

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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Happy Spring!

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

After this I looked, and behold a great multitude..., from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,...crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10)

As I write this letter, I can look out my window to see the icicles dripping from the roof and patches of mud showing through the ice on the church driveway. March 5; spring is just over two weeks away. And to think that a week ago, Charleen and I were sitting with Ian on his landlady's veranda, eating breakfast in shorts and tee shirts, looking out at banana and sugarcane growing in the distance and the blue-green water of the Atlantic Ocean.

What a privilege and a delight it was for Charleen and me to take two weeks and visit with Ian in Martinique where he has been teaching English in the high school for the year. Charleen had been faithfully salting away a bit from each paycheck for the past two years into her "travel fund". When the time came we had sufficient to fly.

Ian's landlady, Sylvie, graciously allowed us to sleep in a spare bedroom, and Ian rented a small van for the two weeks, and between his teaching schedule and his soccer practices, he showed us all over the island that is essentially the same size as Berkshire County. Long beaches with coconut palms, waterfalls flowing through tropical rain forest in the mountains, small fishing villages with sailboats bobbing in the harbor, and gracious people all speaking French and Creole. Ian was an exceptional translator too.

I can't begin to tell you how pleasant and restful a two weeks it was for us, all except the return leg of the flight from San Juan to Miami, which was a bit exciting. The plane had to turn around after 15 minutes out over the ocean because of mechanical trouble. Some folks near the front of the plane were quite panicked and there were emergency vehicles on the tarmac when we landed. That notwithstanding, we are alive and back in Pittsfield.

One of the most memorable experiences for me was attending a little Baptist church in Vauclin, the little town just south of where we stayed. Martinique is a province of France, thus it is a little like New England spiritually. It is nominally Roman Catholic, but for all intents and purposes it is pretty secular. Evangelical churches are few and far between. Nevertheless, God has his people there, and we had the privilege of worshipping with some of them.

When asked by the Pastor to introduce ourselves, I had to respond with the words, *Je ne parle pas français* (translation, "I don't speak French"). A middle-aged man from the congregation graciously offered to translate the remainder of the service for me. Charleen and Ian managed to fend for themselves fairly well. The second week the same fellow sat beside me and translated not only the sermon, but the announcements and the songs.

What this all said to me was that they recognized us as brothers and sister in Christ, and the value of our fellowship together because of our faith in Christ, even though we were from different nations and languages. It also reminded me that this is in microcosm a picture of the church that we have in Revelation 7. We have an integral kinship with the believers of Martinique, not to mention the believers of every other nation, precisely because of Christ. Hospitality is a practical manifestation of that.

Pastor Tom Bridgman





Missions Corner

Schmidt's Prayer Letter from Japan

There are some people in our English Speaker's Fellowship group that are hurting. They struggle with relationships and have cut themselves off from the group, trying to hang in there on their own. We meet with them and try to help them find reconciliation, but they do not want to. A long time member of our group, a woman from Africa, will get her doctorate in March, and she has become very antagonistic toward us. Her husband just moved to Canada, and she is here alone with her child. We have gone through some real complicated times with this couple. Lately they have cut off communication, so we do not know how they are doing. Another woman just came back to the group after a long time, needing prayer and support because of family problems. Please pray for us to have wisdom and sensitivity. On Sunday mornings our pastor is going through the Lord's Prayer. It seems like forgiveness is the balm that is needed in all of these situations. Through that choice and process, healing could come.

PRAY WITH US:

For those in our midst that need to find reconciliation with each other
For strength for those that face temptations
For those that struggle with loneliness and depression
For the one who admitted an addiction to computer games
For those who are having marital problems

These are all Christians. Most of them come to the English Speaker's Fellowship every Sunday afternoon. We are all human and needy. By coming together we support one another through a time of praise, prayer and the study of God's Word.

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Psalm 34:18
May we all be willing to learn from the Lord how to truly care for one another.

Sapporo Guest Home News:

March is a full month! We will have 2 Serve Asia short term helpers living downstairs for 6 months, and many missionaries staying over while in transition. This includes a family with a baby. Sounds like we will be busy and having fun.

Family News:

Our girls will soon be living in three different countries! Hannah got a job in Japan teaching English in the Japanese school system. We are so excited that she will be coming to Sapporo to teach, sometime this Spring!! Thank you for praying for this! Rebekah, flew over from Indonesia here for Christmas, and we had a super time together. Andrea is happy in the USA for now, very involved at school and in her church. Please pray for Shelley's sister, Linda, who moved from Brazil, to Chattanooga in January. She is in transition, needs a car and needs to find a place to live. We are glad she can be of help to Shelley's Mom, who just turned 85!!

