for purchase for \$10. We will be directed by



Scot Hanna-Weir, a member of Grace who is also the conductor of the choirs at Santa Clara University and the Santa Clara Chorale. Soloists include Mark Tendall, Angelique Zuluaga, and one of the newest members of our choir, Ingrid Baumann. It should be a very memorable afternoon!

All of our choirs are busy preparing for Christmas Eve services, in addition to all of the Sundays of Advent. Our Sunday school children are learning several traditional Christmas carols to be sung as part of their program on December 20. For Christmas Eve, the children's choirs are working on a new, jazzy arrangement of "Joy to the World," among other seasonal offerings. They will sing at the 4:00 pm service. At the 6:00 pm service, the adults will sing a lovely setting of *In dulci jubilo* ("Good Christian Friends, Rejoice") by the 17th century German composer Dietrich Buxtehude, as well as the joyful "Shepherd's Pipe Carol" by John Rutter. The bells are playing wonderful arrangements of "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming," "O Come, All Ye Faithful," and another medley of familiar carols. Mark Tendall will sing solos at 9:00 pm, Ingrid Baumann will sing on Christmas morning, and Angelique Zuluaga on December 27. It's going to be a wonderful Christmas celebration!

Wednesday, January 6, is Epiphany. We will celebrate the arrival of the Magi with dinner, followed by Holden Evening Prayer with the last few carols of the season at 7:00 pm.

On January 10, we will hear a concert played by the Sonos Handbell Ensemble. Sonos is one of only a very few professional handbell groups in the entire country, and our own Gretchen Rauch is one of its members. This "Twelfth Night" performance will feature music from the ensemble's December East Coast tour.

We are entering Lectionary year C, with its focus on the Gospel of Luke. Singing abounds in the early chapters of this gospel. Zechariah's wife Elizabeth gives birth to John the Baptist, and Zechariah sings "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who has come to God's people and set them free... (Luke 1:68-79). Pregnant Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth and has a song of her own to sing: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior..." (Luke 1:46-55). And then on the night Jesus is born, the angels of heaven itself sing "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth." (Luke 2:14). How lucky we are to join our song to theirs, this season and always! Merry Christmas! ■



When I sit down to write my newsletter articles, I often have no idea what I will write. I wait to be inspired. It usually happens while I am listening to a song, driving, or looking at pictures. A word or Bible verse will pop into my head, and I will sit with it for a little while—to see if it feels right. I usually feel like I will never come up with something and feel stuck, but then it happens. An idea. And I get really excited about *writing* about it. This word came just that way.

Joy.

A friend recently said that he was starting to feel sad because it was getting dark so early and the days were shorter and colder. I could agree with the cold and the dark, but not the sad. Which was new for me. I have always felt the same way in this season—starting to miss my family and my home, and feeling sad and distant. But not this year. I have JOY.

If you have seen the movie *Inside Out*, you know that they did a great job of personifying the emotions Joy and Sadness. It was a great movie and I recommend you watch it. In fact, I think we will have a screening for youth and families when the movie is available on DVD! Anyway, I loved Sadness in the movie. She was very funny and had some great one-liners, and I could connect with how she was feeling. But something new is happening within me this season. As the sun starts to fade away, I can't help but think about the beauty of the sky and the leaves changing! There is joy within me.

OPEN

Sunday, December 13, 4-7pm

The Parsonage

641 Towle Way • Palo Alto 94306

HOPE

*The Mid-Peninsula
Recorder Orchestra*

*Frederic Palmer, Director
Greta Haug-Kryciw,
Assistant Director
presents*

*A Holiday
Concert*

*The program will feature an antiphonal
canzona by Giovanni Gabrieli, a movement
from Bach's Orchestral Suite No. 4, The
Liberty Bell March by John Philip Sousa, a
medieval motet by Oswald von Wolkenstein
and a suite by Johann Philipp Krieger.*

*Saturday, December 5, 7:30 p.m.
Grace Lutheran Church
3149 Waverley St., Palo Alto
Admission Free*

*The location of this concert is wheelchair accessible.
The Mid-Peninsula Recorder Orchestra is an
affiliate of the San Francisco Early Music Society.
For further information please visit our website at
mpro-online.org or call Frederic Palmer at 650-591-3648.*

There are lots of times in our lives when joy is hard to come by, days when it feels a million miles away. But there are also days when you have a choice, and you get to choose joy. There is so much to be thankful for, so many ways that we are blessed, so much beauty in the world. In this season of short dark days when the world seems to be choosing hate, I choose joy. It is easy to get wrapped up in the world, the sadness, the hate, all that is going wrong, but if you focus on what God is up to, you will find a different story. You will find heroes, human kindness, love, and forgiveness. A different story is being told if you just listen.

