

# 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](mailto:secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net), or put in the tray on the secretary's desk.





## From the Pastor's Desk

*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. (Matthew 5:14-15)*

A couple of months ago a young man showed up in the church driveway with a proposition; he wanted to put a used clothing collection receptacle in our church parking lot. I didn't give it a great deal of thought but did consent to let him bring it to the Elders meeting which was scheduled for later that evening. I was actually quite surprised when the Elders responded enthusiastically, so we decided to bring it before the congregation at the Annual Meeting which was about a month away. The response at the annual meeting was predictably mixed.

One of the objections has to do with the fact that the clothing collection is run by a for-profit organization that sells to organizations in developing countries, and our church would receive a small financial return on the clothing. The objection is that this is not the way to support the church. I agree 100%. The church is supported by the commitment of its members through tithes and offerings. On the other hand, if the proceeds of the clothing are designated for a specific need in our community then perhaps the clothing collection can double as a viable form of ministry.

Frankly, neither I nor the Elders have a lot invested in whether or not we collect used clothing at the church. The placement of a shed in our parking lot is really secondary to the bigger issue, and that has to do with how we see ourselves as a church and our role in the community. The deeper question is do we see a ministry of this sort at Grace Church as beneath our dignity?

I know there is always a danger in trying to assess underlying motives. That said, I still believe it is a viable question for us.

In the 1950's Dr. Mekeel, Pastor of First Presbyterian in Schenectady, NY prayed that God would raise up a church in the Berkshires that was warm in its evangelical witness that would worship God with the dignity to which New England is accustomed. That prayer, in many respects served as the original vision for Grace Church. But the questions we face is, how do we define that word "dignity" today? What does it mean in 2012? Who defines it? These really are soul-searching questions.

If dignity means that we desire to reflect the glory of God in all we do, then God will honor us, but if it means only that we long to protect our desired image of Grace Church, then God will not honor that. What I am saying is that if our desire for "dignity" trumps our being warm in our witness, then it seems to me that we have defeated a key component of why God has us here as a church in the Berkshires. This is a question I have been ruminating on for several years, and it has taken something as seemingly mundane as a used clothing shed in our parking lot to serve as a catalyst.

C. John Miller, an Orthodox Presbyterian Pastor in Philadelphia and professor of evangelism at Westminster Theological Seminary challenged his church and the rest of us of the Reformed faith in his book, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, not to turn our Reformed Theology into a "religious cushion". Like Miller, I am passionate about the Reformed faith. Our belief in the Sovereignty of God (i.e. a high view of God) is foundational. But we need to always remember that Reformed theology is characterized by a high view of Grace as well. (Notice I intentionally spell both Sovereignty and Grace here with capital letters here.)

I believe that God has given us a tremendous gift at Grace Church. We live in a community that needs desperately what God has given us. Should we hide our lamp under a basket for fear that there might be "lions in the road" (last month's newsletter) and turn our Reformed faith into a religious cushion? My prayer is that we take seriously what God is calling us to do and want God is calling us to be, and that God would find us faithful in that calling.

Pastor Tom Bridgman





# Missions Corner

News from South Sudan-excerpts from Bob Kirkman's blog

## Negotiating the Minefield of Conflict in South Sudan

*Do not repay evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.*

*Romans 12:17*

As I arrived in South Sudan for the 12th time in early February, evidence of a developing infrastructure was immediately apparent. For the first time I was able to fly directly into Juba and drive south for only 2 hours to our mission compound in Borongole on a road that was mostly paved. This was a big difference from the bone jarring and throat dusting 12-14 hour drive from Kampala, Uganda that I had become accustomed to.

There was a 12 mile stretch yet to be paved. Days earlier, a bulldozer operator was killed when his machine exploded a land mine that had been planted by the Islamic forces near the end of the war. This tragedy interrupted the progress of rebuilding the physical infrastructure in a land that had been laid waste in over two decades of war.

In January we learned of another event that interrupted the rebuilding of the social infrastructure of the families, churches, and communities here. A conflict had erupted over a land dispute between the Acholi and Madi tribes. Five Madi villagers were killed in a surprise attack just a few miles from our compound. In spite of the immediate grief and rage throughout the Madi community, the Elders responded in a manner consistent with Proverbs 20:22. They instructed the community to not seek revenge or even call upon authorities to intervene. Instead they contacted the Elders of the Acholi community to find out the root cause of the conflict and who was responsible. It was discovered that a corrupt official had incited the attack by spreading rumors and false allegations for personal gain. This man was turned over to the authorities. However, the damage had been done. Suspicion and a lack of trust brooded between the tribes.

The Elders of both tribes determined to do what is right in an effort to overcome evil with good. Peacemakers Ministries describes basic principles in a process of cooperative negotiation. They are: **P**repare, **A**ffirm relationships, **U**nderstand interests, **S**earch for creative solutions, and **E**valuate options ("PAUSE"). The Elders outlined a way forward calling upon people to pray, gathering facts, and outlining proposed solutions (Prepare). I had the honor of being invited to the meeting. Members of the South Sudanese church and government officials were also there to observe the process.

