



Grace Lutheran Church
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Hartford, CT 06105



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Sue Carey, Secretary

Dale Eberhardt, Treasurer

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Dale Eberhardt, Organist

Miriam Miller, Sexton

www.graceistheplace.org



GRACE NOTES

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH, 46 WOODLAND STREET, HARTFORD, CT 06105

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December Volume 2015

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Taddeo di Bartolo, Italian, 1362–1422

Madonna and Child

Gift of The Robert Lehman Art Foundation, 1962.444

Image courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum

A Christmas Devotion BY SUSAN CAREY

This painting from about the year 1400 is one of my favorites in the collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum. It's so different from the tender images we traditionally see at Christmas time with the virgin mother Mary lovingly cuddling her newborn son.

The secular world, with all its hype for Christmas decorations, shopping, and parties, would have us believe that Christmas is the most important holiday of the year. However, this birth and child would have little significance except that Jesus became the man who died for our sins, was resurrected from the dead, and is God made man. The artist is attempting to tell the whole story in a single picture.

In this painting, the child is small like a baby but isn't quite an infant. The child holds a small bird, a goldfinch, in his hands, and is pointing to the open mouth of the bird. In the 1400s, this gesture was understood as a symbol for the resurrection, and it foretells the child's future. The long, slender hands and fingers of the mother Mary embrace this sign. They draw our attention to the hands of the child to ensure we don't miss the message, which culminates at Easter.

To our eyes today, this painting could appear awkward. The figures lack a photogenic quality that we might prefer. Instead, the background is filled with gold, a symbol of the kingdom of God. The Christ wears the robe of a king, made of gold and richly textured, a pattern that is repeated in Mary's veil and gown. Both are crowned with golden halos, symbols of their holiness. They are not in our world, but instead confront us from the heavenly kingdom. Mother and child are deeply somber. They look directly at us and beckon us to contemplate our lives and to respond to the message of good news.

The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

Reminder: Christmas Fair at Grace

BY JUDY BUTTERWORTH-KREMER

Join us on December 12th for the Christmas Fair as well as crafts.. Please bring any donations (crafts and new or gently used gifts) to the church **by December 6th or before**. Baked goods and cookies should be dropped off by December 11th so they are fresh for the 12th.

We need volunteers to get the word out (flyers are available from Elsa) and to help on that day, also. The sign-up sheet is in the Fellowship Hall. Please contact Emma and/or Judy for more information.

Emma: 860) 930-1793

Judy : (860) 470-7400

Pastor's Message: Paradoxes of a Special Season

Advent, the Season of Waiting, has begun... yet those of us who have the wherewithal are running around buying things, planning things, cooking things and dreaming things... not exactly waiting. For these people, it is all about taking charge, making sure that everything is planned and executed just right.

Some of us are simply warmed by the season even as it gets colder. Others who live in the cold of the season... perhaps on the streets of Hartford or New York, they wish for the warmth that is just out of their reach.

And, what we anticipate, of course, this season, is the prince of peace... and, arguably the world around us, and the communities we live in or near... are all at war.

Pope Francis during a mass last week spoke of this holiday season within the context of terror attacks worldwide saying, "we are close to Christmas. There will be lights, there will be parties, bright trees, even Nativity scenes – all decked out – while the world continues to wage war." His argument which feels to be on target is that "it's all a charade. The world has not understood the way of peace." And the wars here, there and everywhere have no justification; none at all.

The innocent victims plead for compassion, beg for it, all over the world from those who truly are bystanders... And, what is the result of this tumult, violence and despair? "Ruins, thousands of children without education, so many innocent victims, and lots of money in the pockets of arms dealers."

The More We Pray Together ... BY ELSA KOULLA



Bishop Eaton, our presiding Bishop, has said, "We are shocked and dismayed by the terrorist attacks in Paris, Beirut, Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, but also in Nigeria, Kenya, Bangladesh and the Philippines (and now, Mali)... Our hearts and prayers go out to all whose lives have been shattered and are grieving ..."

Yet, we know that these people will not have the last word.

Again, Bishop Eaton, "Let us recommit ourselves to sharing encouragement to those persecuted as we seek to be a disturbing, reconciling, serving and deliberating presence in God's world. This will demand difficult, courageous work from each of us. 'As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace' (Ephesians 6:15)."

May we all reach out to the suffering and show compassion for the vulnerable. The Christian response is to love and to care and in that way empty ourselves out for the good of others. And, it is Christian to give thanks and express gratitude... yes, there is irony and paradox here, but it is nestled in the arms of a loving God who keeps promises.

Pastor Rick

Grace held a beautiful Thanksgiving service on Wednesday, November 25th.

