

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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Happy Thanksgiving/Merry Christmas!

Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. . Psalm 136



May your Christmas be blessed and centered on Christ!



From the Pastor's Desk

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;... (Isaiah 61:1)

I have to confess, a trip to Finland was not on my radar screen a year ago. It is not something either Charleen or I had anticipated. Nevertheless, after a nine hour flight to Istanbul and a three hour leg from there, Ian and Octavio met us in the airport in Helsinki. We spent the first night in a guest home run by an Aussie/New Zealand couple working with YWAM. The next day Charleen, Ian and I boarded the bus for an eight hour trip north to Kajaani, while Octavio waited another day for his mom and sister to arrive from Mexico.

The purpose of our trip, of course, was to participate in the wedding of Ian's friend, Octavio, and his Finnish bride, Mari. What a pleasure to take part in their wedding, and what a delight so see that part of the world, including a 3 ½ hour car ride to the Arctic Circle, replete with reindeer in the road on the way.

Mari and Octavio met while both were doing missions work, he with YWAM, and she with a Finnish mission organization in Kosovo. We have known Octavio for almost ten years, as he has passed through our home many times while coming and going. He has really become like part of our family; in fact Charleen refers to him as "my other son". We met Mari back in the spring as she had flown over from Europe on her way to meet Octavio's family in Mexico. We found her to be quite comfortable in our home, level-headed and spiritually mature. I'm convinced she will make a wonderful wife for our "other son".

As you might imagine, the wedding was quite an international affair; Scripture was read in English, Spanish and Finnish. I had an interpreter to translate my sermon into Finnish, and Octavio and Mari recited their vows to each other in their respective languages. Along with that there was about a dozen of Mari's friends who made the trip from Kosovo- all first generation Christians. One of Mari's Kosovar friends is married to a young Austrian attorney, who is seeking to practice refugee law in that part of the world as a Christian.

Speaking of refugees, we here in the US only hear and read of what is happening in Europe at present. Europe is experiencing the worst refugee crisis since WWII. Many are going to Germany, the UK, and the Scandinavian countries. We began to see that the first day we were there. Some are from Afghanistan, Somalia, and other countries, but the majority are from Syria. The governments of these European countries are really scrambling to accommodate them as they flood across their borders, Finland included. They are being placed in various cities and towns all over Finland, including the small city, Rovaniemi, right on the arctic circle. We saw evidence while riding the buses and also while attending worship in the small city of Kajaani on Sunday.

We here in America, as well as in many other countries, talk about protecting our borders against those who would come to our shores illegally, especially those who might be intent on doing harm. That's certainly understandable, given 9/11. But as Christians, we need to ask how God might be calling us as the church to respond.

A generation ago, we had those in and from Grace Church who responded to Vietnamese "boat people", yes, even here in Pittsfield. Thankfully there are many churches at the forefront of response to the refugee crisis in Europe. And there are those who have left non-Christian countries where they have witnessed the tactics of the likes of ISIS and seen the comparison of the gospel in the response of Christians. It seems like that should tell us something. We need to pray that God would help us discern the difference between protecting our way of life and being an intentionally missional church.



Pastor Tom Bridgman



Missions Corner



Mission Snapshots

Pre-Transition in the Life of Bob and Judy Long

Dr. and Mrs. Judy Long report that this was the last year of providing member care at the Christian Medical and Dental Association Continuing Education meetings in Thailand, something they have done for the last 12 years. It has been a year full of travel and ministry opportunities, as well as family time. Granddaughter Hannah accompanied them to the meetings in Thailand and helped with child care. Following that, Hannah traveled with them to Beijing, after which they enjoyed visits with long time friends. May through July included Bob's successful surgery for spinal stenosis as well as trips to San Antonio, Albany, and Wheaton. In August it was back to Asia accompanying the couple who are transitioning into the Longs' member care role in that area. The Pastors to Missionaries conference was in North Carolina in October. November and December hold a number of opportunities for visits on the west and east coasts with former colleagues in mission, as well as family. They look forward to December when they will travel to Kenya to see daughter Becky and 7 grandchildren for the first time in 1 1/2 years. This year also saw the celebration of 49 years of marriage. Their final overseas member care trips will be next year when Bob will be 79 and Judy 72. They write, "We pray you have found God very present in your transitions in 2015!"

