

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
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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

When your son asks you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?" then you shall say....
(Deuteronomy 6:20-21a)

I can't tell you what a joy it has been for me to have my grandsons in our house for the past couple of weeks. Hectic goes without saying; stepping on Legos in my bare feet early in the morning, disconcerting, but a real joy nonetheless. What is even more moving, is to see them sitting with Charleen at bedtime, one on each side, as she reads to them and, each holding her hand as she prays with them before tucking them in.

I can't help but wonder what the future holds for them. Our country is changing so fast, isn't it? The whole world is. What will life be like in another ten years? Twenty years? What will life hold for our children and grandchildren? What will our church be like in another ten or twenty years?

Last month, in our church newsletter, I addressed the importance of our having a vision for our church. Vision is that picture we have in our minds as to what we believe the church should look like in the future. The Bible tells us that God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. We also know that the gospel doesn't change. The gospel is the message of redemption- that Jesus gave his life on the cross for our salvation, and we receive that salvation by faith. And our task as the church is to bear witness to that truth today as the church has been doing for over two thousand years. But our community and the world is changing. So the question is, "How can we be the church and fulfill our calling as the church in the changing environment in which we live?"

These questions aren't new. Christians have had to wrestle with them for over two thousand years.

Several important considerations come into play. The first is to distinguish between the negotiables and the non-negotiables. There are things that we cannot change without preaching a "different gospel", as Paul speaks of it in Galatians 1. These things are almost always theological in nature. We cannot alter our beliefs with regard to who God is and the nature of our salvation in order to accommodate the spirit of the age without compromising the foundations of the faith.

There is another important consideration; what is the culture in which we live? Paul is not averse to this as he shows in 1 Corinthians 9, where he writes, *To the Jew I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews.* And he continues to write that to those who were not Jews he became as those who were not Jews in order to win those who were not Jews. We see this in practice, for example in Acts 17 where he addresses the philosophers in Athens.

Francis Schaeffer taught that we must be exegetes of our culture as well as Scripture. He was able to understand the pulse of western culture of the 1960's and 70's (my generation), and was very effective in applying the gospel to the needs and questions of the day. I am finding that I cannot limit myself to the questions of my day if I want to speak to today's generation.

That leads to the third consideration, and that is simply, how much do we really care about the needs of each successive generation, and how committed are we to the Great Commission? Each of these considerations affect how we formulate our vision as a church, because a vision has to do with how we see the future of the church.

What a delight to have my grandchildren in my home. It is equally a delight to have new babies and toddlers in the church. What will their church look like?

Pastor Tom Bridgman



Missions Corner



Schmidt's May-June Prayer Letter

Thank you for praying for us during our **transition to Home Assignment!** After four years, it is nice to be back in **Switzerland**. It has taken some time to feel settled, but fellowshipping with the International Church in Buchs has been a great help. We are living in the same little apartment we were in last time. The view of green fields and mountains all around brings true refreshment. Plus, it is only a five-minute walk to Dieter's parents' nursing home, where they relocated to in February. They have visibly slowed down, but are doing fairly well with the care they now get. We visit them almost every day.

Thank you for praying for the Shum's visa. They arrived with five days for handover! We left Japan confident that the Shums would do a great job, and they have been! Please pray for them as the Guest Home will be full for the next months.

We had a lovely and touching send off from the church and ESF. After we arrived in Switzerland, Hannah found out that her company was not given contracts in Sapporo with the Education Department, so she and all her friends lost their jobs. The change also meant that she needed to move. Thank the Lord she found an apartment nearer the city. From the 8th floor it has a great view of the mountains and one room she will use as an Art Studio. We are so thankful that many OMF friends have been helping her! **Pray for Hannah to find a new permanent job soon** and to be sensitive to God's leading in all this. God is good!

May and June we have many opportunities to share about what God is doing in Japan. Pray for God to use us to raise awareness of the needs in Asia and for people to get involved in God's Kingdom work!