Finances:

Giving for us personally was less than 40% last year. Thanks to general giving and the sharing principle in OMF, our needs were taken care of. However, with the difficult economic situation in the world and the strong yen, giving toward the general fund is declining. Please pray with us for our financial situation to improve.

Thank you for praying for us ,
Dieter and Shelley



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Daylight Savings Time Begins
 Daylight Savings Time begins on **Sunday, March 13th**. Be sure to set your clocks ahead by one hour on Saturday night!



Women of Grace

All women and teenage girls are invited to come to our March *Women of Grace* fellowship meeting on **Saturday, March 12th, from 10:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m., including lunch**. We continue our theme of "Prayer and Friendship". Join us for a time of Biblical nurture, discussion, prayer, and fellowship over a delicious luncheon. Feel free to invite a friend!

Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men are invited to join together at the church, **Saturday, March 19th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.** for a devotional, a time of prayer, and light refreshments.



Women's Retreats

- ♦ **FaithLift**, sponsored by the Evangelical Free Church and held at Hope Church in Lenox, will be **Saturday, April 2nd, from 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.** The theme is: *If Closets Could Talk*. The day includes worship, workshops, and lunch. The cost (including the luncheon) is \$28. **Registration deadline: Saturday, March 22.** For brochures see Charleen Bridgman. Online registration is available at www.pittsfieldefc.org/faithlift
- ♦ **OPC Women's Retreat** at Lakeside Conference Center in Pittsfield, **Fri & Sat, April 15th & 16th.** Theme: *A Royal Romance*. The retreat includes a speaker, workshops, lunch and dinner on Friday, and breakfast and lunch on Saturday. Cost including meals is \$45. **Registration deadline: March 15th postmark.** For brochures see Charleen Bridgman.

4C's Regional Fellowship Meeting

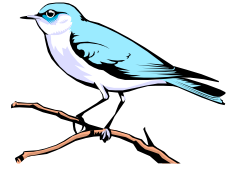
The Spring meeting of our regional fellowship will be **Saturday, April 2nd**, at 9:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m. The focus is "Christians and Muslims: How Do We Respond?" Pastors, church leaders, and lay people are encouraged to attend.

With Sympathy

Our hearts go out to Betty Vella, former longtime member of Grace Church, as she grieves the loss of her husband Harry Vella in February. Cards and notes may be sent to: Betty Vella, 407 Cheshire Rd., Pittsfield, MA 01201.



March 2010



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		1 7:00 Elders' Meeting	2	3 7:00 Addictions Victorious	4	5
6 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	7	8 7:00 Elders' Meeting	9	10 7:00 Addictions Victorious	11	12 Women of Grace 10 - 1:00 p.m. Change your clocks tonight! 
13 Daylight Savings Time Begins 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	14	15 7:00 Elders' Meeting	16	17 7:00 Addictions Victorious	18	19 Men's Prayer Fellowship 7-8:30 a.m.
20 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	21	22 7:00 Elders' Meeting	23	24 7:00 Addictions Victorious	25	26
27 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer Gathering	28	29	30	31 7:00 Addictions Victorious		

Vacation Bible School

We don't need to go to another country or another state to be ambassadors for Christ. There are people who need an introduction to Christ everywhere we look. Plans are afoot for a Vacation Bible School this summer. We are currently looking at **the week of June 27-July 1st**, Monday through Friday, the week after school gets out (provided we don't have any more snow days!). The time would be from **9 a.m. - about 12 noon** each day.

Theme: Faith Expedition: God's Treasure Revealed

Ages: pre-K-4th grade.

Many opportunities for service will be available! Please prayerfully consider what your involvement might be. A successful VBS requires a churchwide effort. That was certainly the case with our 2010 VBS! A series of planning meetings will be necessary for most workers. We need people for the following positions. If you think you might be interested, see Charleen Bridgman (413-499-3040) for more details on what is involved with each position.

Planning committee (2-3 additional people)

Teachers and Teaching assistants: (at least 3 of each)

Skit Director and skit assistants

Snack coordinator and helpers

Craft coordinator and Craft helpers

Music coordinator

Recreation coordinator and helpers

Publicity coordinator

Registration (at least 2)

Floater

Transportation coordinator

Also, be thinking of any families you know with children we could invite. So many children are growing up with no knowledge of the Scriptures or the Lord. Please pray with us that we might have a vital ministry to the coming generations.



Are You a “Reader”?

Over the past two years the Grace Church Library committee has focused its attention on organizing and cataloguing our books so that they would be of more use to the congregation.

