Gathering Together in the Same Place

On the day called Sunday there is a gathering together in the same place of all who live in a given city or rural district. The memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then when the reader ceases, the president in a discourse admonishes and urges the imitation of these good things. Next we all rise together and send up prayers.

When we cease from our prayer, bread is presented and wine and water. The president in the same manner sends up prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people sing out their assent, saying the ‘Amen.’ A distribution and participation of the elements for which thanks have been given is made to each person, and to those who are not present they are sent by the deacons.

Those who have means and are willing, each according to his own choice, gives what he wills, and what is collected is deposited with the president. He provides for the orphans and widows, those who are in need on account of sickness or some other cause, those who are in bonds, strangers who are sojourning, and in a word he becomes the protector of all who are in need.

155AD Justin Martyr’s First Apology

It is said among us as Christians that we are Easter people. We are people, no matter how dark the day becomes, that are confident and hopeful in tomorrow because Christ is already there preparing the way. In the passage above, we read about a pattern of worship from the middle of the second century that is very familiar to us today. But the words that leap out are ‘gathered together in the same place’. It seems almost redundant, right? ‘Gathered together’ and ‘in the same place’? It’s almost as though he knew about Zoom!

I am hopeful this year that we will begin to get back into patterns of gathering together in the same place. I am hopeful that our life together will begin to return to in-person expressions. I am hopeful that the gathering of the Body of Christ will be less dependent on WiFi bandwidth. I am hopeful to begin seeing all of you dear people in person regularly in this year.

I am hearing about your vaccinations and I am watching our local numbers begin to fall again (for now) and can’t help but think that this Lent and Holy Week will have a far more Easter-hopeful feel than last year.

Keep your eyes peeled for updates on our life together as we may begin soon to return to some in-person programs. See you soon!

Peace,

Rev. Matthew A. Smuts, senior pastor
Give Us a Call!

We have a new phone system that rings through to the office wherever the office may be! We’d love to hear from you now that we are back to answering calls directly, even from home. Give us a call! Same number as always, 650.494.1212.

New Member Classes!
February 22, March 1 & 8
7pm on Zoom

Even in these curious times, we’d like to offer our next New Member Class! This three session program is an opportunity to be more intentional in your relationship to this community of faith. Membership in a faith community is about journeying together in the questions and joys of this life. If you are interested in considering this program, please email Pastor Matt at pastormatt@gracepa.org.

Thank You!!

As a staff, we are so grateful for your support during these months, and for your generous Christmas gift. It is a joy to serve among such excellent people!

An Ash Wednesday with No Ashes

While ashes on Ash Wednesday are not required, the very name of the day suggests that they are essential. As you might imagine, in these days it would not be safe to offer that beginning of Lent touchstone ritual. Ashes are intended to bring us back to earth—to remind us of our mortality and the basics of this life. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. This year, we will be focussing instead on the second part of that phrase through the use of soil. At the Drive-Thru event on February 14 we will be offering you some supplies, including a small peat pot (although any pot or bowl will do) to gather some soil from your yard or a nearby park. This soil will remind us of our grounding from beginning to end in this season. You will also be given some seeds in a beautiful medium.

Lent is an Old English word that means Spring. Our hope is that this Lenten journey, begun in the soil, reminding us of our mortality, nurtured through Spring, might come to flower by Easter. So, plan to have your soil starting Ash Wednesday, February 17!

Drive Through Communion
Transfiguration Sunday, February 14 | 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

This Transfiguration Sunday, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, we will be offering Drive-Thru Communion from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. You are invited to head over to Grace Lutheran following coffee hour, where you and your family can receive communion (blessed during the live-stream service) without leaving your car.

Enter the parking lot using the driveway closest to the sanctuary. Pastor Matt will be distributing communion (contactless) on the driver’s side of the vehicle.

In addition to receiving communion, you will also receive materials to facilitate the observation of Ash Wednesday, Lent, and Holy Week in your home. We look forward to seeing you there!

