

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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Welcome to the October edition of *Grace Notes*. Please send any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter to secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net.



From the Pastor's Desk

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (Colossians 1:18)

As those of you who were in attendance in worship through the summer know, I spent the whole summer preaching on our identity as a church and what God is calling us to be and do. I have preached similar series, though not as protracted, on the same theme in previous churches I have served. I probably should have warned you in advance, when I have preached on what it means to be the church, I have found that for some reason some people have gotten angry. Initially, I must confess, when I was new to ministry I was taken by surprise by this reaction. Since then I guess I have come to expect that criticism often accompanies the task of preaching. But more importantly, though, I think that biblical teaching on the identity of the church is apt to threaten our assumptions of what it means for us to be a church.

That said, John Calvin and the other reformers defined the three marks of the church as: the true preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of church discipline. We assume the first two as common practice in all churches and would be surprised to find any church in which these did not occur on a regular basis. It is the last of the three which sets us as modern people back on our heels. Church discipline smacks of unnecessary control. But according to one theologian (Louis Berkhof) it is summarized as the “maintaining of purity of doctrine and safeguarding the holiness of the sacraments.” With all three of the marks of the church, the burden of responsibility rests upon those who are charged by the congregation with the leadership of the local church.

Churches of the Reformed tradition have always recognized, along with the office of Pastor (Teaching Elder) the office of Ruling Elder. This office has been preserved most consistently in Presbyterian churches. While the office of Ruling Elder was lost in many Congregational churches along the way, it was always a part of historic Congregational polity (government) as well. The statement which I read from the Cambridge Platform of 1649 in worship a few weeks ago attests to this. What the Platform tells us in a nutshell is that the responsibilities of the Ruling Elder as well as that of Pastor involve both administration and shepherding. To be charged with the oversight (for that is what Elders are- “overseers”) is a weighty thing. That is why so much weight is placed on character and spiritual maturity by Paul in his first letter to Timothy.

I want to attest to the commitment of the three men who meet with me for three to four hours almost every Tuesday night at the church. I have a visible role as I am the paid “professional” (I say that with reservation). These three men (Tom Ross, Bob Kirkman and Tom Lanoue) are not paid, but I feel especially privileged to serve with these three men who take their responsibilities as seriously as they do. Our work is hard. We put in long hours together (and drink a lot of coffee). Do we always agree on everything? Not hardly! But this is where iron sharpens iron, and we have the responsibility of hearing each other out.

JoAnn submitted an article for last month's newsletter- *Praying for Your Pastor from Head to Toe*. Maybe you think I need special prayer in each of these areas. I know I do. Please keep praying for me. But along with me, please pray for your Elders too. They need your prayer too. After all we are each jars of clay, in whom the perfect Chief Shepherd has chosen to invest the burden of leadership. And it is really about his glory, *that in everything he might be preeminent*.

Thank you, Tom, Bob and Tom.

Pastor Tom Bridgman



Missions Corner

What Was Meant for Evil... A Report from South Sudan

“Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy.”

Proverbs 12:20

In July, our gospel radio station, “Nehemiah Trumpet Call” NTC – 97.3 FM, was fire-bombed – destroying our transmitter and severely damaging the building. It appeared to be a victory for those opposed to the Gospel of Christ and its life affirming hat message of hope and reconciliation in conflict ridden South Sudan.

Their “victory” was short lived. An appeal immediately went out in the U.S. and members of the Christian community responded. Within a month enough funds were raised to replace the 500 watt transmitter with one capable of 1000 watts – effectively doubling our broadcast range and the number of listeners! Equipped with invaluable technical support from

Galcom International in Canada, William Levi and I were able to safely deliver the new transmitter to Eastern Equatorial South Sudan (with a few “bumps in the road” – literally and figuratively) by the end of August.