The meeting opened with prayer, acknowledging that God is a God of both tribes, and that He would reveal the way forward if those attending would humble themselves before Him. The meeting started with opening remarks about the long history of mutual coexistence and cooperation between the tribes. (Affirm relationships). Tribal historians presented the record of tribal boundaries and described accounts of prior conflicts and how they had been resolved. Eyewitness accounts and victim impact statements were offered in an atmosphere of quiet respect. Respective position papers were read. (Understand interests). Conciliatory gestures were offered with both sides agreeing that the land in dispute belonged to the Madis, but that the Acholis were welcomed, as both have a mutual interest in restoring their country. As the day progressed it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between tribal loyalties, as all seemed to affirm the view of each speaker. Solutions were offered with one Acholi even proposing that they agree to live under the authority of a Madi Chief in the interest of the common good. (Searching for creative solutions). Both sides agreed to submit to mediation with the Inter Church Council, and that the Chiefs from throughout the region would meet in March to review the root causes of the conflict and the interests of both parties and evaluate the options presented. (Evaluate options).

I am privileged to promote the principles of Biblical peacemaking in daily broadcasts over our radio station, and in workshops with local congregations. It is humbling to witness the church and its Elders coming together in such an effective, gracious, and Biblical manner to bring healing and reconciliation to the communities of this region. This certainly bodes well for the cause of peace in New Sudan.

By His Grace,  
Robert Kirkman



# GRACE CHURCH NEWS

## Prayer Gathering

All are encouraged to come together for a special time of corporate prayer **Sunday evening, March 4th, from 5:00-6:00 p.m.** Join us as we seek God's face and acknowledge our dependence on Him in all things.



## Daylight Savings Time Begins

Daylight Savings Time begins on **Sunday, March 11th.** Be sure to set your clocks ahead by one hour on Saturday night!



## Poetry Presentation

Sorina (Kulberg) Higgins will be sharing poetry from her newest publication *Caduceus*, on **Sunday evening, March 11th, at 6:00 p.m.** at the church. Join us for an evening of poetry, fellowship, and light refreshments.



## Women of Grace

All women and teenage girls are invited to come to our March *Women of Grace* fellowship meeting on **Saturday, March 17th, from 10:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m., including lunch.** We continue our study of *Out of the Salt Shaker and Into the World*. Join us for a time of Biblical nurture, discussion, prayer, and fellowship over lunch.



## Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men are invited to join together at the church, **Saturday, March 24h, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.** for a devotional, a time of prayer, and light refreshments.

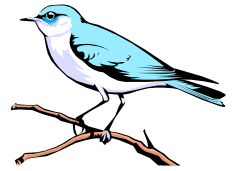


## Women's Retreats

- ♦ **FaithLift**, sponsored by the Evangelical Free Church and held at Hope Church in Lenox, will be **Saturday, March 24th, from 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.** The theme is: *Sing to the Lord a New Song, but Lord I like the Old One...* The day includes worship, workshops, and lunch. The cost (including the luncheon) is \$28- \$30. **Registration deadline: Saturday, March 17.** For brochures see Charleen Bridgman. Online registration is available at [www.pittsfieldefc.org/faithlift](http://www.pittsfieldefc.org/faithlift)
- ♦ **OPC Women's Retreat** at Lakeside Conference Center in Pittsfield, **Fri & Sat, April 20th & 21st.** Theme: *Redeemed! The Story Unfolded Through Isaiah.* The retreat includes a speaker, workshops, lunch and dinner on Friday, and breakfast and lunch on Saturday. Cost including meals is \$50. **Registration deadline: March 15th postmark.** For brochures see Charleen Bridgman.



# March 2012



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



## Haiti Rebuilding Project Dave Fairfield and Ian Bridgman

**Dave Fairfield and Ian Bridgman** will be leaving for Haiti on **April 4** for a 10-day rebuilding project. They will be a part of a Samaritan's Purse team, continuing the rebuilding process following the devastating earthquake of two years ago. They would appreciate prayers for health and safety, good relationships with the Haitians and project coworkers, and success in the building project. If you would like to participate by assisting with the cost of airfare, donations may be made through the church and designated for the Haiti Project.

## Vacation Bible School 2012

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. We are in the planning stage for a Vacation Bible School this summer. We are currently looking at **the week of June 26-30, Tuesday-Saturday**. The time would be from **9 a.m. - about 12 noon** each day.

**Our primary need right now is prayer - for personnel and for the families.**

**A successful VBS requires a churchwide effort.** Many opportunities for service will be available! **Please prayerfully consider what your involvement might be.**

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

**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.



**LEARNING & ARRIVING: The Measure of Our Days**  
*Doug Rose*

“O LORD, make me know my end  
and what is the measure of my days;  
let me know how fleeting I am!  
Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,  
and my lifetime is as nothing before you.  
Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah

(Ps. 39:4-5)

Our LORD said,

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?” (Luke. 12:22-26).

The apostle, James, reminds us, “...yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” (James 4:14b).

Even the most successful of mankind are little more than a bubble rising to the surface of the pond. (Calvin’s *Commentary* on Psalm 39)

In March, we in this northern hemisphere experience the vernal equinox, when the Earth once again begins to tip by the hand of God toward another Summer. Other than the certainty of the seasons, we do not know what tomorrow will bring: whether it be a memorable and joyous birthday or a sudden illness; a time to never forget or an hour of remorse and regret. We do know that our lives, however short or long in passing by our mortal standards, are fleeting in the eyes of God: a mere breath, a bubble, a mist.

In our Savior’s resurrection, and with His, ours, rests a sure deliverance from the bonds and shackles of mortality. Our anxieties and pains, our infirmities and constraints will vanish. “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:4). Similarly, all of our earthly rejoicing and laughter will ring hollow in light of the joy, wonder, and glory we will feel in His eternal presence. “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17).