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GRACE NOTES

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

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Bishop's Letter	1 & 3
Pastor's Message	2 & 6
A Gift of Love	3
Thank You Note	4
Faces of the City	5
Good Read	6
Celebration and Prayer Lists	7

ELCA Presiding Bishop Addresses President Trump's Refugee Executive Order

January 30, 2017

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Yesterday, we heard these words in the Gospel reading from Matthew 5:1-12, the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, Jesus lays out a vision for life in God's realm, characterized by seeing those who are often most disregarded, including the meek, the mourning and the peacemaker, as bearers of God's blessing. Over the coming weeks, we will continue to hear this Gospel, including Jesus' call for his disciples to be carriers of God's light and hope and reconciliation to a world deeply in need of them.

In this spirit, earlier last week I communicated with the Trump administration asking that it not stop the U.S. refugee admissions program or stop resettlement from any country for any period of time. The Bible calls us to welcome the stranger and treat the sojourner as we would our own citizens. I agree with the importance of keeping our country secure as the administration stated in its executive order last Friday, but I am convinced that temporarily banning vulnerable refugees will not enhance our safety nor does it reflect our values as Christians. Instead, it will cause immediate harm by separating families, disrupting lives, and denying safety and hope to brothers and sisters who are already suffering.

Refugees being resettled in the United States have fled persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political views and/or associations. They wait for years for the chance to go home. But sometimes, there is no home for them to go back to. We know from our partners at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) that only 1 percent of all refugees are chosen for resettlement.

(continued on page 3)

Volume 2017, Issue 2

Pulling Apart and Coming Together... By Pastor Rick

Over recent months, perhaps years, we have seemed to be moving in diametrically opposite directions as a people, as a country, and as a world. Some of us have already dropped out, stopped reading newspapers and watching TV news, looking for a safe place to be, or at the least a quiet one. Others have been spurred on to speak out, to demonstrate, to ask questions and to seek solutions. Whatever your choice at this point, and your capability, I have some good news this month.... I think!

Because, just as our world and country seem to be splitting apart, or at odds with each other, there is a far more dramatic thing happening, one that is worth acknowledging if not celebrating. It is probably too new for the latter.

And, as we have been reading the Sermon on the Mount on Sundays, and will continue to do so for a little while, we are hearing Jesus call us to a higher standard, a place that does not use position power or proximity to the heavens (Pharisees and scribes) as the authority to be exerted on this earth. The kingdom is coming, and it is not of this earth, it is the kingdom of God.

And, at the very same time, people of faith in Hartford, in America and in the world are coming together to address the frightening shifts that are occurring just when the most vulnerable are at the greatest risk, and as the things that really matter are getting covered by the bushel basket of greed, power and wealth. A couple of Sundays ago 500 or more people gathered for an Interreligious Service at St. Joseph's Cathedral. We heard from all walks of life, through their scripture or writings... and you know what? The message was the same! God calls us all together, and while we hear in different ways at different times and through different voices, the message of love and peace, of protecting those who are in danger, of loving the stranger and welcoming them are beginning to scream their way into our public discourse. Enough! At the same time as the 500 were gathered, four times that many were demonstrating at Bradley International Airport holding signs calling for the end of travel restrictions, and welcoming those strangers to our shores. Both events had the same purpose.

These demonstrations, a direct result of actions taken by our government, are taking place all over the world. Our light isn't shining as it once was... and we and they don't want a basket put on top of it. They are realizing just how important we have been to the world, a tower of civility and hope, not a dungeon of darkness and ism's. Read what our Presiding Bishop had to say (our cover to this issue). She is joining in with people of other faiths and calling for a new look, a new way. We, indeed, must do that. Our identity is at risk, along with our crumbling leadership in the world.

To paraphrase Walter Brueggemann, a sage theologian, this is the time that we must show the world how we as Christians are different. Jesus is showing us this by his actions and his words at the Mount. I like how professor Brueggemann presents his case; our case and the case of God's kingdom:

First we need to show HOSPITALITY. Grace is hospitality and has been for many, many years. We can't be silent as our borders and airplane doors are shut. There are States, Cities and Churches who are declaring themselves as sanctuaries... this is the call of the Gospel! IT IS!

Then, we need to show GENEROSITY. We are not tied to our "militaristic consumerism" unless we allow ourselves to be. We all have more than we need. There are others that need. Let's make the connection. How can we do this without creating a society of givers and takers? We all must be givers! All of us! And, we can all do more. (continued on page 6)



FEBRUARY'S BIRTHDAYS

2/04	Otto Koenig
2/07	Sally Nolen
2/09	Nina Kretschmer
2/10	Lee Whiteemore
2/11	Melissa Brown
2/15	Waltraud Jordan
2/16	Martin Holmeen
2/18	Randall De Rosa
2/22	Sue Carey
2/23	Roy Nelson
2/23	Paul Yigle-Kaljob
2/24	Lisa Dugan
2/26	Joseph Kisiel

FEBRUARY'S ANNIVERSARY

2/9 Judy and Pastor Rick Kremer 43

PLEASE PRAY FOR...