Our South Sudanese team on the ground had spent the month prior to our revival repairing and rebuilding the station. Field Director Timothy Levi, himself a self-taught radio engineer, prepped the staff in all the technical aspects of properly installing the equipment. They were ready for our arrival. The joy on their faces when they saw the equipment is memorable. They immediately went to work. What a blessing to watch them – Benjamin Levi scaling the 300 ft tower to connect the antenna with only flip flops on his feet – the team working quietly and efficiently, stooping only to pray and problem solve together when the inevitable technical problems emerged. Within 36 hours of our arrival the gospel message was in the air throughout Eastern Equatorial and Northern Uganda. Phone calls started coming in from far and wide from listeners along with congratulations from various government officials who see the broadcasts as a stabilizing and positive influence in a land torn by war and rumors of war.



Part of Operation Nehemiah’s values statement reads “We believe that a people’s dignity is enhanced by meaningful work, education and discipleship...the primary focus of Operation Nehemiah is to promote the Gospel that leads to repentance and salvation. This is the fundamental measure of success in all of our efforts.” By this measure, and we are confident in God’s economy, this effort was successful indeed!

Bob Kirkman

Development Coordinator

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

A Ministry of Samaritan's Purse

It's that time of year again! Time to prepare our Operation Christmas Child shoe boxes! Millions of children around the world will experience Christmas joy when they receive gift-filled boxes and hear the Gospel through Christian literature. **But it doesn't end there!** The children have the opportunity to take part in **The Greatest Journey**, a 12-lesson discipleship and evangelism program offered in their own language. Upon completion of the program, graduates receive their own copy of a New Testament. What starts out as a simple gift--a shoe box containing toys, school supplies, and toiletries--is used by God to transform the hearts of millions of children and their families.

This will be **our church's sixth year serving as the Relay Center for Northern Berkshire County**. That means people from around the county will be bringing their packed shoeboxes to our church during **National Collection Week, November 16-23. Over a thousand boxes come through our center.**

You can participate in this ministry in several ways:

- Pack a shoebox by yourself or with a friend. Decorative "GO" (Gospel Opportunity) boxes are available at the church. .
- Purchase individual items that can go in a box (rather than packing an entire box yourself).
(For both of these options, please make use of the packing brochures with gift suggestions and a list of items to avoid)
- Serve as a volunteer at our Relay Center during Collection week. Opportunities for service include:
 - ⇒ Putting together gift boxes from individual donated items
 - ⇒ Greeting those who come through our doors with their donated boxes
 - ⇒ Baking cookies to offer our guests
 - ⇒ Carrying packed shoeboxes from the cars into the church (**young people encouraged to apply!**)
 - ⇒ Packing the shoeboxes into larger boxes for transport to the Northampton Collection Center
 - ⇒ Loading the larger boxes onto the transport truck
 - ⇒ Record keeping of the number of boxes brought in each day, and from whom

To sign up and to get more information, please speak to Charleen Bridgman, Relay Center Coordinator at 499-3040, or email to secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net

Operation Christmas Child now reaches over 100 million children a year and impacts individual children, families and whole communities with the Good News of God's love.



Help spread the joy!



Seven Steps For Resolving Conflict

Mathew 18:15 says "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."

Although Jesus is speaking specifically of dealing with sin, John Orthberg, a pastor at Mando Park Presbyterian church in Mando, CA, in his book *Everybody's Normal Till You Get To Know Them*, applies it to conflict in general. He broke down resolving conflict into the following seven steps:

1. If there is conflict
2. You
3. Go
4. To the person
5. In private
6. And discuss the problem
7. For the purpose of reconciliation

The Cliff Notes version of Jesus' instructions is "Go to the other person and directly discuss the problem" The problem is, as a rule, we don't do it. We face powerful reasons to ignore his instructions and are tempted to go the other way.

Step one: "Acknowledge Conflict". To be alive means at some point we will all be in conflict but many would prefer that conflict does not exist. The truth is conflict is often complex and hard to resolve even with goodwill. It's important to face conflict squarely in the eye. Jesus knew that if we are to live in communities, un-addressed and unresolved breakdowns are not acceptable.