There is hope and expectation in the beautiful story that has been told over and over for thousands of years about a refugee family looking for a place to stay and welcoming a precious baby boy into the world: a baby who would bring us God, a baby who would be God with us. That God would choose to come to this earth as a helpless baby, as an innocent baby, as pure love—says so much about our God and how God chooses joy in a world that would hunt him down and crucify him on the cross. God sent a baby into a world with King Herod and so many other enemies, a dangerous and unsafe world. It doesn't sound too different from what we see around us now. God chose joy and love.

So, today and in this season, I see joy, pursue joy, and feel it all around me. Sometimes I have to look for it or even hunt it down, but it is there all around. Hate and ignorance don't have the final word. I remember the joy that Mary felt as the angel told her that she would give birth to a savior. The joy that they felt when the inn keepers took them in and gave them a place to sleep. The joy that we feel as we gather together with our loved ones. The joy that we can find every day in the beauty of the world around us.



But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. Luke 2:10■

Elizabeth Hood, Director of Children, Youth and Family Ministry

Soli Deo Gloria
 Allen H Simon
 Artistic Director

**Let Heaven
 and Nature
 SING**
 with Orchestra Gloria

“Lo, How a Rose...”

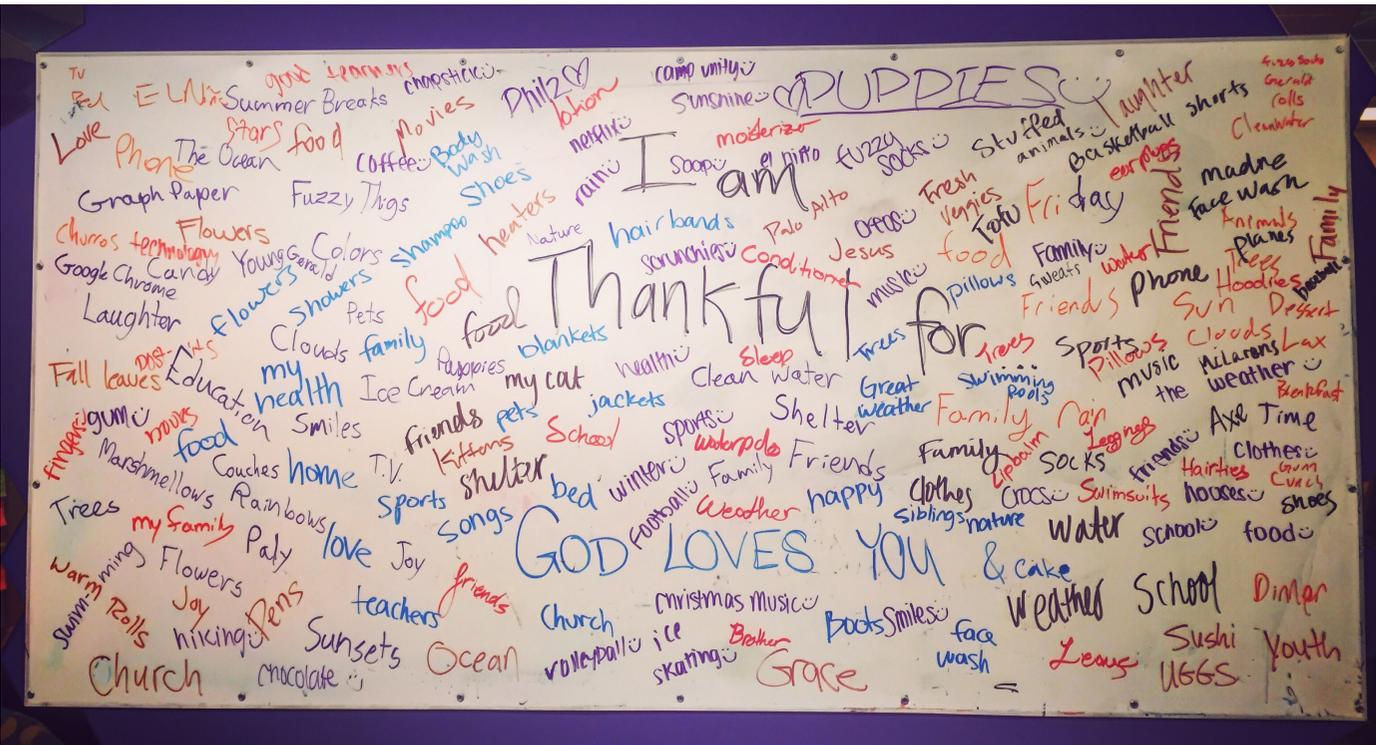
Saturday, December 5, 4:30 p.m.
 Christ Episcopal, Alameda