We give you thanks for all the saints who have been lifted up to live with you in light eternal. Especially Bob Makowski, who passed away on January 31.

Those who are unable to attend worship at Grace, especially Bertha Benoit; 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*), Marie Coburn (*friend of Pastor & Judy*), Angel Colon, Frankie Colon, Marcus Cosenza (*friend of Barbara Ruhe*), the Crawford Family, Alicia Dicken, Marietta Dickens, Vivian Drury (*Nina Kretschmer's mother*), Donna & Dale Eberhardt, David and Dorothea Glatte, Gil Holmeen, Marty Holmeen, Dave Holmes, the Hudson Family, Bodo Jahn, Mary Gill, Mark, Cindy & Tim Jones, Irene Kirschner, Bob Kremer (Pastor Rick's brother); Nina Kretschmer, Michael Lewis, Mike McGarry, Lynne Meyer (*mother of Jackie Meyer*), Pete Mobilia (friend of David Eberly and Pastor) Virginia Nicholas, Fairest Pledger, Laverne Pledger, Henry Rempt, Aaron Sanders, Gisele Scholz, Karen Scott, Mavis Smith, The Tetreault Family, Adrian and Felicita Texidor, Mildred Unfried, Sonia and Tyrell Wellington, Doborah Wendt(friend of the Kremer's); Gerline Wilks (*mother of Sonia Wellington*) and Linton White.

Looking for a Good Read? By Nancy Urban

May I suggest: A different Kind of Daughter: The Girl Who Hid from the Taliban in Plain sight. Usually my taste in reading goes to a good mystery or historical fiction, but this book caught my eye and once I started it was hard to put it down. Born into a very liberal family from Pakistan's violently oppressive northwest tribal region, Maria Toorpakai struggles with living out her true athletic nature where women playing sports is forbidden and girls rarely leave their homes. At age four she is left on her own as her older siblings are in school and her parents are off teaching in order to make a living. As she wanders outside, drawn by the noise of a men's volley ball game, she watches entranced by the athletic movements. When the ball comes near her hiding place she picks it up, throws it in the air, smacks it with her hand and delivers a beautiful serve back over into their area. She smiles as the men approach thinking they will now let her also play. Not so. The leader grabs her by the face, strikes her hard across the cheeks several times and as she lies bloody on the ground, they all come by and spit on her calling her "dirty girl" over and over again. The next day she burns all of her heavy beaded dresses, cuts her hair and with the help of her family takes on the persona of a boy, wearing her brother's old shorts and t shirts.

The rest of the book is her journey through her young years as a boy and into adulthood as a woman who is targeted by the Taliban because she is a champion athlete. There is intrigue, sports competition, the determination against all odds for Maria to pursue her dream, the mighty loving support of her family. We also get a glimpse of the political situation with no easy solutions. Most of all I was intrigued by the ongoing commitment of this family to follow their beliefs and ideals in spite of all that was against them. And by the way, it does have a happy ending.

This one Pakistani family can be an example and an inspiration for us as we "people of faith" seek to live out our Christian beliefs and ideals during these times of political upheaval and uncertainty.

A Different Kind of Daughter is available at the West Hartford Public Library

Pulling Apart and Coming Together... (continued from page 2)

Again, drawing on Brueggemann, then we must offer and be willing to receive FORGIVENESS. The third leg of the stool of light and salt is what we have been given without doing anything by our loving God. Forgiveness is a two way street; it is made essential by repentance and it is the crucible of love. Yes, we can forgive those whom we disagree with, dislike or even hate... our enemies and our friends. As Christians, it is what is expected of us... it is what it means to be Christian.

If the faiths can come together, and they are; we can. If Christians can act more, and listen, too, maybe we can bridge the crevices and mend the shreds of our identity and our hope for the world.

In coming weeks and months we will be engaging with Rabbi Steven Fuchs (to learn more about his new book on the Torah), because what the people of Jewish faith have done with the Sabbath (as one example) can be instructive to us as we try to pry ourselves away from a godless, secular existence that separates us and raises our fears and anxieties. We also hope to begin to learn more about our brothers and sisters of the Muslim faith. Conversations have begun with Imam Sammy Abdul Aziz for presentations at Grace about Islam and contemporary issues of war and peace.

This is a time of great change, and hopefully a time of great coming together. It is the latter that gives me hope and the former that challenges us to remember just who we are – we are Christians.