But, I’m sure you would all agree that books are of little value if they remain on the shelf. With that thought in mind, the library committee has begun to broaden its scope and vision for our church library. Reading itself seems a logical place to begin; and what better month to evaluate our use of the written word than March: National Reading Month.

We live in a country that has historically valued the ability to read. Today, the United States continues to make great financial investments in promoting the literacy of its people. As Christians, we see God’s Word, in our own language, as His incalculable gift. We can also thank Him, that in His sovereign providence most of us have grown up in a time and place that has given us the privilege and opportunity to learn to read. But we must ask ourselves, as citizens as well as Christians, are we good stewards of this talent called reading?

In 2007 a study was published, “To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence”, by the National Endowment for the Arts. The 99 page study “analyzes more than 40 studies on the reading habits of Americans of all ages”. Many findings are troubling:

- Reading scores for American adults of almost all education levels have deteriorated, notably among the best-educated groups. From 1992 to 2003, the percentage of adults with graduate school experience who were rated proficient in prose reading dropped by 10 points, a 20 percent rate of decline.
- American 15-year-olds ranked fifteenth in average reading scores for 31 industrialized nations, behind Poland, Korea, France, and Canada, among others.
- The number of adults with bachelor's degrees and "proficient in reading prose" dropped from 40 percent in 1992 to 31 percent in 2003.

The report cites some progress in elementary school age reading as well as indications of the benefit of reading. But overall the report confirms reading in the US is on the decline. The Chairman of the NEA, Dana Gioia, makes this note worthy comment: *“To Read or Not To Read confirms—without any serious qualification—the central importance of reading for a prosperous, free society. The data here demonstrate that reading is an irreplaceable activity in developing productive and active adults as well as healthy communities. Whatever the benefits of newer electronic media, they provide no measurable substitute for the intellectual and personal development initiated and sustained by frequent reading.”* The link below is to an executive summary of this report and is well worth your time to peruse. http://www.nea.gov/research/ToRead_ExecSum.pdf

Instead of responding to our first impulse, to speculate about the twig in someone else’s eye, we must first deal with our own timber! Attached to the end of this newsletter you’ll find a Reading Survey. We would like to ask everyone to participate in this survey and we will post the results in the May newsletter. There will be extra copies of the survey on the table at the back of the church so every member of a family can participate (that includes children in school as well; there are eight questions with a * next to them for you). And parents don’t forget to include your college students too.

The library committee desires to see the Grace Church Library become a more active participant in the nurture and outreach ministries of our church. We hope to present some fresh and innovative ideas in the coming months. This is only a first step!

Cheryl Lanoue

Learning & Arriving: Occupied With Joy

“As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger. Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart. Ecclesiastes 5:15 – 20.

When I think about how much I love to worship and sing praises to the LORD each Sunday, I find it hard to fathom how many Sundays in my otherwise misspent life I failed to spend my time worshiping Him. As for prayer – how many days and hours and minutes of my life have been squandered and wasted without contemplating His presence in my heart? In our lives as Christians together – how many weeks and months have gone by that we have stood alone, outside of the warmth and grace and light of the Christian countenance on the faces of our brothers and sisters in Christ?

“Who am I?” I so often ask the LORD. “Why have you brought me this far?” We are going to take nothing that we may carry away in our hands, in spite of all our toil. As we came, naked and alone, helpless and crying, so shall we go.

All we can possibly do is to help some other poor pilgrim along the way. The toil in which we need to rejoice is the toil set upon us by Jesus – to carry His cross to Calvary. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” Matthew 16:24 -26. This is the gift of God – to love Him and to love one another as Jesus loved us. Carrying His cross is helping, loving, and sharing each other – selflessly, charitably, trustingly, without reservation or doubt. Carrying one another’s cross in this life is our occupation with the joy of Christ’s love in our hearts.

So let us pray as a Christian family, a congregation of worshipers:

God, heavenly Father: lead us to Christian love;
Bring us into the light of love. Keep us from the cold loneliness
Of heartache and distrust; bathe us in the warmth of companionship,
Heartfelt love, and eternal trust in You.
Let us live life in the love of Christ and with the love of Christ,
With our true Christian companions, forever.
This we ask through our Savior,
And by His Holy Spirit. AMEN!

Doug Rose

Our meeting is from 9:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m. at:

**Clifton Park Community Church
516 Moe Road
Clifton Park, NY**

Directions: If coming from I-87, take exit 9 and proceed west on NYS Route 146. Moe Road will be 1.0 miles from I-87. Turn left onto Moe Road.