February 17, 2021 | 7:00 pm Zoom/YouTube

Ash Wednesday
An Ash Wednesday with No Ashes

February 21 - March 28
9:00 a.m.
ADULT FORUM

ROWAN WILLIAMS
Being Disciples
ESSENTIALS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
Heroes

The world of Lutheran church music lost two heroes a couple of weeks ago. Carl Schalk, born in 1929, died on Sunday, January 24. Much of Carl’s career was spent teaching at Concordia University in River Forest, Illinois. He was well-known as a speaker, writer, and teacher. He wrote often on the theology and practice of church music. He served on the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, which led the development of the green Lutheran Book of Worship in the 1970s. He worked with children’s and adult choirs and wrote music for their use. He’s probably best known to most of us as a composer of hymn melodies. Among his tunes are those used for “Now the Silence, Now the Peace,” “Thine the Amen, Thine the Praise,” and “Before the Marvel of This Night,” which Mark and Angelique sang beautifully for us just this past Christmas Eve!

Scott Weidler, born in 1959, died with pancreatic cancer on Saturday, January 23. Scott served as Program Director for Worship and Music at the ELCA’s churchwide office for 23 years, leaving that position in 2018. Scott’s influence on what we sing and the way we sing in worship in this 21st century was absolutely enormous. Our current worship book, the red Evangelical Lutheran Worship, was developed under his leadership, along with many, many supporting documents and additional music resources. He was deeply interested (as was Carl Schalk) in ways we church musicians could help our congregations sing better and with confidence and ease. I was privileged to be invited to work with Scott on a number of projects over the last 15 years or so, and I regarded him both as a mentor and as a dear friend.

Both of these deaths occurred just as we are once again turning our thoughts at church toward the season of Lent. Many of us are feeling a sense of loss during these long months of isolation as we are trying to protect ourselves and our loved ones from COVID-19. Some of us have experienced deaths of people dear to us; for others the absence of community is loss enough. During Lent we are invited to call to mind our own mortality, and this year it may come to mind even more readily than usual. The smudge of ashes we normally receive on Ash Wednesday comes with the words “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” This year, we will receive that reminder in an alternative way. But there’s joy at the end of the story: We are baptized! Paul writes to the Romans in a reading we hear at the Easter Vigil:

We have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

We take time during Lent to reflect on our mortality, but more importantly, we reflect on and rejoice in the gift of baptism that saves us from the sting of death. We read in Evangelical Lutheran Worship: “returning to God’s mercy and grace, marked with the cross of Christ, we make our way through Lent, longing for the baptismal waters of Easter, our spiritual rebirth.”

On Ash Wednesday, we pray:

Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. Call forth our prayers and acts of kindness, and strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence in the mercy of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Wiith Carl Schalk and Scott Weidler and all the saints we sing:

The love that we have always known, our constant joy and endless light, Now to the loveless world be shown, now break upon its deathly night. Into one song compress the love that rules our universe above: Sing love, sing love, sing God is love, sing love, sing God is love!

“Embrace the quiet. Embrace the stillness. Embrace the gaps in-between things.” -Morgan Harper Nichols

As we circle back into this time of Lent, I can’t help but think about last year and how we had no idea what was coming, no sense of what this year would look like, or how hard it would get. How dark these days would be. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine planning for a second time of Lent virtually. I feel like we have turned a corner now that we have the vaccine, but not knowing when we will receive it or what comes next, I feel stuck in the in-between. Lent is kind of the perfect in-between time, the wandering through the desert for forty days; wandering and wondering what comes next. It is a journey. This whole year has been such a journey, as we moved through fear, the pain of isolation, grief of people and things we lost along the way. Through all the heartache and worry we kept moving.

I have always been a planner, but I don’t know how to plan for what comes next. I don’t know what it will look like, or how life will change. So, in this in-between time, I am going to embrace the quiet. Embrace the stillness and try to be at peace with the in-between—the not yet time that we find ourselves in. I think it is hard to hold that space, to have hope but not yet, to know things will get better but not yet, to celebrate, but not yet. In this time of Lent, we know what is coming: we know Jesus will die, and we know that he will rise again, but not yet. It is in that in-between time that we get to decide how to live and what our journey will look like. What will you do with your time in the in-between?

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https://society6.com/morganharpernichols

Elizabeth Hood
Director of Children, Youth & Family Ministry

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**SUNDAY SCHOOL | EVERY SUNDAY 9AM ZOOM**

We gather every Sunday on zoom for all ages Sunday school with a lesson, a video, and learning all about Jesus with friends online.

