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The Challenge (and joy) of Lent

By Pastor Julie Wright

Lent is a challenging season. In the midst of a frigid winter, when there is more darkness than daylight, we are dared to pay attention to our faith when most of us would rather snuggle up under a cozy blanket with a good book or remote control in hand. We are dared to take a journey with Jesus into a dark time in his life as he makes his way to the cross. This year we have barely finished singing about angels, stars and shepherds when we will need to make a quick left turn into Lent.

Not all Christian traditions observe Lent, but for Lutherans, it is an essential part of the journey. Joan Chittister writes that during the season of Lent,

“I am challenged again to decide whether I, myself, do truly believe that Jesus is the Christ – and if I believe, whether I will live accordingly when I can no longer hear the song of the angels in my life and the star of Bethlehem has grown dim for me.”

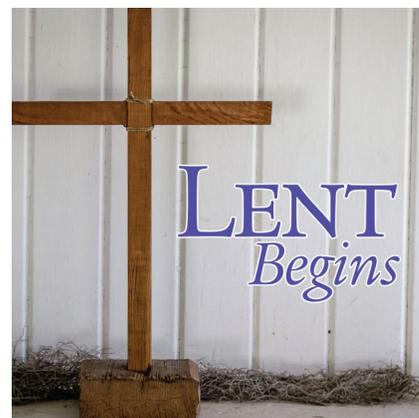
What if we see Lent as a time to re-evaluate, to step back and see what God is up to in our midst – after the Christmas tree has been put in storage, the glitz and glory of that season has been set aside? In a sense, we could view Lent as an early *spring cleaning* in which to get intentional

about this life of faith. It could be a chance to *take stock* of where we are in our journey of faith and then *take steps* toward being deliberate about where we want to go next in life, in faith, and as a community.

Our 2016 Lenten Journey

A group of creative and faith-filled members have been meeting diligently since mid-October with one goal – to bring lively and meaningful worship experiences to our community during the season of Lent. Special thanks to members of this Lenten planning team: Al Bondy, Kathryn Herman, Katie Klopfleisch, Susan Ricketts, Louise Lentz, and Hailee Waska. With a focus on the Gospel of Mark, this team has designed an experience for Wednesday night worship services that will allow all of us to slow down, decompress and see Jesus in a new way through music, liturgy and storytelling.

In the past several years we have used the Holden Evening Prayer during Wednesday



night services. This year we will be making a departure from that tradition to try something new. What can you expect?

Come for a Meal and Conversation - Wednesdays at 5:30 pm

The community gathers for a simple meal at 5:30 pm each Wednesday in Lent with plenty of time for conversation. This year we will also have a special hands-on activity for children. Confirmation students will meet one-on-one with their Mentors during this meal time for a series of guided faith conversations.

Come for Worship – Wednesdays at 7:00-7:30 pm

In the space of a brief 30-minute worship service we will enjoy special prelude music, sing, invite God to be among us, and hear scripture and engaging storytelling. With worship at the heart of our life together, we hear the promises, joys and challenges of the journey to the cross.

The Lenten schedule begins on Wednesday, February 10th for Ash Wednesday

- 5:30 pm Meal and Conversation
- 7:00 pm Worship with Communion and Imposition of Ashes

See the church calendar or website for all of the Lenten activities and look forward to receiving a Lenten calendar filled with creative ways to observe Lent this year.

Worship and Music Ministry

Worship and Music Notes

by Louise Lentz, Worship and Music Chair

The Worship & Music Ministry Team opened our meeting in early January with a devotion focused on Psalm 148. The writer of the devotion asks the question “Why do we worship?” He contends that worship is focused outward. It is not about us. We lift our voices and our hearts and celebrate God who hears us and is pleased. As we embark on the New Year, the Worship and Music team is committed to enabling that outward expression of joy by creating experiences that are meaningful, relevant, Spirit-filled, and grounded in God’s word.

The purpose of our worship is to glorify God. We want your help to define and bring to life how we glorify God. The team has plans for special music events to enhance our services throughout the year. A committee has been established to explore options for wall hangings and banners to visually enhance our Sanctuary. The strategic planning team is seeking input from all members to create a long range vision for Amazing Grace which includes worship experiences.

This is your invitation to share your thoughts for planning our worship in 2016. Connect with one of the team members or attend a meeting. The members of the Worship and Music Team are: Louise Lentz, chair; Trish Ebensteiner, Pastor Chris Kinney, Laurel Oseth, Brad Pipal, Nancy Pollock, Gloria Rasmussen, Angy Thelemann, Judy & Tom Thompson, and Susan Young. We meet on the first Thursday of each month with our next meeting scheduled for Thursday, February 4, 7 pm. We look forward to hearing your ideas.



Our Lenten Journey Begins...