Step two: "I must own responsibility." We don't want to take responsibility. Often we feel "It's not fair that I should have to be the first one to take the first step." In fact Jesus goes so far as to say if you've done something wrong, take the first step. He then says, if the other person has done something wrong, you still take the first step. Why? Because people who value community are people who own responsibility and deal with relational breakdowns.

Step three: "Approach, don't avoid, the person you are in conflict with." Jesus tells us to "GO!" take action and don't let resentment fester. Avoidance kills community and causes resentment to fester inside us. We must approach, not avoid, the people with whom we have conflict.

Step four: "No third parties." Jesus wants us to go directly to the other person. Usually this is the last thing we want to do. It's more fun to go to someone else and commiserate with them.

Step five: "Use sensitivity". Jesus says that we are to approach the person of our conflict "in private" and deal with it "just between the two of you." We don't want to embarrass another person by forcing them to respond in front of an audience. We should approach them in the way we would want to be approached.

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Step six: "Direct communication." "Show him his fault," Jesus says. This, too, is easier said than done. Very often we address the problem indirectly to soften the blow. We must watch our tendency to get fuzzy precisely when the truth is most needed and the most difficult to speak.

Here is an example of direct communication.

- a. Describe clearly what you observed: "You weren't really listening to me."
- b. Explain how it hurt you: "I found myself feeling that I don't matter to you."
- c. Tell what the consequences have been: "This could cause distance in our relationship, and I don't want that."
- d. Ask for the change you would like: "I want to connect when we're together."

Last but not least, is step seven: "Aim at reconciliation." Jesus says, "If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." The goal in conflict situations is not to win or score points—it's reconciliation. Jesus knows that reconciliation is rarely simple or quick. But it is the express command for his church. This should be the goal so that all the other work will be worthwhile.

Direct confrontation doesn't always result in reconciliation. In those situations, we may need one of God's greatest gifts--forgiveness.



*Everyone says forgiveness
is a lovely idea, until
they have something to
forgive.*

C. S. Lewis





Grace Church News

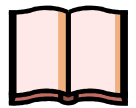
"Treasuring the Word Together "Fellowship Meal



On **Sunday, October 11th**, will share a fellowship meal following worship and recite Psalm 119 together, each person reciting the stanzas he or she has been memorizing. Dessert and beverages will be provided. Please bring a dish to share and join us as we celebrate God's Word and this accomplishment together!

Ladies' Bible Class to Resume

The Tuesday afternoon Ladies' Bible Class will resume on October 13th. The class will be held at the church from 1:15-2:45 p.m. All women are welcome to be a part of the study. For more information please speak to Margaret McBurney.



Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are invited to be a part of the monthly Men's Prayer Fellowship **Saturday, October 17th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.**, at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. Enjoy a time of Bible study, discussion, prayer, and fellowship. Refreshments will be served.



Prayer Gathering

Our monthly prayer vigil will be held in the sanctuary from **5:00-6:00 p.m.** on **Sunday, October 25th**. All are encouraged to come together in prayer before the Lord as we acknowledge our dependence on Him in all things, and seek to know Him and His direction for our part in His kingdom work.

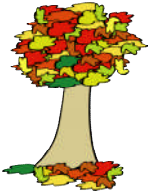


Encouragement Needed

As the weather gets cooler, lets make opportunities for warm fellowship. Consider getting together for tea, coffee, or hot chocolate. Look around and see who could use a card or a phone call. Consider sharing what God is doing in your life ,sharing His Word with one another, or memorizing Scripture together.

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...but encouraging one another... (Hebrews 10:24,25)





October 2015



SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

				1	2	3
4 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	5 7:00 Addictions Victorious	6	7	8	9	10
11 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 12:30 Fellowship Meal	12 7:00 Addictions Victorious	13 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	14	15	16	17 7:00-8:30 a.m. Men's Prayer Fellowship 
8 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	19 7:00 Addictions Victorious	20 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	21	22	23	24
25 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer Gathering	26 7:00 Addictions Victorious	27 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	28	29	30	31