

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

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Welcome to the September edition of the Grace Church newsletter. If you have any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter, please send them to secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net





From the Pastor's Desk

*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.
(1 Corinthians 12:27)*

I have never taken the time to count up the number of churches in Pittsfield. There are quite a number in our city with a population of 45,000. Years ago when I lived in Ohio I counted over forty in a city half the size of our own. We have Congregational, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, to name a few, plus a fair number of independent non-denominational churches. There are no Presbyterian churches in Pittsfield though, although theologically we come pretty close.

Did you know that when Paul wrote his epistles in the early days of the church there were not the multiple churches in the various communities that we have today? Christians were very much the minority, and yes, there were in the larger cities eventually more than one congregation, but it was not as if there was a different church building on every corner. (Like the six different churches we have in Pittsfield all within a few hundred yards of Park Square)

I am not minimizing the doctrinal differences between the various churches or denominations. God forbid that we take our theology lightly. But I'm not convinced that is the real issue today. What I'm talking about has more to do with our perception of the church and how we see the value of the church in our lives as followers of Jesus.

Ever since the early spring there has been a common thread in my preaching in case you haven't noticed. It has to do with how much the cross of Christ plays a role in our lives as Christians. I'm not talking about how we became Christians - the cross is absolutely essential for that, but what role the cross plays in our lives as we hopefully grow in our faith. The point is, the cross should play an increasingly prominent role in every aspect of our lives each day, not just individually but also corporately as the church. It should define the tenor of our worship, it should provide us with passion for interacting with our unbelieving neighbors, and it should dictate how we see ourselves as a local community of believers.

You see, it's not uncommon for people to switch from one congregation to another purely because they prefer the music or the personality of the pastor or something equally as frivolous. The church becomes less than what Jesus intended that it should be. It becomes merely a vehicle for our entertainment or a weekly shot in the arm or a place for us to meet friends, but other than that it has no real purpose or value. If these things don't live up to our expectation, then it's time to go shopping for another church.

But for Jesus, the church is much more than that. It is what Jesus promised to build and against which the gates of hell should not prevail. It is the manifestation of the resurrected Lord on earth today. It is the vehicle through which Jesus seeks to effect spiritual growth in our lives because God has chosen to sanctify us, not in an isolated arena, but in the context of Christian community.

If that is so, then shouldn't it play a more prominent role in our lives? What I should be saying is, Church is not just something we go to on a weekly basis, but something we **are** if we call ourselves Christians.



Missions Corner



OPERATION NEHEMIAH: Helping Rebuild the New Sudan

Shalom! I hope and pray that this update finds you sound in the Lord. Our prayers for a new tractor and implements for the Beth Israel farmland in South Sudan have been answered! God provided exceedingly beyond our expectation.

We have a professional tractor driver training three other men to operate the tractor, so that they can make the most out of this investment and expand God's work in the South Sudan. Along with this training comes discipline, faithfulness and commitment for those involved, furthering the vision of long term sustainability.

There are those who report on hunger and famine in the South Sudan, telling the world that over 3 million will die of starvation this year. Operation Nehemiah is taking action to stop famine by empowering South Sudanese men to work with their own hands and sustain their families. Our goal is to reduce dependence upon imported food and U.N. feeding programs by encouraging local farmers in entrepreneurial organic farming, producing both healthy food and a stable local economy, thus raising the overall standard of living. To this end, we are currently engaged in opening 1,000 acres of nutrient dense crops with the help of indigenous nationals, who directly oversee the entire process from seed to market.

We thank God for the one year anniversary of the independence of the Republic of the South Sudan in July. However, the past year has shown the challenges and difficulties of building this new nation. South Sudanese are now facing new threats of physical and spiritual destruction that are real. The nation is grievously plunging into materialism and political correctness, and corruption on an epic scale.

We have witnessed the power of God in raising up a nation from the ashes of war. South Sudan's Christians stood against jihad and won their freedom, but this freedom can only be maintained by acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus Christ and repenting of our sinful ways. The message of Operation Nehemiah to the South Sudanese Christians is to prove their Christ-like character, which was wrought through many years of persecution, as expressed in Romans 5:3-5: *"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering works perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope: and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

This summer has been an exceptionally tough season for nonprofit Christian ministries around the world. Operation Nehemiah is no exception. We need your continued prayers and support to advance the work of the Lord in South Sudan. Thank you for standing with us, and encouraging us to press on.