"Shine! God's call to the Christian Employee" Conference Report from Susan Stone in Romania

Many, many thanks to all who prayed and gave financially! The conference was a smashing success – God worked mightily: prayers were answered, hearts were touched, minds were changed and people committed themselves to taking practical steps of obedience toward "shining" more for God in the workplace. The best image that I can come up with is a huge super-healthy, super-tasty spiritual smoothie with all the participants standing around on stools thirstily and enthusiastically slurping up the contents with gigantic straws.

Prayer requests related to the Conference: **1.** That each participant will follow through on the practical applications that they made, to shine more brightly for God in the workplace. **2.** This fall, partnering with young professionals who attended the conference I will be doing mini "Shine" conferences around the country in OSCER groups and churches.

A note from the Schmidts in Japan: The Lord is calling people from all nations to Himself.

We experienced this in two ways recently. Last Sunday was our church's 31st anniversary. The excitement was palpable as 163 people filled up the church. The small beginning in 1984 has resulted in members from the Japanese, Korean, Chinese and English congregations all praising the Lord in their own language. God's faithfulness was visible. Two women got baptized that morning, and Shelley sang in a choir in 4 languages. Lord willing, by this time next year a Japanese pastor will be leading Sapporo International Church!

The English Speakers' Fellowship (ESF) had 45 participants from 12 nations at its International Welcome Party in October. Hannah led a fun icebreaker, a Kenyan taught us a song/dance in Swahili, and we ate Mexican Burritos. ESFers brought give-away things, so many new students left with coats, boots and warm clothes in preparation for their first winter. Keep praying that some helpful, supportive leaders could be part of ESF. This is especially needed as we go on Home Assignment. *(continued next page)*

We will be going on a Home Assignment at the end of March 2016, for 9 months. Please be in prayer for the many details to work on before we go. We are so thankful to already be in contact with a couple from Canada that has applied to take over the Guest Home ministry! Please pray for accommodation and transportation to fall into place before we get home, first in Switzerland, but from July on also in the USA.

After a busy time in the Guest Home in September and October, we have come to a reprieve. Yet even here the nations gather. We have 2 Serve Asia Workers (SAW) with us, from Hong Kong and Sweden. A young career missionary from Canada is soon to arrive. His parents are OMF Missionaries in Japan. We are thankful that guests find these accommodations a home-away-from-home, and that we can serve "the nations" in this way.

We praise the Lord for Caitlyn, a SAW from Australia here to help with childcare for young families in Language Study. One day a week she comes to give us a hand at the Guest Home. As we get ready for winter, there are many preparations to make inside and outside the house, so her help comes in handy. We also appreciate her expertise in technical things. What a joy and encouragement to see the enthusiasm of this next generation of the Lord's servants coming to Japan!

Rejoicing in God who calls and leads, and thanking Him for you partnering with us,

Dieter and Shelley

Psalm 67

3 May the peoples praise you, God;

may all the peoples praise you.

4 May the nations be glad and sing for joy

Pray...

...for the search for a new pastor to come to a successful conclusion soon

...for the details to work out smoothly for the couple from Canada to come and fill in for us during our Home Assignment

...for the English Service on Nov. 29 with a guest speaker

...for the various Christmas events:

- Dec. 11, Shakaijin-club Christmas Party

- Dec. 13, English Speakers' Fellowship Christmas Party at our house

- Dec. 20, Christmas Worship Service of our church

- Dec. 24, Christmas Eve Outreach Service

...for God to call many of the SAW's to long term service

...for a blessed year-end English Service with the ESF group on Dec. 27

...for us to make significant progress in planning our Home Assignment

Wedding Bells in Finland

By Ian Bridgman

I had the stereo thumping and was cleaning up the last few dishes from supper when I heard a pounding on the window. It was Mari, my best friend's new wife, waving for me to come outside and shouting something I couldn't hear through the triple-paned windows found in every house in Finland. She and Octavio had gone to the grocery store, and I wasn't sure why she seemed so excited to have me help carry in a few bags. I was still stuffing my feet in my shoes when she burst through the door.