In the service was jointly included First Calvary Church, Grace Lutheran and Trinity Episcopal. I like to see different bodies of the Christ coming together to remind us that Thanksgiving is all about gratitude, which is an attitude, a virtue and a way of thinking and living.

We often see gratitude as a passing feeling that is shown after a beautiful actions and words. Some could say that gratitude is a privilege of those who are at peace, have their health and wealth....

As Christians, we must remember to express more gratitude for what we have, our experiences (good or bad), sometimes for life itself. In the midst of all THAT, God is in control. That is the reason why it is important to understand that our attitude has to be gratitude. Thankful that we always have someone walking with US.

THIS MONTH'S BIRTHDAYS

12/05 Gail Lindstrom

12/12 Bertha Benoit

12/18 Geraldine Pickens



12/22 Donna Phelan

12/23 Annie Major

12/30 Daniel Kretschmer

Happy Birthday, Marion!!!



Marion St. Germain turns 90, on November 30th! Please join us in sending her your love and best wishes on this very big birthday. Cards and letters would be welcomed (I said so, not Marion—I hope I don't get in trouble); her address is 8 Fairway Drive, Apt. C in Wethersfield, CT 06109. It was wonderful to see you, Marion; and, we know that you are a faithful reader of Grace Notes....

So this one is for you! May you have a very blessed day.

PLEASE PRAY FOR...

We give you thanks for all the saints who have been lifted up to live with you in light eternal. Especially Garry Webster who passed away on November 11th.

Those who are unable to attend worship at Grace, especially Bertha Benoit; Bill Cottam; Jane Egan; Inger Morgan; Marion St. Germain; and Waltraud Jordan.

Those in need of healing: Albert Bell, Kevin Brookman (*friend of Barbara Ruhe*), Antwan Byrd (*grandson of Albert Bell*), Courtney Byrd (*grandson of Albert Bell*), Vincent Carrier (*godson of Miriam Miller*), former president Jimmy Carter, Marie Coburn (*friend of Pastor & Judy*), Angel Colon, Frankie Colon, Marcus Cosenza (*friend of Barbara Ruhe*), the Crawford Family, Alicia Dicken, Edmund Dickens, Marietta Dickens, Vivian Drury (*Nina Kretschmer's mother*), Donna Eberhardt, David Eberly, Dorothea Glatte, Gil Holmeen, Marty Holmeen, , the Hudson Family, Bodo Jahn, Mark, Cindy & Tim Jones, Gertrude Kanwischer, Edouard Koulla (*Elsa Koulla's father*), Rosemarie Wendt, Irene Kirschner, Nina Kretschmer, Michael Lewis, Mike McGarry, Lynne Meyer (*mother of Jackie Meyer*), Virginia Nicholas, Fairest Pledger, Laverne Pledger, Henry Rempt, Aaron Sanders, Karen Scott, Mavis Smith, The Tetreault Family, Adrian and Felicita Texidor, Randy Webb (*brother of Sally Nolen*), Sonia Wellington, Gerline Wilks (*mother of Sonia Wellington*) and Linton White.

Wanted for Christmas Eve Celebration: BY NANCY URBAN

Christmas Cookies (bring to forum room after December 20)

Personal Items for Gift Bags (bring to forum room by December 20)
(toothpaste/brush, deodorant, small lotions/shampoo etc.)

We're Havin' a Party and You're All Invited!!!

CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE at the Urban's.
yummy food, joyous music, ping-pong and more
Sunday, January 3rd: 3:00-6:00 p.m.

Living Generously BY NANCY URBAN

Taking the time to listen, to care, to walk hand in hand, giving gifts. Can we learn from the stories of Jesus as to see Christ in the other. Giving of ourselves means so much more than just giving of our "stuff". Maybe something to think about as we are surrounded this Christmas Season with all the messages of ". buying and he walked this earth and from others that we meet along the way what it means to "Live Generously"?"

Janet's Closet...

On November 7th Vicar Dominic and his commanding officer, brought a donation for Janet's Closet with a promise of more to come.

They are trying to help in their communities. They said that, most of the time, the military helps abroad. Maybe, it is time for them to give a helping hand to neighbors. It could be also a way to help fellow soldiers to find a church while they are away from home.



Rev. Albert Bell, Outreach Minister; Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church BY PASTOR RICK

It was a thrill to recognize and appreciate Albert's life-long journey of faith and his commitment to the people of the community that we serve this past month. Rev. Albert Bell has been a remarkable minister in our midst. He came to Grace several years ago and has gained the love and admiration of all who know him. He attended the Hartford Seminary School of Black Ministry, and was ministering to those in the community long before he joined Grace. When people are suffering or need help, he is simply instantly present. With his big car he travels constantly to Betty Knox and to see and visit with people in hospitals, rehab centers and homes. He offers heart-felt advice and support and he is literally available 24/7 to respond to problems or challenges of others. His generosity is well known, and he always gives the "other" the benefit of the doubt and his love. He is a consummate Christian and represents Grace everywhere that he goes. He is a regular Bible Study attendee and is comfortable offering his own, personal take on matters theological and social. Albert ministers to Hartford, his family and to his friends at and around Grace.

some visitor, probably someone he was ministering to, unknowingly brought the plague to his home.