Sunday, December 6, 4:30 p.m.
 Grace Lutheran, Palo Alto

Saturday, December 19 | 3:00 pm
 Grace Lutheran Church
 3149 Waverley St. | Palo Alto 94306

Sunday December 20 | 3:00 pm
 San Jose First United Methodist
 24 N. 5th Street | San Jose 95112

DING DONG merrily



Clockwise from LEFT
Thankful Board and
Thanksgiving Feast from the
Youth Group Thanksgiving
Dinner on Wednesday,
November 18.

ELCA Youth Leadership
Summit in Nebraska
Christmas Sock Exchange
for the High School Youth

Gunn High School
Monthly Lunch



ELCA YOUTH LEADERSHIP SUMMIT AT
CAMP CAROL JOY HOLLING IN NEBRASKA

Earlier in November, I was selected with two youth from the Sierra Pacific Synod to attend the ELCA Youth Leadership Summit in Nebraska. We gathered with more than 140 other youth and adults from all over the US to learn and grow our leadership skills. The presiding Bishop of the ELCA, Elizabeth Eaton, was there, she preached and did a great Q and A. The director of Youth Ministry for the ELCA, the Director of Worship, and the Director of Young Adults were all there, as well. One of the main items they trained the youth on was Peer Ministry, and the youth really loved learning this! It is a great skill for anyone to have, to learn to listen and communicate with your peers! We have already used this on our last retreat for the Sierra Pacific Youth Committee.

Our synod has a Youth Committee that leads and plans three retreats over the year. Theresa Landi is the youth representative to the synod council, Inger Smuts is the vice president, and I serve as the district's adult representative. We work very hard throughout the year, have planning retreats, and also attend synod assembly where the youth have a vote. It is a really wonderful way for the youth to grow as leaders in their faith and in their communities.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

We are in full swing and we would love for you to join us for Sunday School! We meet every Sunday in the Sanctuary at 9:45 am for Sunday School Opening. We are currently starting to sing and rehearse for our Christmas Program!

- **Saturday, December 19, at 10 am**
Christmas Program Rehearsal in the sanctuary
- **Sunday, December 20, at 10 am**
Performance (Meet in Brown Hall at 9:45 am)

This year we will be doing a brand NEW program called The Advent Tree!! We will perform this only on Sunday December 20, not on Christmas Eve, so make sure you come and see them that day!!

ELEMENTARY

February 26-28 | Retreat at Mt. Cross | Theme: "Love is"

Gather for a faith-filled weekend at Mt. Cross with Lutheran Elementary Youth from all over the Bay Area!

Please contact Elizabeth if you are interested! We can't wait to take our young campers to camp for a weekend of fun and faith.

We took a great group last year and had a blast over the weekend!

HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH GROUP

Christmas Service Project and Party | December 19

We will gather to do some good, working all together on a service project, then we will transition into a "Gift Exchange Party"! This year we are doing a Christmas Sock Exchange! Everyone will bring a fun/crazy/creative pair of socks stuffed with inexpensive gifts (Under \$10) and then we will draw numbers to pick socks! It will be a blast, bring a friend, and have them bring a "Sock Gift."

Youth Group every Wednesday except December 30 and January 6, and Sunday School every Sunday except December 27 and January 3

MIDDLE SCHOOL MINISTRIES

December 6 | Family Game Night!

Bring your whole family along, we will have a lot of fun! We will gather in Brown Hall on Sunday afternoon from 4 to 6 pm and play!!

We just had a great Middle School Retreat at Mt. Cross put on by the Synod Youth Committee! Inger, Theresa, and I all helped plan and lead the event. We had youth from Grace attend, and it was a blast. The theme was "Love Your Neighbor."

WOMEN OF GRACE

Sunday, December 20 | Cookie Decorating Party | Noon

Everyone is welcome to attend this, bring your whole family, we will eat and decorate cookies in Brown Hall!

Sunday, February 14 | Sweetheart Party

All Girls, Ladies, Friends, and Sisters are welcome to an afternoon tea with snacks, crafts, and fun. Bring a friend and make sure not to miss out!