A Gift of Love...By Pastor Rick



These times are tough for urban and suburban churches alike, as an increasingly secular world smothers the vestiges of life present in so many communities of faith. At Grace we have contended with an aging building, a finicky lift, a broken dish washer (we feed people all of the time!), problems with our floors, and, sadly, a shrinking congregation, with a very alive ministry and purpose. As we pondered the financial challenges of our church, and the New Year coming, there was a sense of hope still present, and, even a doggedness about our intentions, and what we are doing in the world. Yet, still, we were concerned.

A former boss and now dear friend and his wife have been most interested in my current life and ministry. We often talked about Friday Gatherings, Janet's Closet and Fresh Start when we were together. They were interested and engaged.

Then, the call came; it came on the evening of December 29th. It was from my friend and his wife. They called to say that they had decided to make a contribution to our ministry. From what our Treasurer has told us, a gift of this size is rarely ever seen or experienced, and when it is, it is typically a bequest from a long-term member. These folks are alive and well and consciously saying that something important is happening at Grace and through Grace. He and his wife decided to make a gift... A gift of \$35,000.

A gift of love....

ELCA Presiding Bishop Addresses President Trump's Refugee Executive Order

(continued from page 1)

People of faith helped start and still sustain the refugee resettlement program in the United States following World War II. As Lutherans, many of our ancestors faced the pain of having to flee their homes and the joy of being welcomed in new communities across the United States. As we have done throughout history, millions of Lutherans across the country honor our shared biblical values as well as the best of our nation's traditions by offering refuge to those most in need. We are committed to continuing ministries of welcome that support and build communities around the country and stand firmly against any policies that result in scaling back the refugee resettlement program.

We must offer safety to people fleeing religious persecution regardless of their faith tradition. Christians and other religious minorities suffer persecution and rightly deserve protection, but including additional criteria based on religion could have discriminatory effects that would go against our nation's fundamental values related to freedom of religion.

I invite ELCA congregations into learning, prayer and action on behalf of those who seek refuge on our shores. The ELCA "[Social Message on Immigration.](#)" [AMMPARO strategy](#) and [LIRS resources](#) are good places to start. Those who have been part of resettling refugees or have their own immigration experience have important stories to share with their communities and testimony to make. I also encourage you to consider adding your voice by calling your members of Congress to share your support for refugees and using online advocacy opportunities through current alerts at [ELCA Advocacy](#) and [LIRS](#).

In Matthew 25:35, Jesus said, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Our Lord not only commanded us to welcome the stranger, Jesus made it clear that when we welcome the stranger into our homes and our hearts – we welcome him.

God's peace,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop

What a Wonderful Surprise!



This past Sunday, three sisters (might as well be), Emma Carr, Rebecca Lewis and Lou Oliver, provided the congregation with an unexpected and simply wonderful breakfast as a very important reminder of the history that we all share, a history that is particularly important for us to learn and hear about in this day and time. February is Black History Month! Wow!

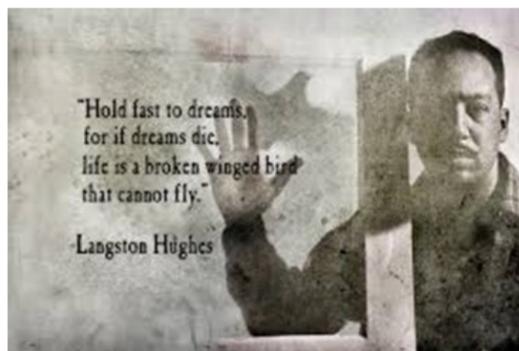
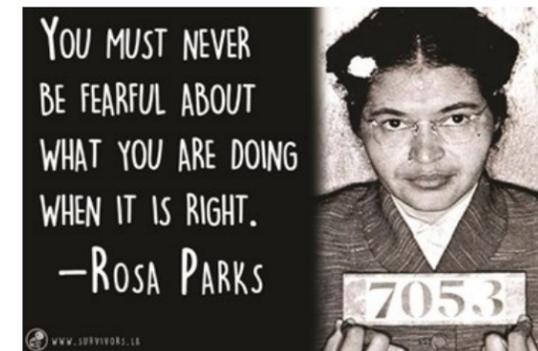
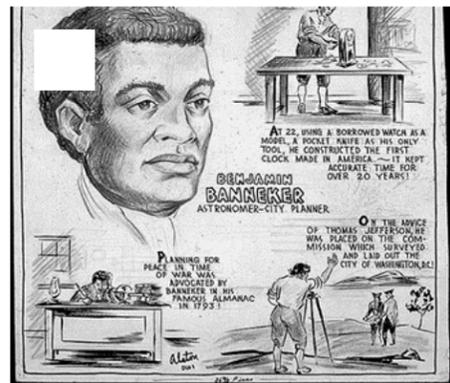
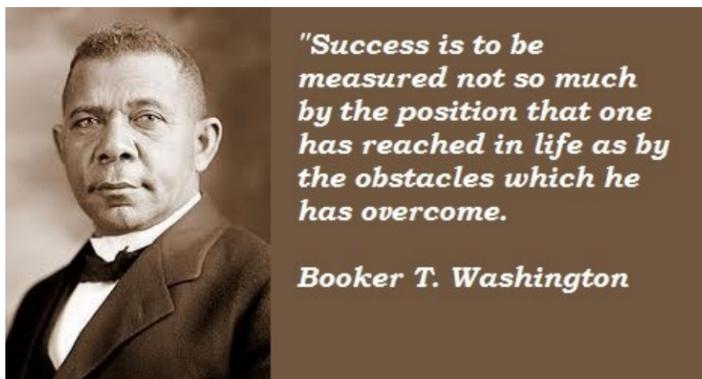
The "Wow!" is for the thoughtfulness and the surprise that these three employed in reminding us of the importance of remembering and learning more about the history of Black people in this country.