"Come outside! Northern Lights!"

The three of us stood out in the street, focused on a greenish-white glow on the horizon. At first, it wasn't all that impressive, and could have easily been mistaken for a patch of city lights or smoke in the distance. Then it began to shift, moving higher into the sky and becoming richer in color until a band of emerald green stretched overhead. Soon, a second batch of lights appeared, waves of white and red, and shimmering curtains that appeared to drop vertically out of the sky. Octavio and Mari eventually noticed the freezing temperatures and went inside, but I stayed, mesmerized by the dancing lights. It was the most spectacular natural display I have ever seen.

I actually saw the northern lights twice during my time there, one of the many blessings experienced during my six-week adventure in Europe's northeastern corner. I was there, of course, to celebrate the marriage of Octavio Gonzalez to Mari Kaatrasalo. Many of you know Octavio, my friend from Hermosillo, Mexico, who has spent a considerable amount of time at our home in Massachusetts. Some of you also met Mari, who visited here in March. They had already had their civil wedding (an informal, justice-of-the-peace style signing of papers), as required by Finnish law, before I arrived, but the religious celebration was held the last week of October.

The bi-lingual ceremony was quite unique, and parts of it were even tri-lingual. I was especially thankful that both my parents were able to make the trip, and that Octavio's mother and sister were able to come from Mexico. There was also a large entourage from Kosovo, where Mari had served previously.

I definitely enjoyed being Octavio's best man, and watching my Dad officiate the ceremony with a Finnish translator was quite interesting. That said, seeing all the behind-the-scenes scrambling and Octavio's butterflies made me grateful that I wasn't the one getting married! I did have a few responsibilities, however. Giving the toast in front of over 100 foreigners was a little nerve-wracking but I'd like to think it came off all right. I also had to co-emcee the rest of the reception but Kaisa, Mari's maid of honor, was an excellent translator and actually handled the bulk of the responsibility. Finnish receptions involve more speeches and presentations than we would usually see here, and the afternoon was great fun, although I sorely missed the dancing that is part of most American receptions.

There were plenty of other highlights over those 6 weeks including a 3-day camping expedition in the arctic wilderness, a weekend across the sea to the south in Estonia, and meeting up with more long-lost friends in Helsinki before leaving.

I never would have imagined that I would be in Finland, together with my parents, standing by my best friend's side on his big day. I am so thankful that God has seen fit to bless him with something he has wanted for so long in the form of a wonderful Finnish woman. They will need our prayers as they adjust to being married. Finland turned out to be a really cool place, and its people, despite their cold reputation, were genuine and welcoming. I am thrilled to have been part of Octavio and Mari's celebration and to have visited a new part of the world. I return home thankful for so much, knowing that many people, including myself, were richly blessed by this experience.



Operation Christmas Child



National Collection Week is upon us! Our Relay Center will be open to receive boxes from the community beginning **Mon. 16th-Mon. 23rd**. The hours will be:

Monday the 16th-Thursday 3-5; Friday 2-6; Saturday 12:30-5; Sunday 12:30-4, Monday the 23rd 1-3.

Samaritan's Purse is a ministry undergirded by prayer. Please pray for your box as you pack it, that God would use it to bless a child not only materially, but also spiritually. Each box represents a Gospel Opportunity for a child and his or her family. Here is one story that shows the importance of prayer, God's amazing personal care, and the power of a simple gift.

From Ted: I was an orphan in the former Soviet Union when I received my shoebox. We had to share everything at the orphanage, including towels. When I got a washcloth in my box I actually thought it was my own personal towel!... God used the shoebox to plant a seed at a time when I was looking for hope and something to believe in. It opened my heart to understanding that there must be a loving God....As time went on, I hungered more and more to know that Truth.