Come to Grace and drive through on Feb 14 at 11:30 a.m. to pick up new Sunday school curriculum to follow along with activity sheets at home! We will also be receiving communion that Sunday.

**HIGH SCHOOL | Every Wednesday Zoom at 7pm**

We know that everyone is Zoomed out, but we also know that community is vital. Every week, come lockdown or quarantine, we are gathering for Youth Group. Even if it’s only for 30 minutes, we gather to check in and pray.

**SUMMER 2021**

This year has looked so much more different that we ever thought! Who would have thought we would be gearing up for our second Lent in lockdown?! So, as of now, summer is completely up in the air. I have lots of ideas and will plan when I know its safe. Until then, we wait and just know everything is up in the air!

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**MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Watch for a Middle School social event online coming soon!

**COMMUNION CLASS**

For children ready to learn about Communion.

If your child or youth hasn’t started receiving communion, we would love to invite you and your child to participate in our Communion Class!

I will host a one hour online parent and child communion class during the week of March 29 - April 2 on Zoom. We will gather and learn together, watch a video, discuss the role of communion in worship, answer questions, and provide ideas for you do use at home. We will bake bread, too. It is lots of fun! **At least one parent must be present**, but both are welcome.

We will be offering communion on **Easter** (April 4) for your child to participate for the first time!

Please contact Elizabeth with any questions, or if you are planning on joining us.
Habitat for Humanity

At last September’s God’s Work, Our Hands, a group of Grace members worked at Habitat for Humanity’s transitional housing community. When the COVID-19 pandemic fell upon San Jose, some of the most vulnerable were those without safe shelter. In partnership with the City, Habitat for Humanity built communities where these neighbors could safely self-isolate, live with comfort and security, and access an array of supportive services. These communities serve not only to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 among our unhoused neighbors, but to help them build a bridge to permanent housing.

One participant in the community knew it was a special place right away. A former teacher, Sandy had experienced homelessness for seven years. Moving between shelters, facilities, and motel rooms, Sandy had survived sexual assault and struggled to overcome addiction. “Once I got here, on day one,” Sandy remembers, “all my thoughts of what happened to me and the places I’d been—they just erased from my mind and gave me that peace that I needed.”

With 24-hour security, her own washroom, and a locking door, Sandy felt a newfound security and privacy. “I really appreciate it with all my heart because I feel safe here,” she says.

Here, Sandy works with her caseworker and gets the support she needs. She gets visits from her son and granddaughter. She works on an autobiography that she hopes will inspire others. She refines her resume and fills out housing applications in preparation for the next stage of her life—for which she holds new hope.

Engaging Lent through Social Ministry

This novel time in our lives might be a great opportunity to think about either changing up your Lenten discipline or returning to something you’ve done before during Lent, but maybe haven’t considered for a while. Grace’s Social Ministry will provide several ways for you to engage Lent this year, although things will need to look a bit different because of our inability to gather in the way we would choose. Along with many other churches and denominations, Grace will again be inviting you to focus on hunger during Lent: a need that underscores our shared humanity like no other.

- Our first Saturday EHP food and diaper collections will continue as always;
- we will again coordinate Grace’s Bread for the World letter-writing campaign;
- and we will all have the chance to learn more about hunger (which comes in many forms) and how the ELCA World Hunger program helps serve those who are hurting.

Watch your email for our periodic Social Ministry “Lenten Links” to learn more about these aspects of Grace’s Social Ministry and how you can participate in Lenten works of love.

Have a blessed and fulfilling Lenten season!

2021 Legacy Grant Update

The Endowment Committee received 8 grant requests which include both Grace related applications and external non-profit applications. We had a preliminary review of the applications at our January 14th meeting. It was decided that a few applications needed additional Committee review time before Endowment makes final recommendations to the Church Council.
Council Notes

As you would expect, most of the church campus has been unusually quiet for many months. But there is an area of the church that has continued to overflow with life, joy, and laughter – the Grace Lutheran Preschool!

The Grace Lutheran Preschool is an important ministry of our church as children play, learn, and grow in a loving Christian atmosphere. It has provided a warm and supportive educational environment for children for over 45 years. And, while COVID-19 generated some significant challenges, it did not stop the preschool from continuing its work.