In His grace,
William Levi

LEARNING & ARRIVING: Let's Rejoice in Philippians!

by Doug Rose

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (Phil. 4:4)

Starting September 9th, the adult Sunday school class will undertake our thirteen-week study of *The Letter of Paul to the Philippians*. Our study promises to be fruitful both spiritually and intellectually, and, as we always strive in our learning fellowship, our discussions will focus not so much on Christian information, but on Christian reformation. Your correspondent has been blessed and honored to have been designated by the Board of Elders to be the facilitator / instructor for the three-month-long course, and we will be walking through the scripture with the assistance of the study-guide, *Let's Study Philippians*.¹ Our syllabus, which should be available with the teaching discussion books this Sunday, covers from six to twelve (or so) verses of the epistle each week, with a half-dozen or so recommended study and discussion questions from Ferguson's appendix. You are encouraged to attend, whether you have registered in advance or not: both the scripture and the discussion will be the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work in and among us.

One commentator has synopsisized the content of Paul's letter to his mission flock at Macedonian Philippi as "*Summa epistolae: gaudeo, gaudete*" – the content of the letter: I rejoice, you now rejoice.² Joy is second among the fruits of the Spirit.³ Paul, though professedly chained and imprisoned in Rome as he is penning his letter to the newly reborn Christians in Greece,⁴ yet exhorts his partners in Christ not to despair, but to rejoice. The word "joy" in its verbal and noun forms is found no less than sixteen times in the short four chapters of the letter.⁵ As Christians, our exhortations to rejoice in the LORD do not proceed from some bastion of temporal peace and worldly security, but from the tranquility and joy of the perpetual strength of God's redeeming grace in our hearts.⁶

Please rejoice and join in our study of *Philippians* this Autumn. Although my soul, like any among us, is betimes vexed and sullen, I have prayed for and been by grace given the spiritual strength to strive to learn with you in joyous heart, so

Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. (Phil. 2:18)

¹ Ferguson, Sinclair B., *Let's Study Philippians* (Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust; 1997).

² Bengel, J. A., *Gnomon Novum Testamenti* (1742).

³ Gal. 5:22.

⁴ Phil. 1:7; Eph. 6:20.

⁵ Martin, Ralph P., *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians: An Introduction & Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1987), p.45.

⁶ *Id.*, pp. 45 – 46.

“One-Anothering” in the Community of Christ

Have you ever noticed how many exhortations there are in Scripture concerning how we should relate to one another? All humans are designed for relationship, but there is something unique and special about Christian relationships (or there should be). The New Testament has about 56 “on another” passages that are either exhortations or statements of fact. Some state the fact of our relationship as the body of Christ. Paul, in Romans 12:5 states, “so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” Nearly all are about what we should be doing in our relationships to reflect that one body.

Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that you love on another as I have loved you.” (John 13:34). About a third of the one-another passages echo that command to love. But there are other commands: Outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12:10); through love, serve one another (Gal 5:13); bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2); be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another (Eph. 4:32); addressing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19); seek to do good to one another (I Thess. 5:15); instruct one another (Rom. 5:14); live in harmony with one another (Rom 5:15); comfort one another, agree with one another (2 Cor. 13:11); exhort one another (Heb. 3:13).

It is quite clear from these passages that the Christian life is not meant to be lived in a solitary fashion. All of these commands can only be implemented if we are in close and regular fellowship with other believers. It is really about Christian community.

Hebrews 10:24 and 25 sums it up for us, I think. It reads: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. There is a lot in those two verses, but a couple of things stand out.

First, our relationships in the body have a purpose – to stir one another up to love and good works, imitating the love that Christ has for us; to put into practice the “one another” commands in the Scriptures. The words “consider” and “stir up” imply intentionality, requiring careful thought and effort. Secondly, that purpose is met largely by our meeting together. How else can we instruct one another, serve one another, address one another in psalms and hymns, comfort one another, and so on? The meeting together can take various forms. The form we most often think of is Sunday morning worship. Some of what we are to be in relation to each other can take place in that setting. Some takes place during worship (instruction, singing, exhortation). Some takes place following worship when we are visiting together – sharing of burdens, giving of encouragement and comfort, enjoying harmony). It has been good to see how much more post-worship fellowship takes place now than when Tom and I first came back to Grace Church. Now, there are still cars in the parking lot as much as an hour after the service is over. This is good. We are growing in enjoying and caring for one another.

But some of the relating that Scripture commands is best done in a smaller setting. This might be a small group Bible study in a home, or at the church; it might be a one-on-one discipling relationship, or two or three believers getting together over a cup of tea to share and pray together. Even phone calls and letters can accomplish some of this. The key is that we need to be connecting with one another in relationships that are centered in Christ and on what He is doing in and through us.