My sister Tanya had heard about a God who loved her when she received her shoebox gift. So she was praying, "God, if you're real, give me and my siblings a family." One day I received a letter from her that said, "We might be getting adopted into an American family." I again thought, There really has to be someone who cares for me. It could only be someone like a God. All these little things were pointing to this amazing, loving God and yet at this point I had little comprehension of who He was. I hadn't heard about Jesus, but my heart was softening. When I was 13, we were adopted.

... in Russia I had been taught a works-based religion with a God that would punish me for everything. I was a little confused trying to sort all this out, so I asked my dad, "Is there something more?" He told me that God created everything for His glory and that He gave us this earth and this life to enjoy but there's this sin problem that condemns us to hell. I remember thinking, Same old story. But he went on that God loved us so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins and that it was a free gift.

I immediately remembered my Operation Christmas Child gift and thought, Wow, that makes sense. Someone who didn't know me gave me a gift, and in the same way before we ever knew God, He loved us enough to give us this gift. At that moment I realized that the hope I was feeling had been given from God and it was a hope I could have the rest of my life in Jesus.

It was incredible how God used something as simple as a shoebox. It was such perfect timing. God ordained that shoebox and orchestrated it in my life. It opened my heart to something that changed my life forever. He uses these simple tools in a mighty way.

What goes into the box is fun; What comes out is eternal. Thank you for your part in this ministry.

Holiday Cheer

The Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays can be a lonely time for many people. Look around and see who could use some encouragement and company at this time of year. A seemingly small gesture can go a long way. What can we do to spread some joy and show the love of Christ? Send a card, make a phone call, bake some cookies, make a meal, invite for tea or coffee, invite for dinner, shovel a sidewalk. Pray for opportunities, and act on them, in the name of Christ.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Galatians 6:10





GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Men's Prayer Fellowship November and December Meetings

All men of the church are invited to join together for Bible study, discussion, prayer and fellowship on **Saturday morning, November 21st, from 7-8:30 a.m.** at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. Light refreshments will be served. The **December meeting will be December 19th, same time and place.**

Prayer Gathering

As we have much to be thankful for, the elders encourage the congregation to join together for corporate prayer at the church on **Sunday evening, November 29th from 5:00-6:00 p.m.** As a body, let's express our complete dependence on the Lord, thank Him for the blessings of this past year, and seek to grow in knowing His great love. We will gather again at the start of the new year on **Sunday, January 4th, 5:00-6:00 p.m.** to thank God for His faithfulness and commit ourselves anew to His purposes.



Women's Fellowship

It's a new opportunity to grow in grace, with busy women in mind. *One* Saturday morning a month **from 9:30 to 11:00** here at the church, we'll be looking at different aspects of the *power of words* and what God teaches us about it. Join us for fellowship, encouragement and breakfast goodies on **Saturday, December 5th**. See Cheryl or Julie with any questions.



Christmas Open House

Pastor Tom and Charleen invite the church family to stop by at their home for a Christmas Open House on **Sunday, December 13th**, anytime **between 12:30 and 4:00 p.m.** for refreshments and fellowship.





A Service of Lessons and Carols

Please join us on **Sunday, December 20th at 6:00 p.m.** for a service of Scripture readings, carols, and special music. **This will take the place of our usual Christmas Eve service.** Invite a friend or neighbor for this special time as we celebrate the true meaning of Christmas. Refreshments will be served.



November/December 2015

S M T W T F S

15 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	16 7:00 Addictions Victorious	17 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class				21 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship
Operation Christmas Child Collection Week November 16-23						
22 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	23 7:00 Addictions Victorious	24 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	25	26 Thanksgiving 	27	28
29 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer Gathering	30 7:00 Addictions Victorious	December 1 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	2	3	4	5 9:30-11:00 am Women's Fellowship
6 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	7 7:00 Addictions Victorious	8 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	9	10	11	12
13 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	14 7:00 Addictions Victorious	15 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	16	17	18	19 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship
20 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 6:00 Service of Lessons and Carols	21 7:00 Addictions Victorious	22 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	23	24	25 <i>Christmas Day</i>	26 
27 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	28 7:00 Addictions Victorious	29 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	30	31 <i>New Year's Eve</i>	