JULY 11-15, 2016 | DAY CAMP AT GRACE

Save the date for summer fun and faith! Online registration begins in January.

DATES FOR DECEMBER

December 6 | Sunday: Family Game Night

Especially for Middle School Youth and Families, but ALL are welcome! Come to Brown Hall and join us in a lot of great fun and games for all.

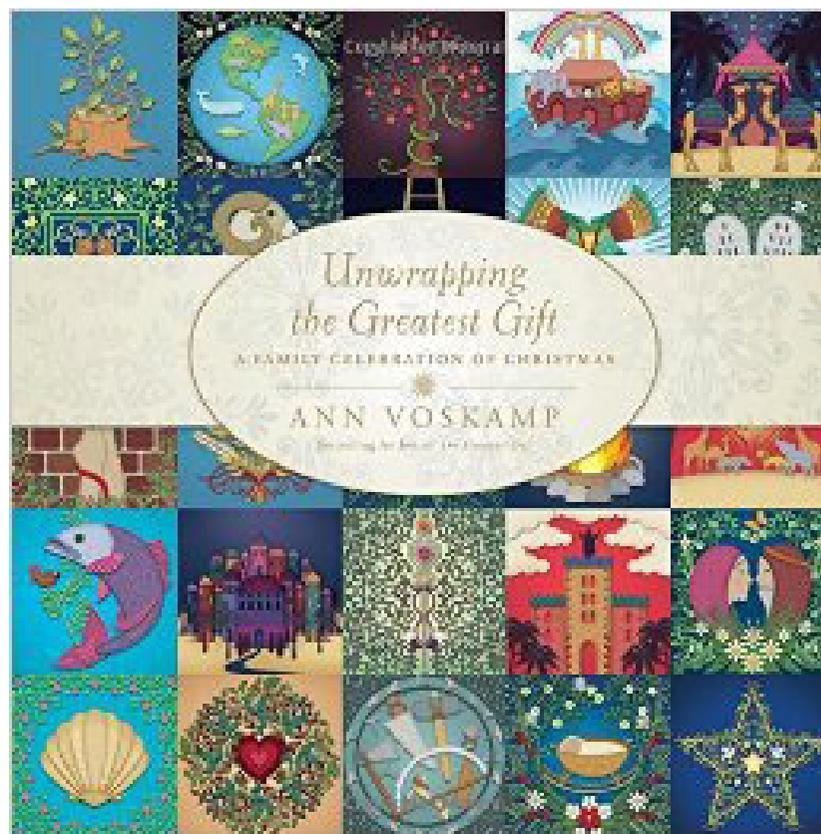
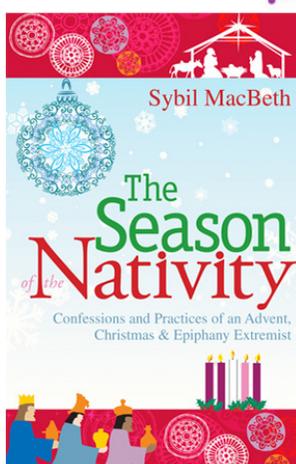
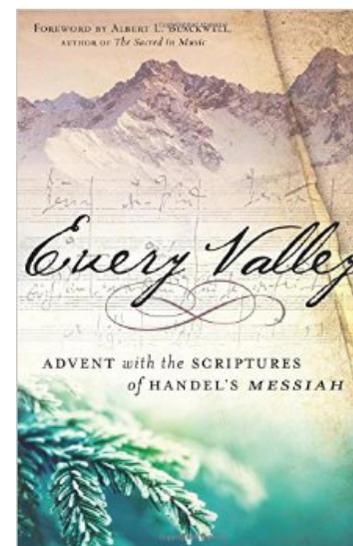
December 19 | Saturday: High School Service and Fun Night—Christmas Sock Exchange

December 20 | Sunday: Sunday School Christmas Program in the Sanctuary between worship

December 20 | Sunday: Family Christmas Cookie Party at noon in Brown Hall ■



Get in the Holiday Mood



The Grace Library will be featuring Advent and Christmas material during December. We have a large collection of Christmas stories for children and adults, and a number of Christmas DVDs for the whole family. Look for the childrens' materials on the childrens' table, and other material on the desk. Our collection of vintage Augsburg Fortress's *Annuals of Christmas Art and Literature* will put you in a holiday mood in a good way, counteracting the hustle and bustle of holiday preparations and focusing on the true significance of Advent and Christmas. They are on the bottom shelf near the computer.