Wednesday, February 10th

5:30—6:30 p.m. Meal and Fellowship
 5:30—6:30 p.m. Confirmation Mentor/Mentee Conversations
 6:00—6:45 p.m. King's Kids Choir and His Harmony Choir
 7:00 p.m. Worship
 7:45 p.m. Sanctuary Choir (8:00 p.m. on Ash Wednesday)

Come and join us as we gather for a meal, lively conversation, and worship each Wednesday night during Lent beginning on February 10th.

The meal is a fundraiser hosted by the youth attending the ELCA Gathering this summer.



February Worship

Sunday	Theme	Lessons	Worship Services
February 7 <i>Transfiguration</i>	More Than We Agreed To	Psalm 27:1-4 Mark 8:27-9:8	8:00 and 10:30 am Worship with Holy Communion
Wednesday February 10 <i>Ash Wednesday</i>	Why Are We Afraid To Ask?	Psalm 32:1-5 Mark 9:30-37	7:00 pm Worship with Holy Communion
February 14 <i>Lent 1</i>	Follow Me	Psalm 19:7-10 Mark 10:17-31	8:00 and 10:30 am Worship with Holy Communion
Wednesday February 17	Trust	Mark 11:12-14, 20-25 (Mark 13:28-31)	7:00 pm Worship
February 21 <i>Lent 2</i>	Have Mercy	Psalm 34:11-14 Mark 10:32-52	8:00 and 10:30 am Worship with Holy Communion
Wednesday February 24	Transformation	Mark 11:15-19	7:00 pm Worship
February 28 <i>Lent 3</i>	Parable of the Tenants	Psalm 86:8-13 Mark 12:1-12	8:00 and 10:30 am Worship with Holy Communion



February 10, 2016
Worship at 7:00 pm

From the Christian Education Ministry Team

SUNDAY SCHOOL KIDS DANCE IN THE NEW YEAR

It was a cold winter's day in January, but the kids in Sunday School on January 10 warmed up quickly with their dance and exercise routines, lead by the Spirited Feet dance teacher, Heidi Crist. Each routine was set to fun Christian music which helped us see how "Faith Fitness" fits into our Christian life. One student commented, "But we'll have the real Sunday School next week!" Well, keeping our bodies in good condition is honoring God our creator. Let all creation praise God!

Spirited Feet returns on February 7 for more dance and exercise. . . in place of "the real" Sunday School. Please join the fun! The Pre-school room will again be open for our littlest dancers.

Thank you to our January teachers, Sue Grundhoffer, Jennifer Rutschke, Linda Becker, and Lynn Waska. Cooking was open for the first time this year, kids planted seeds of faith, and the theater of plays and puppets rounded out the curriculum, as the children learned about the Parable of the Sower from Matthew 9.

In February we welcome Lynn Waska back to teach Bible Skills and games, Annie Morgan will be our chief chef in the cooking center, Sara Liegl brings her creativity to Arts and Crafts, and Trudy Johnson will open up the Computer Lab. Thank you most sincerely for each one of these volunteers. February sessions will run on February 14, 21, and 28.

The teaching schedules for March and April, posted on the Sunday School bulletin board, are completely open. God has blessed our congregation so richly with willing volunteers each month and we pray others will step forward. It would be wonderful if we could get a few more men to work with the children, setting a prime role model and inspiring young minds. All the curriculum is written for you and help is available.





VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL SAVE THE DATES!

VBS 2016, *Kickin' Up Kindness*, will be held June 20-23, 2016. Registration materials and early registration will be available in February.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Youth...Parents... Grandparents... Neighbors... Friends!! *Come assist and help the children Strengthen their Faith.* Volunteer workers are needed to help run this year's exciting VBS summer program, "Kickin' Up Kindness". Come join the fun for a few hours or a few days!

HELP IS NEEDED IN MANY AREAS:

Teacher	Classroom Assistants	Breakfast Assistants
Craft Time	Lunch Supervision	Outdoor Supervision
Snack Assistance	Field Trip Supervision	Decorating/Set-up
Afternoon Check-Out	Cleaning (daily)	



First Communion Workshop

Submitted by Pastor Chris Becker

Amazing Grace welcomes all to Holy Communion. There is no age restriction. We encourage parents to be attentive to when they feel their children are ready. When a child is ready, we offer a workshop that is intended to enrich a person's understanding and appreciation for this gift God has given to the church.

On Saturday, March 12, from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. children and youth of various ages will gather with their parent(s), and other significant adults in their life, to explore the various aspects of Holy Communion. This workshop is interactive with hands on activities that present the major themes of Holy Communion in ways all can grasp.

Throughout our life we continue to learn new insights of God working in our lives. This workshop is one of those steps we take in our journey of faith. Please mark March 12 on your calendar and sign up on the blue sheet in your Sunday bulletin by February 28.