We need each other. We need cross-generational as well as peer connections. We are created for community. We are to build each other up and be “built up as a spiritual house, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (I Peter 2:5). The ultimate goal of all this is that we might become more and more like our Lord Jesus, and be better equipped to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light”; to proclaim it to a world desperately in need of Christ, that they too might come to faith and join the body, the community of Christ.

by Charleen Bridgman, from thoughts shared at a Women of Grace meeting, Spring, 2012

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 and follow-up discipleship programs. 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 year, for the third time, Grace Church will be 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 12-19**. Please consider participating in this wonderful ministry. Besides packing a shoebox, you can serve as a volunteer at our Relay Center. Opportunities for service include:

- ◆ Greeters
- ◆ Cookie Bakers
- ◆ People to help carry packed shoeboxes into the church (**young people encouraged to apply!**)
- ◆ People to help pack the shoeboxes into larger boxes for transport to Northampton
- ◆ Strong arms to help load the larger boxes onto the transport truck
- ◆ Record keepers to log the number of boxes brought in each day, and from whom

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

HOW TO PACK A SHOE BOX

1. Use an empty standard size shoe box, or a small plastic container. Pray for the child who will receive your gift.
2. Decide whether your gift will be for a boy or girl, and the age category: 2-4, 5-9, or 10-14.
3. Fill with gifts. Gift suggestions: school supplies, toys, hygiene items, other items such as hard candy, T-shirts, socks, flashlights with batteries, etc.
4. Include a personal note to the child and a photo of yourself, if desired.

Do not include: Used or damaged items; war-related items such as toy guns, knives, or military figures; chocolate or food; out-of-date candy; liquids or lotions; medications or vitamins; breakable items such as snowglobes or glass containers; aerosol cans

5. Please donate \$7 or more for each shoe box to help cover shipping and other project costs. You can give online at samaritanaspurse.org/occ and find out later where your shoebox went!

Since 1993, more than 94 million boys and girls from over 130 countries have been the joyful recipients of shoe box gifts. This year Operation Christmas Child plans to reach the 100 millionth child with the Good News of God's love.

Won't you help spread the joy?



GRACE CHURCH NEWS

FALL SCHEDULE

Our fall schedule resumes on **Sunday, September 9th**, with **Sunday School** for children and adults at **9:30 am.**, and **worship** at **10:45 a.m.**. The adult class for the first quarter will be a study of the book of Phillipians, taught by Doug Rose. Study booklets are available for each participant.



MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Men of all ages are invited to meet for a time of study, dicussion, and prayer on **Saturday, September 15th**, from **7-8:30 a.m.** at the home of Doug Rose. Light refreshments will be served.



PRAYER GATHERING

Our monthly prayer time for the ministry of our church will continue into the fall. Our next time of corporate prayer will be **Sunday, September 30th**, from **5:00-6:00 p.m.**

CHURCH PICNIC

All are invited to our church cookout on **Sunday, September 16th**, following the morning worship service. Hot dogs, hamburgers, and beverages will be provided. Please bring a side dish or dessert to share. Invite a friend and join in the fellowship!



SEPTEMBER ANNIVERSARY / BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

September 4th is a popular day for weddings.

Happy Anniversary to: **Elder Tom and Eunice Ross**, who celebrated **58 years** of marriage; **Don and Lissa Lundgren**, **45 years** of marriage; and **Gary and Sorina Higgins**, **8 years** of marriage.

Happy Birthday also to four of our younger friends: **Nadine Kulberg**, Sept. 2; **Eve Kulberg** and **Belle Wright**, Sept. 7; and **Ian Bridgman**, September 20th.



THANK YOU

Thank you to those who faithfully labor to maintain the church building and grounds. Thank you to Hunter Parks for keeping the lawn mowed, to Millie DeVos and Linda Poulton for weekly cleaning of the church, regular tending of the flower beds, and recent straightening of the library, and to Elder Tom Lanoue and Pastor Tom for the various ways they maintain the building.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Remember our students as they return to their studies this fall. Pray for Bill Wanamaker at UMass, and Aaron Durkee at Worcester Polytech. Pray also for our younger students, that they too would grow in grace and knowledge this coming year.



CONGRATULATIONS

For those who remember Jeremiah Johnson, he was recently honored as the 2012 Neiderhoffer Fellowship recipient at John Jay College. The award is given to a doctoral candidate in memory of Professor Arthur Niederhoffer, who was a distinguished policing practitioner and scholar. Jeremiah is currently Detective Sergeant with the Darien, CT Police Department.



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<p>2 10:00 Worship</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>6 7:00 Addictions Victorious</p>	<p>7</p>	<p>8</p>
<p>9 9:30 Sunday School resumes 10:45 Worship</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>11</p>	<p>12</p>	<p>13 7:00 Addictions Victorious</p>	<p>14</p>	<p>15 7-8:30 a.m. Men's Prayer Fellowship at the church</p>
<p>16 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 12:30 Church Picnic</p>	<p>17</p>	<p>18</p>	<p>19</p>	<p>20 7:00 Addictions Victorious 5:00 Third Thursday downtown</p>	<p>21</p>	<p>22</p>
<p>23/30 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship (5:00 Prayer Gathering on the 30th)</p>	<p>24</p>	<p>25</p>	<p>26</p>	<p>27 7:00 Addictions Victorious</p>	<p>28</p>	<p>29 </p>