We have some new Advent books this year. The first is: *Every Valley: Advent with the Scriptures of Handel's Messiah*, compiled by Jessica Miller Kelley. This book contains forty reflections on the Bible texts used for the fifty-three movements that make up the three parts of Handel's Messiah.

The Season of the Nativity: Confessions and Practices of an Advent, Christmas & Epiphany Extremist, by Sybil MacBeth is part memoir, part front-porch theology, and includes pages of practices and activities which invite you into a deeper understanding of a time of year you may have never really discovered before,

Unwrapping the Greatest Gift: A Family Celebration of Christmas, by Ann Voskamp has twenty-five stories from the Old Testament for the 1st to the 25th of December. Added to each story are scripture readings, questions and activities to engage the entire family, and beautiful illustrations to further enhance each reading.

We hope you will visit the library and find a book, poem, or video that will make your holiday more meaningful and we wish each of you a Blessed Christmas. ■

Mary Ashley

Update from the Building Team

Whether traveling on an interstate highway or on the road to a new narthex, certain questions are often heard along the way:

- Are we there yet?
- How much longer?
- Why are we stopping again?
- Whose idea was it to take this road?
- Oh, no! – another detour?
- Do we have enough gas to get there?
- At the end of the day, will we have a nice place to stay?

The Building Team is dealing with such questions as we move forward with the narthex construction project and the associated maintenance activities directed at the sanctuary roof, the spire, and the parking lot. During the past month we have turned some lemons into lemonade, but we recognize that there are still lemons on the tree that may fall in our direction. Nevertheless, we are pleased with our accomplishments so far and confident that recent adjustments in the narthex design will bring improvements in both the esthetics and the functionality of the new space.

Key accomplishment: Doug Hohbach, structural engineer by profession and a member of Grace and of our Team, provided a detailed analysis of the sanctuary structure in the context of a significant earthquake. The features of most concern are the relatively loose connections between a) the relatively flexible [during an earthquake, not during a spirited choir anthem] steel structure that supports the roof and b) the sturdy anchoring provided by the brick/masonry structures at each end of the building. We developed a plan for including seismic upgrades to strengthen those connections as we execute the other aspects of the overall project. Recognizing this opportunity for safety upgrades while we have access to the roof and to the internal structure of the narthex is an extra credit item for the overall project. Now the Team just has to find room for this previously unanticipated work in the project budget.

Design adjustments: A month ago, we publicized what we thought would be our “final” design. You may recall some of its features from the diagram in the previous issue of Grace Notes. Any such drawing carries the caution that it is “preliminary” until the various City of Palo Alto departments have had their say about the matter. During the past month, the staff member responsible for reviewing our design in the context of the City’s concern for preserving its architectural history (for buildings more than 50 years old) has had lots to say. In particular, he disfavored the proposed clerestory, the low slope of the roof, and the seeming lack of symmetry between the sanctuary roofline and that of the new construction. All of these observations are simply one man’s opinion that could easily be disputed and argued back and forth. However, rather than spending time and money on that approach, our architect advised that we not dig in our heels but rather adopt the strategy of embracing the input from the City and developing a fresh narthex design that will please all those who must be satisfied in order for the project to move toward completion.

At this moment we are well down the road toward acceptance by the architectural historian and, equally important, toward a total buy-in by the Building Team. We had been mourning the loss of certain features we liked in the earlier design, but we are now enlivened by several strong aspects of the revised design that we hadn’t even realized were weaknesses in the previous layout. Having “gone public” with a design that has since been eliminated from consideration, we’ll be a bit more cautious about a premature public rollout of the latest drawings before we get more concrete signals of affirmation from the City. Meanwhile, we will keep asking questions and pushing for answers on your behalf. Be assured that, at the end of the day, you will have a VERY nice place to stay.

From your fellow travelers,
Advent blessings to all! ■

Call Committee

The call committee has had a busy couple months since the last update about our calling a half time associate pastor. We are excited to announce that the Ministry Site Profile (MSP) has been completed and posted on the Churchwide website. The MSP is the document that describes who we are and what we are looking for in a candidate. Once the MSP is posted on the synod website, prospective candidates are able to review it and express interest to the synod. Those that the synod feels would be a good fit will be passed along to the call committee for consideration and likely interviews.

The exact timing of next steps is uncertain, but our hope is that we will hear back quickly from the synod and can possibly start interviews before the end of the year. We look forward to sharing more good news with everyone very soon. Please continue to pray for us, the prospective candidates, and the synod as we move forward together on this journey. ■

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