

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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Any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter may be sent to secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net, or put in the tray on the secretary's desk.



From the Pastor's Desk

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Twenty years ago this past March, Charleen and I drove back to Pittsfield from Marietta, Ohio, where I was serving as Pastor of Putnam Congregational Church. A few months earlier while home for Christmas, I had promised the Elders of the church then that I would send some information to them, because I been approached several times during the previous year and a half about the possibility of serving as Pastor here. I wasn't really looking to move from Ohio, as I was part way through a Dr. of Ministry program at Covenant Seminary then, but Grace Church had been impacted heavily by General Electric having left town, and I knew the church was facing the very real possibility of closing its doors. And even though we weren't looking to move Charleen and I were deeply concerned about the welfare of the church we had both grown up in.

Unbeknownst to me, the congregation at their annual meeting in January made the decision to extend an official call, and it was that call that precipitated our decision to drive out in March to do some visioning with the congregation. So that Sunday in March after worship, we had a meal together in the church basement and then spent about 3 ½ hours sitting around the table discussing the future of Grace Church. (I had yet to accept the call).

I began the discussion by asking six questions, four of which I asked again recently on an insert in our bulletin. They are: 1. *If a stranger walked into Grace Church today, how would you define the identity of our church in one or two sentences?* 2. *What do you like most about Grace Church and why do you go here rather than to another church in the community?* 3. *If you could change something about Grace Church, what would it be?* 4. *If lack of money or people were not an obstacle, what is your wildest dream for Grace Church?* Each of those present then were asked to write their answers on a piece of paper and then I had each person read their answers. There are not many left who were a part of that original meeting twenty years ago.

Twenty years ago seems, on one hand like just yesterday. On the other hand it seems like a long time ago, and indeed it is- a full generation. Our children were quite young then; Ian was nine and Rachel was five. Now they are both adults and I have grandchildren almost that age now. But the questions are equally as relevant now as they were then. What do we see as the future of Grace Church?

I certainly do not want to minimize the contribution of those of my parent's generation who had the vision to start this church in this community. And I do not want to minimize the contribution of all those of my generation who have continued that work, but if I do not ask the question about the next generation, then I am being irresponsible in my duties as Pastor.

Our core values have remained true to the original vision of Grace Church- to be a continuing witness to the historic gospel in this community. Our identity as a church is still the same as what Peter articulated in his first Epistle, and our vision is no different from the vision that Jesus passed on to his disciples 2000 years ago. But the question we have to ask now is, how do we do that today in the community and culture we have at hand? This was no different than the question that Paul and the other Apostles had to ask in each new community they entered for the first time.

Pittsfield is not the same town it was in 1959. But the gospel is the same. How do we effectively bear witness to it now? This is why I asked you these four questions. Pray about how you answer them.

We will be giving attention to our vision as a church for the summer months. At the end of the summer revisit those questions and see if you would answer them differently.



Pastor Tom Bridgman

Missions Corner



Schmidt's Prayer Letter, May 2015 An Extraordinary Sunday

3rd floor of the church, 2 PM. "Want a banana smoothie?" Out of the blue, a guy who rarely comes to the English Speakers' Fellowship (ESF), brings all the fixings for smoothies, and proceeds to delight our palate! Then in come many others that have not been around for a long time. The room fills up. The door opens and the Mexican dad of the newborn baby with his father and Russian stepmother visiting from Mexico enter. Congratulations ensue all around. He passes around some spicy Mexican candy instead of cigars. That morning when I was making brownies, Dieter had asked, "Are you expecting a crowd?" "Yes." And there was. In the midst of them, we saw God's wonderful provision in a unique situation. In the morning service we had met an English-speaking Russian lady and her daughter. That afternoon they also came to ESF for some Christian fellowship. It was amazing to see this Russian Christian translating the Bible study to our other Russian visitor, who did not know English, nor much of the Bible. We were very encouraged to see how God works in this international Group! There were 25 people from 10 nations represented that day at ESF. We look forward to what the Lord will do for the Global Day of Prayer!