The breakfast was delicious, from biscuits to grits, apples to sausages, potatoes to fruit, it was simply fantastic. And, all who were there were impressed, just as I was! Every table had information about Black History and the people who made it. I loved sitting at the table where Langston Hughes was remembered! If you don't know him, "google" him!

Just a couple of weeks ago I attended my first Board meeting as a Trustee of the Collaborative Center for Justice in Hartford. Interestingly, on this particular Sunday, another Board member came to worship at Grace with her husband. What a great time for them to come and sit with us and have breakfast with many of the figures from our country's past.



Let's all celebrate Black History Month, and appreciate the wonderful way our sisters Emma, Rebecca and Lou shared their enthusiasm and creativity with us. Grace is the place! And, they proved that once more. Amen.



Faces of the City...By Theresa Sullivan Barger (copied from the Hartford Magazine, 2/17 issue)

A day after moving to Hartford from Seattle, Tim Mundy walked into the Grace Lutheran Church basement for a complimentary dinner. When he saw the portraits mounted on the walls, he knew this wasn't the usual soup kitchen.

"I sort of looked up and noticed a couple of these faces staring down at me. I felt welcomed," says Mundy, who was staying in a shelter and looking for work.

The pastor, the Rev. Rick Kremer, joined him for dinner. Following dinner, Mundy helped clear the table, then sat for a photo in front of a painted backdrop set up in the dining area.

Mundy's photo will join the hundreds of black and white portraits that line the basement walls, where the community has been gathering for Friday night dinners since Christmas Eve 2010. The headshots, which volunteer photographer Bernie Michel mounts on foamboard, rest in rows of wooden slats.

"You know, God makes the faces," says Michel, of Hartford. "It gives people a different way of seeing themselves when they see an 8X10 of themselves up on the wall. These are people that, a lot of them need the reinforcement, so it works out pretty well."

The Asylum Hill neighborhood church began hosting Friday night dinners to help area residents, many of whom had lost jobs during the recession.

"It was like an act of faith. We have no money," said the Rev. Darrell Urban, a congregation member and retired Lutheran



minister. "We said, 'This is not a food program. This is a place where you want to belong and become a community, help each other,' and so the pictures on the wall have got to do with this sense of community and belonging."

Newcomers can't distinguish between the volunteers, church members and area residents. Some volunteers become worshippers, such as Joycelyn Roberts-Agyemang, who began as a chef and expanded her duties to manage the free clothing closet.

Like many diners, Carrie McCall initially came for the fresh-cooked meal, but returned for the people. When she arrived at a recent Friday night dinner after an absence, she greeted fellow diner and church member Sue Carey with a hug.

McCall, who had had surgery, appreciated the prayers and the meals sent to her while recuperating.

Lynn Johnson began attending Friday night dinners to collect and write people's stories at the request of a friend — a church member and volunteer chef. A psychotherapist, Johnson plans

to "capture their essence," she says, and print the stories alongside their photos. The pastor hopes to put the stories and photos into a book.

The portraits capture children, teenagers and adults, young and old, Black, white, Hispanic and

Native American — displayed in no particular order on the walls, just as the diners mix together while church member David Eberly plays the piano. The faces in the photos are those of people who are worshippers, homeless, professionals, laborers, chefs, clergy and unemployed, or facing addiction, mental health and family challenges.

Some stopped by for a meal just once, others, nearly every Friday night for six years.

"I recognize them all. A lot of them don't come any more. They've moved away, died or got shot," Urban says. "As it does for Bernie, it's about finding the face of God in other people's faces."