Praise for:

- *Our safe arrival and special Easter with Dieter's parents and sister
- *IBF Buchs member lending us a car which is so helpful
- *The Shums having settled in well and helping in the different ministries
- *The International Welcome Party bringing in many new students

Please pray for:

- *Renewed energy, and inspiration for God honoring presentations
- *The Shums in the busy months ahead, and helping with ESF
- *Hannah to find a suitable, permanent job soon
- *Dieter as he grieves the passing of his mentor friend, Ueli Furter, who lost the battle with cancer

Thankful for your love and prayers,

Dieter and Shelley



Easter Sunday with Dieter's parents and sister

In Tribute to My Dad on Father's Day

My dad on his knees in prayer. How many times did I go by your door and see you on your knees, in conversation with God? Life before Westover Street is pretty hazy for me, but one of the most consistent images I have of you from my Westover Street years is you on your knees beside your bed, every morning and every night. If you missed some mornings or evenings I was not aware of it. I still marvel at, and am thankful for, the discipline of your consistent prayer. What greater blessing could a child have than a father faithfully going to his Faithful Father in prayer? To see her provider and protector pointing the way to an even greater Provider and Protector. To see the dad she depended on showing his own dependence on the One who fails not. It was (and still is) like a protective hedge around me to know that you were bringing me before our Heavenly Father in prayer. How different might my life have been were it not for your consistency!

A faithful father faithfully at prayer--one of the richest treasures a child could have!



Straight Talk

By David Powlison

“Men don’t talk honestly with each other.”

“Women don’t talk constructively with each other.”

Do those comments ring bells for you? Of course, neither generalization is always true. Moral issues apply across gender lines. But both comments are true enough often enough to make you think.

Men don’t talk honestly? It’s the easiest thing in the world for a conversation to remain superficial and self-concealing, never getting to anything that actually matters. Empty words. And, of course, many women do the same, and just keep it light. Are your conversations pointless?

Women don’t talk constructively? It’s the easiest thing in the world for a conversation to be revealingly honest, but never get anywhere helpful. Unfruitful words. And, of course, many men do this too, saying what they really think and feel, but not going anywhere good. Do your conversations rehearse what’s wrong but never pursue making it right?

How do we begin to change how we talk with each other? Here are five truths to orient you.

First, Jesus says that God is actively listening to every word, even the most casual, unthinking things we say (Matt 12:36). He takes note of what we are saying and weighs our words. Are your conversations empty, misleading, inappropriate, or judgmental? Or is the way you talk nourishing, constructive, timely, and grace-giving? (Eph 4:29) The Lord gives the rating “Empty” to any conversation that skims over the surface of life and never gets real. The Lord gives the rating “Harmful” to any conversation that digs up dirt and tosses it around. But he sizes up a life-giving conversations with a hearty “Yes and amen! Keep it up!”

Second, Jesus never said a pointless word to other people. He was never just marking time or keeping things that matter at arm’s length. He always engages the important matters. He never just describes, analyzes, and complains about what’s wrong. His conversations always go somewhere helpful. Jesus speaks life-giving words: candid, constructive, relevant, and redemptive. And one of the constructive things Jesus talks about is helping us to assess the quality of what we talk about. “The mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart”—either good or evil (Matt 12:34).

Third, our God teaches us to have meaningful conversations with him. The Psalms and the other prayers in Scripture are candid, constructive, relevant and grace-filled. They teach us to remember who he is. As we listen, we learn to talk honestly about what is good or bad about us. We learn to speak of hard things as well as happy things in our circumstances. We learn to cry out where we need help, and sing about how we are grateful. Our prayers can express care and concern for others—“I thank God every time I remember you, and I pray that your love will abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment” (Phil 1:3, 9). Prayer gets to what most matters and to what’s true.

Fourth, our God then teaches us to have meaningful conversations with each other. The way we talk with him directly relates to how we talk with each other. Ephesians 4:15 says that we grow up in Christ by lovingly speaking truth with each other. For a few people that includes

preaching and teaching. For everybody that means our daily conversations. How do we encourage each other daily in the face of sin's deadly deceitfulness? How do we comfort each other in whatever afflictions and difficulties each one of us faces today? How do we talk about what matters in a way that makes a difference?