The Preschool board worked with Grace’s Preschool Director and Teacher, Penny McDermott, to ensure a safe environment for the children and our teachers. They developed new safety precautions, established new cleaning procedures, and adapted the teaching methods for the current situation. Because of their efforts, the doors of the preschool have been able to stay open with current enrollment at 11 children. The kids are having so much fun while Teachers Penny, Aaron, and Krista guide them through play-based learning activities. You can see some of their artwork in the Fireside room windows as you drive past on Loma Verde Avenue. (See the preschool update on the next page.)

Please join me in recognizing and thanking the Preschool board for their ongoing work toward this ministry at Grace. The board is actively looking for volunteers from Grace to join them—it’s a great way to get involved in this continued ministry.

Holly Lucke
Grace Council President

Generosity in the Midst

Thank you to everyone for your amazing generosity in the midst of the pandemic. The bountiful giving of your time, talent, and treasury is evident as we have converted from in person activities to our new normal of YouTube and Zoom programs. We think our staff at Grace deserves a lot of credit and many thanks for their creativity and hard work! The resilience of our community during this difficult time is a testament to God’s numerous blessings.

During the last few years we have conducted the pledge campaign during Lent. Although life is beginning to stabilize, the Stewardship Committee will delay the pledge process this year until after Easter. More details will be forthcoming. In the meantime, check out where you are in your 2020/2021 giving at https://gracepa.ccbchurch.com/give_detail.php. We also encourage you to try out electronic giving through Txt2Give or at https://gracepa.ccbchurch.com/goto/giving.

Thank you for your support.

• Txt2Give (mobile phone)
  Text GIVE to 650.262.6880
  or use QR code shortcut, then follow prompts

• gracepa.org (online)
  Click this link if viewing digitally:

• mail your check to:
  Grace Lutheran Church
  3149 Waverley St
  Palo Alto, CA 94306

Holly Lucke
Grace Council President

Sunday Worship
10:00 am Live-stream gracepa.org

Also broadcast on Cable 30
Sundays: 11 am | 8:30 pm
Mondays: 12:30 pm

And available on the Grace YouTube channel:
  links at gracepa.org

Preschool Board
Evelyn Guernsey, President
Gail Foelsch, Treasurer
Susan Choquette, Secretary
Greg Crider (previous parent)
Hannah Khuri-Yakub (current parent)
Pastor Cora Scheel
Pastor Friederike Wekel
Penny McDermott, Director
Thank you to all who supported Grace Lutheran Preschool's scholarship fund. This year more than ever, during this time with the COVID-19 pandemic, we are grateful for the kindness of others. Donations allow us to grant scholarships to families and help us continue to “Let the children come.”

Christmas at preschool was very special and very different from other years. We made loads of ornaments, decorated our preschool Christmas tree, made clay handprints, and made a play about the very first Christmas, which we performed in the preschool yard, recording it for all the parents. They children loved it and wanted to do it over and over. We used sign language to help us sing our songs like *Away in a Manger, Jingle Bells, Jesus Birthday* and the candles are burning so bright. It brought joy to all who got to see the video and happiness knowing the children at our school have some “normal” in their lives.

Everyday we work at so many things. Listening to the teachers, and most important listening to their friends. We are becoming experts at working on jigsaw puzzles with a friend, painting, glueing, building with pipes, pumping on swings, writing our names, sailing boats on our peanut butter river, making super markets outside. (Items for sale are dinosaurs and cakes.)

In the next few months we will be getting ready for many celebrations. Valenties Day (we made plates for our families), making the heart wrapping paper, making valentines bags, and lots of heart decorations. Then comes Chinese New Year—lanterns and dragons to take home to celebrate. St.Patrick’s day will mark a year from when we closed. We still have the bulletin board up in the classroom with leprechauns and gold on it. Rainbows and leprechaun magic will fill our preschool yard. Easter will be on its way with coloring eggs, making chickens, sending Easter cards to friends, and making bunnies.

Our families (right now we have 11 families, 12 children), love our school and are so glad their children have a safe and happy place to go to each day. Thank you to the Grace Lutheran Church community for helping us make the school work.