If you have any questions please contact me at cbecker@aglcigh.org.



Tuesdays at Two

Submitted by Judy Rhein

Every Tuesday at 2:00 pm you are asked to pray for someone in need, give thanks for someone special, raise up a particular cause in the community or the country, or take time to give thanks for your many blessings. Talking to God through prayer is central to our lives as Christians. God asks us to come to Him, not just with our problems, but with thanksgiving. Praise God for his listening ear!

Psalm 30 in Acrostic Poems

by the Confirmation Class, Mentors and Parents

Trusting in God
Having faith
Acepting God's help
Never ending gratitude
Knowing his love

Loves you always
In your heart
Silences your fears
There for you
Eternal life
Never leaves your side

Reaching out to
Everyone with
Joy
One who
Is
Constantly with you,
Eternally

You are omnipotent
Almighty
Healer
Wonderful
Everlasting
Heavenly Father



Devotion to God
Assures
Needs
Chances at life for
Everyone

Loving
Ongoing
Receiving
Doesn't deny

Always faithful
Remember me God
I praise your name
Secure my soul
Exalt in my steadfastness

Sure of his love
Even when I fail
Calling his name
Unto the heavens!
Redeemed
Even though I am flawed

Love
Ongoing
Rejoice
Delivered

Recieve his love
Embrace his grace
Joy is in your faith
Ovation unto Him
Inticing His power
Caring for others
Ever after is His promise

Placing my life in your hands
Relying on you
All my days
In everything I do
Singing praises
Endlessly and always

Cry's of joy
Around the world
Ringing in my ears
Ignoring sadness
Never neglecting me
God

Jubilant celebration of love
Ordinary people called by God
Yehovah will be with you always

L Leave your troubles behind
L Invite God into your heart
S Serve others
T Together we rejoice
E Everyday is a reason for thankfulness
N ever forget who will love you al-

P ut hands up to the Lord
R egate in his glory
A nounce to the world your devotion
I n his name we pray
S ecure your place in his kingdom
E njoy the rewards of his praise

Y ou raise me up
A lways praise God
H eed arrogance
W eeping turns to joy
E vening mourning turns to dancing
H eart will sing unceasingly



F OREVER
A FFECTIONATELY
V ALUED
O RDAINED AND
R ECEIVED

T his morning I'm mending
H is love is vending
A lways with me
N ow I bend a knee
K indness and love
S ing praises like a dove

F orever is an eternity
A waiting His glorious
V aliant return
O n the horizon
R eaping His joy

S aved by faith
E mpowered to grow
C entered in love
U nshakable foundation
R estoring power
E ternal home

T urns our mourning into dancing
U nderstanding of our emotions
R arely angry, mostly loving
N ear to me always
S et me high above the world

L eave everything to God
O ur omniscient God
Vocalize your love of God
E stablish God as your Savior

Y ou were there for me
A ngry once in awhile, but a lifetime of love
H ow easy to crow when things are good
W hen you turned away, I fell to pieces
E ven now help me
H ow I will praise you and give thanks forever.

H elping to understand
E arning respect
A ttributing to God
R eceive knowledge

F orever
R edeemed
E mbraced
E verlasting Love

From the Youth and Family Ministry Team

Teaching Prayer at Home—Answered Prayers!

Submitted by Merri Guggisberg, Youth and Young Adult Coordinator

Many times we miss noticing what God is doing around us. We might forget to thank Him for an answered prayer or may simply not pay attention to the small miracles of safety, life, and beauty around us.

Place an empty jar where it can easily be seen in your home. Then invite family members to put a penny in the jar each time you see God's hand at work in answer to a prayer. To get them included start with sharing examples where you have had prayers answered, adding a penny to the jar.

At the end of the month, collect the coins and decide as a family where to donate the funds. Maybe MN FoodShare month, or World Hunger or another charity that is dear to your heart.



Family Service Idea *(Monthly service idea's shared from our Youth & Family Ministry Team)*

submitted by Merri Guggisberg, Youth and Young Adult Coordinator



Creative Ways to Share Love this Valentine's Day and Make a Difference!

When sending your loved ones Valentine notes this year, how about creating cards that will brighten another person's day. Simply create paper valentines and bring to AGLC – we will share with those who could use an extra smile!

Date: Valentine's Day – February 14 (bring to church by February 7)

Age: all ages

Location: your home and AGLC



Gerten's Upcoming Plant Fundraisers

Supporting summer camps, mission trips and youth events

Easter Plants sale dates: February 7-February 21, 2016
Plants used to decorate our sanctuary for Easter Sunday.

Spring Garden sale dates: March 2 – April 3, 2016
(All orders must be returned by April 3)

Plant delivery: Friday, May 13

(Plant cards available by April 17 –great Mother's Day gift)



Lenten Worship and Dinner

Wednesdays: February 10- March 16, 2016

Dinner: 5:30pm -6:30pm

Proceeds support youth mission trip to Idaho, June 2016.