It got so bad that he had to destroy his mattress and box spring, and in attempting to help, some friends had boxes of his memorabilia and books, that were deeply important and meaningful to him, destroyed. It was like large portions of his life were simply no longer accessible. He was deeply hurt.

As he sorted through his things, after the problem was resolved, he only found a single envelope which included some of his writing when he attended the program at the Hartford Seminary. These writings necessarily have become very precious to him, and he shared them with me. As I read them, it was clear that Albert was a deeply motivated and engaged student. They showed a grasp of the theological which helped me to understand why everyone always addressed him in very respectful terms as Reverend. Albert has offered his writing to Grace Notes as a means for all of us to continue to better understand our faith and its words and their meaning. This issue will hold the first of these. Albert and I encourage others who have thoughts or ideas about their faith, our world, its brokenness and its hope, to submit your thinking in writing and we will publish it. Albert at 87 reminds each of us that faith is a journey, and a wonderful one, to be sure.

Not so long ago, he faced a crisis of his own. The apartment he lived in became infested with bed bugs. He had long lived there without problem, so it was that

Getting Ahead BY ELSA KOULLA



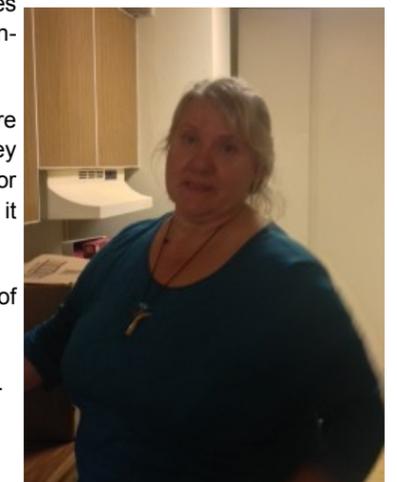
Louisa Barton-Duguay and Ron Bell, who graduated from the **Bridges out of Poverty** and **The Getting Ahead Workshops** last July, did make mental models of their lives and set three primary goals to begin creating their individual future story.

Since then, Louisa's and Ron's finances got better, they made some important connections **and BOOM...**

Saturday November 28, 2015, they were able to move into their new apartment. They are both very excited and very thankful for all the resources and people who made it happen.

The location is perfect for both because of its closeness to their employments' sites.

For the first time, I was able to notice a large smile illuminating Ron's face...



Black Liberation Theology BY ALBERT BELL

One of the most critical dilemmas that black theologians face today is: credibility. That is: practicing what you preach. Today, communities throughout the country are plagued by the scourge of drugs. The nation also has to deal with "youthful anarchy". The value system has been altered immensely; we now have a system where "Up is Down" and "Down is Up"; "Right is Wrong" and "Wrong is Right". These situations are critical, not even mentioning the horror of a growing homeless population.

The churches that are pastored by black ministers should be able to identify with these so-called problems. Through reading and the study of the bible, all of these crisis situations are mentioned and have been identified. The solution to the so-called problems is spelled out in scripture. There is no end in today's society; no end, to the proliferation of moral decadence.

Enter, "Liberation Theology" – that is, an interpretation of Christian faith that grows out of the experience of the poor; a theology that emphasizes liberation from social, political, and economic oppression as an anticipation of ultimate salvation. It calls for liberation from the decadence of human behaviors and assumptions of today's society. We have the precedents of time to guide us from Genesis to Revelation. What ministry is solely lacking is the perspective of the least of these; and an understanding of the radical agenda of Jesus to pay attention to and show compassion for those most vulnerable, those that live in the way of greed, power and false truths.

Living Generously BY NANCY URBAN

You see some of us around wearing "Live Generously" black and red t shirts. These are a part of the Thrivent Action Teams that members have been participating in for the past two years. Grants from these Action Teams have helped us to provide food and other supplies for Friday Gathering; allowed many to have a "beach day" this summer; supplied funds to update the men's bathroom; purchase tools and paint for the Fresh Start project and supplies for the Grace garden. Thrivent supplies the funds and others provide the time, energy, organization and work.