Jesus, in Matthew 21:13, said that "the church" was to be a house of prayer [for all nations]. On that day of Passion Week **Jesus also had an extraordinary day!** It began by entering Jerusalem with praises all around Him, to clearing out the Temple of enterprising businesses, to offering healing to the blind and lame. Meanwhile the children still shouted Hosannas while the Pharisees plotted against Him. At the end of that long day Jesus headed to Bethany, where He knew He would find quiet, rest, comfort, and food.

We pray that in the midst of busyness, our guests can find the Sapporo Guest Home to also be a place of refuge and quiet. **Our days are usually of the ordinary kind** of getting ready for guests and preparing for ESF, among other things. This month is unusually busy, so we need prayer for energy, efficiency, and the right balance. We are looking forward to our friends from Massachusetts visiting for three days from May 18 on, and shortly after that Andrea will be here for a couple of weeks!

A year from now we are planning a home assignment for 9 months. Please pray with us for a suitable couple to come and fill in during our absence. If you know of anyone who would be interested, please get in contact with us. Our work does not require Japanese ability, though some basics are helpful.

This year we get to celebrate **the extraordinary event of CIM/OMF's 150th year anniversary!** God's unchangeableness and faithfulness to OMF is being celebrated in many different countries throughout the year. There will be events in Japan too, so please pray that God would use these opportunities for His glory and for many to be stirred to pray for missions and consider going themselves.

Praise for good cooperation and good atmosphere at the International Welcome Party in April

Pray for:

- various CIM/OMF's 150 year celebration events in Sapporo June 5-7
- for two short term prayer groups from the UK and the US, as they travel in June to churches in Hokkaido to encourage believers, and to pray for openness to the Gospel in Japan
- for energy and smooth running of the Guest Home in the next two months with many coming and going for Rebekah, as she travels to the US on June 13, to join her husband Kevin for the summer

Rejoicing in the faithfulness of God,

Dieter and Shelley



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Summer Schedule

Beginning **Sunday, June 7th**, we will switch to our summer schedule of **worship at 10 a.m.** Sunday School has been discontinued until the fall, to give our Sunday School teachers a well-deserved break.

Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are invited to meet on **Saturday, June 20th** for a time of devotional, discussion, prayer, and fellowship from **7:00 -8:30 a.m.** The men are using *Humility, by Andrew Murray*. Doug Rose in Stockbridge is hosting. Refreshments will be served.



Thank You!

Thank you to all those who came out for our Church Spring Cleaning Day last month! Yard work, window washing, and general sprucing up helped to make the property look nicer.

Prayer Gatherings

All are encouraged to join us for our monthly prayer gathering as we intercede together, seek God's face that we might grow in grace and the knowledge of His love, and reflect His image in our church and community. This time of corporate prayer on **Sunday, May 31st**, and again on **Sunday June 28th from 5:00-6:00 p.m.** in the sanctuary.



Church Community

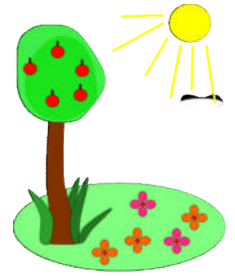
Let's take advantage of the longer days and more relaxed pace (for some) of the summer months to get together in each other's homes, or for outings, or just for a cool glass of lemonade and conversation. It can be a challenge to make the time, but the importance and benefits of cultivating relationships in the body and knowing how to better pray for one another are worth the effort.

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...but encouraging one another... Hebrews 10:24





June 2015



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	1 7:00 Addictions Victorious	2	3	4	5	6
7 10:00 Worship	8 7:00 Addictions Victorious	9	10	11	12	13
14 10:00 worship	5 7:00 Addictions Victorious	16	17	18	19	20 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship
21 Fathers' Day 10:00 Worship	22 7:00 Addictions Victorious	23	24	25	26	27
28 10:00 Worship	29 7:00 Addictions Victorious	30				