Fifth, the Holy Spirit generates wise conversations. So you don't skim over the surface. So you don't stay stuck in the mud. Scripture demonstrates how every conversation can go somewhere good. It even captures how, in some important moments, what must next be said is to be silent. Sometimes there are no more words to say. Perhaps you are grieving. Perhaps you are thinking. Perhaps you are praying. Perhaps your quietness communicates how much you care. Perhaps silence is saying that there is no point to saying anything more right now. When Jesus was silent before his accusers, his silence was the most eloquent thing that could be said. A meaningful silence expresses what is true, constructive, most appropriate, and grace-giving. And then you will find the right words at the right time. In Gethsemane, Jesus had things to say to his Father, to his friends, and to his betrayer. On the cross, Jesus had things to say to his Father, to his tormentors, to the repentant thief, to his mother... to all of us.

Of course, nothing we'll ever say is that momentous. But everything we say does matter. So what do you talk about, and how do you talk? Where can you listen in and get a feel for what wise words sound like? Let me suggest an unusual starting point:

Listen in to how Scripture shows us what it's like to talk with God.

Talk about the same kinds of things with other people.

Our Father teaches us to traffic in reality—addressing the best *and* the hardest things in life. You can't live in reality without seeing both, and remembering your Lord in the midst of it. Facing the hard things, you can be honest about your need. Receiving the good things, you can express joy and thanks. As you learn to pray about what matters, you are also learning to talk with other people about what matters. It's a curious thing, but entirely reasonable once you grasp the principle. Jesus' conversations and prayers are about the same things.

He's committed to you and working in you. You, and I, and all of us together can become much more honest and much more constructive!

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GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Women's Fellowship

All women are welcome at the Women's Fellowship meeting **Saturday, July 9th** at the church, **from 9:30-11:00 a.m.** We will be looking at John Bunyan's *Christiana* (sequel to *Pilgrim's Progress*). Refreshments will be served.



Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are encouraged to be a part of the Men's Prayer Fellowship, **July 16th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.**, at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. Join us for a time of devotional study (using *Walking as He Walked*), discussion, prayer, and fellowship over breakfast.

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 will be on **Sunday, June 26th**, and on **July 31st, from 5:00-6:00 p.m.** in the sanctuary.



"And he [Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." Luke 18:1-8



Anniversary Thanksgiving

Pastor Tom and Charleen give thanks to God for His faithfulness and blessing on 40 years of marriage, on June 26th.

"O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever." Psalm 107:1

Church Community

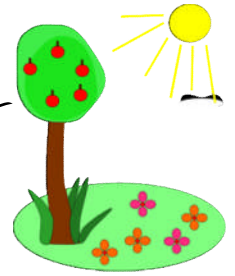
Let's take advantage of the longer days and more relaxed pace (for some) of the summer months to get together in each other's homes, or for outings, or just for a cool glass of lemonade and conversation. It can be a challenge to make the time, but the importance and benefits of cultivating relationships 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-July 2016



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19 10:00 am Worship	20 7:00 Addictions Victorious	21	22	23	24 6:30 Young Adult Bible study	25
26 10:00 am Worship 5:00 pm Prayer Gathering	27 7:00 Addictions Victorious	28	29	30	JULY 1 6:30 Young Adult Bible study	2
3 10:00 am worship	4  7:00 Addictions Victorious	5	6	7	8 6:30 Young Adult Bible study	9 9:30-11:00 am Women's Fellowship
10 10:00 am worship	11 7:00 Addictions Victorious	12	13	14	15 6:30 Young Adult Bible study	16 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship
17 10:00 am Worship	18 7:00 Addictions Victorious	19	20	21	22 6:30 Young Adult Bible study	23
24 10:00 am worship	25 7:00 Addictions Victorious	26	27	28	29 6:30 Young Adult Bible study	30
31 10:00 am Worship 5:00 pm Prayer Gathering						