Often when we think of living generously we think in terms of money, but that is a very small part of being generous. A STORY: A few years ago we were exiting a New York subway station with our daughter on our

Liberation Theology is the focus we need! Most, if not all black churches are located in depressed areas of cities, surrounded by a veritable sea of human suffering and decadence. If the black churches and/or its leaders are aware of the poverty, crime and drugs in the community from Moses to Joshua, to the Rev. Martin Luther King, they would know that the die has already been cast. To gird for the struggles and indeed the battle the black church must face, it must exert its influence, its spiritual direction and leadership to bring us up from oppression.

To deliver us from moral destruction, to free us from economic bondage, to break the epidemic fatalism, to leave the circle, so as to chart a new course that will set the ship on a path of deliverance, just as we may see in "Exodus". Historically, the black church has always been in the forefront of the black quest for freedom.

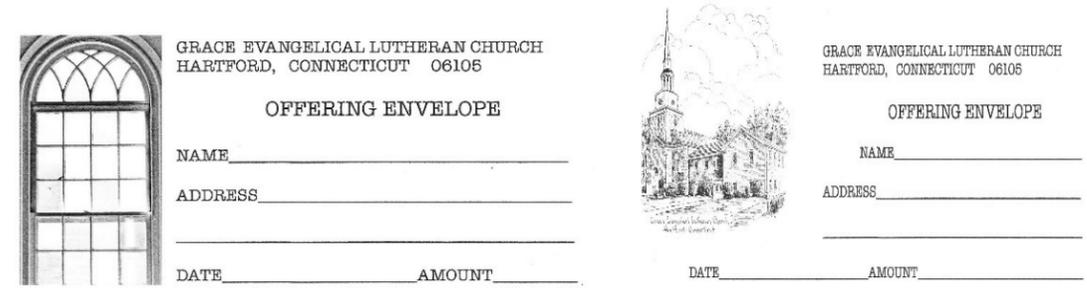
(Note: this piece was written more than thirty years ago and speaks to a time that black leaders and pastors were challenged to face a brutal deterioration; today the picture is oh so similar. There is more diversity in the suffering, perhaps, and the violence is more prevalent or less dependent on one's point of view, but the cities remain and the suffering continues and the radical thought of freedom and liberation remains in the heart of all people, and particularly black people. The Black Lives Matter movement is demanding justice; poverty has taken the worst toll in our history, and wealth disparity is an acknowledged fact. Black Liberation Theology calls all Christians to this battle. Every one of us!)

way to a fun family time in Prospect Park. As is usual around these stations there was a woman at the top of the stairs holding out a cup, begging for some coins. As usual, I started to pass her by not wanting to be bothered when behind me I heard my daughter's voice--- "Hello Doris---how are you doing today and is your daughter doing better? I can't stay and have lunch with you today, but let me buy you a bit to see you through the day." As I stood there with I'm sure my mouth hanging open, I watched my daughter and Doris walk arm in arm over to the food booth, chatting as food was purchased and goodbyes were said. A LESSON: My daughter showed me, once again, what it means to "Live Generously. (to be continued on page 6)

Offering Envelopes Will Be Different In 2016 BY DALE EBERHARDT

There are two reasons: the numbers are no longer needed for accounting, several members only use one envelope per month.

Next year members can use leftover envelopes, disregarding the old dates and numbers but writing their names on the envelopes. Members can use new envelopes that will be available. Some will be the style currently in the pew racks for visitors. Others will be our own locally-printed envelopes. Designs are being prepared. Here are a couple samples.



Christmas Eve Dinner Coming Soon: BY NANCY URBAN

Once again Grace will open its doors for a Christmas Eve dinner to be followed by a carol sing and Christmas Eve worship. This experience is Grace's Christmas Gift to the community and usually serves around 200 people. Waneta as head chef and other Friday Gathering volunteers as kitchen assistants will prepare and serve the meal from 5:00-6:30, but we need others to help out to make this a joyous event.

Before December 24th:

- Saturday, December 5th, 9:00-11:00 help decorate the fellowship hall.
- Sunday, December 20th, everyone who is able meet following worship, to prepare gift bags, wrap eating utensils, etc.
- A few people to prepare Christmas cards for the gift bags.
- Anyone who is able to bake cookies for dessert.
- PR folks to take invitation flyers to local businesses and apartments and social service agencies.
- Donations of toothpaste, soap, toothbrushes, lotion, etc. for gift bags.

On December 24th: 4:45-6:45

- (2) Greeters to welcome folks as they come in, do name tags and hand out tickets for gift bags.
- (1-2) Hosts to guide folks to seating, beverages etc. or carry food plates to those who need help.
- (2) Staffing the coffee, tea, and other beverage table
- (2) Servers to pass around the cookie trays
- (1-2) Staffing the gift bag table.

I know that everyone can get involved in some way. Please call: 860 416-3336 or email: nlurban@gmail.com and let me know how you would like to participate. OR be ready to say YES when you get a call from me.

Thanks to all.