Worship: 7:00pm

Notes from Evangelism/Stewardship Team



THANK YOU SUNDAYS

Submitted by the Year-Round Stewardship Team

On Sunday, March 6, you'll be asked to consider writing a short thank-you note to someone in **our church community** who has had a positive impact on your faith. We wanted to let you know in advance so you could have time to think about who that special person might be and make sure you get their name. It could be anything from lending a strong voice during the opening hymn or making sure the candles are lit to helping you through a specific hardship. This is all part of our focus on generosity and part of the Year-Round Stewardship Team's definition of stewardship. "Stewardship is having a purpose to better the world and each other by **acknowledging** and utilizing God's gifts in all of us." Let's take this opportunity to acknowledge God's gifts in each other.

Missions Updates...

World Hunger

Submitted by Zella Vandervort

World Hunger

We've hardly caught our breath after Christmas and it's already time to think about Lent. Wow! On Feb 10, the evening of Ash Wednesday we will hand out World Hunger boxes and envelopes. Both the boxes and the envelopes can be put in the offering basket anytime during Easter Week. Please remember that as we gather for our wonderful Lenten suppers, there are many around the world who will go hungry. Your change or check provides not only nourishment but hope to those who go without both on a daily basis.



Fair Trade Table

Thank you to everyone that shopped the Fair Trade Table over the Christmas Season. By buying the Fair Trade products you support the small farmers and businesses around the globe, while the money that was made from the sale will be divided between Neighbors and ELCA Disaster Response.

"Lutheran Disaster Response has been and will continue to meet the basic humanitarian needs and upholding the rights of those fleeing war and oppression. We are working with our trusted partners and companion churches, who are helping provide safety, support and basic amenities, such as water, food and shelter." ELCA Disaster Response.

Africa Mission Trip

Submitted by Pastor Chris Becker

Our theme for this journey is "Embracing Grace". To prepare for this mission trip we are meeting once every month. Our preparation includes: cultural information (what clothing to wear, proper etiquette, gender roles, etc.), language lessons, preparation of teaching material, Biblical reflections, practical items such as Visa forms and medical questions. We have met 3 times and will meet 5 more times before we leave on Sunday afternoon August 14th for 15 days.

Our journey will involve a long plane ride, a long bus ride and some interesting places to spend the night. There are 4 members of Amazing Grace (Helen and Mary Yotter, Abby Guggisberg and myself), along with the pastor from Newport Lutheran, 2 other people who are friends of our members and who have traveled to Africa before with us, and 1 person who is going for the first time.

We go to continue the deep relationship between Amazing Grace and Magulilwa Lutheran Church. We go to discover God in the joy of those who live in great poverty. We go to serve God as we use our talents and gifts to enrich the lives of others. We go to experience what it means to be the recipient of such blessed hospitality. We go embracing the Grace of God in our lives and the lives of those whom we meet.

Please pray for the preparation for this group who represents Amazing Grace in Tanzania.

Pastor (Mchungaji) Chris



Neighbor's Inc.

Submitted by Lisa Barnhart



The March Food Drive is fast approaching!

To kick off this event, we will be showing “The Starfish Throwers”, a documentary following three individuals in their quest to help the homeless and hungry. This will be shown in 2 parts. Join us in the Upper Room between services on February 28 and March 6.

Each Sunday in March you will be presented with a different challenge to help you with creative ways to make donating to the Food Shelf easy and affordable. If you can't make it every Sunday, check the church's Facebook page for details of that week's challenge!

Current food shelf needs: Baked beans, tuna/canned meats, pancake mix and syrup, Hamburger Helper, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, canned fruit, jelly, toilet paper, hygiene products, Spaghettio's and canned pasta.

MN Food Share Kick-Off Movie Event: February 28 and March 6

AGLC TREASURY UPDATE

AGLC Financial Summary through December 2015

Prepared by Tim Sanborn, Treasurer

- ❖ December Income was a favorable \$5,570 over Budget, but for the year we were -\$24,998 under budget.
- ❖ Expenses are \$24,199 under budget (favorable). AGLC was about as close to \$0 Net Income in 2015 as can be.

Dec. Income:	\$45,570	2015 Income:	\$402,002
Dec. Expense:	<u>\$52,859</u>	2015 Expense:	<u>\$402,801</u>
Dec. Net Income:	-\$7,289	2015 Net Inc.:	-\$799

Council Corner

Submitted by Jim Zentner, Outgoing Council President

This is it, my last message to all of you! I can hear your cheers now. My biggest hope as I leave this position is that some of you might have read some of the things I wrote. This time I am going to give you a pat on the back.

Some forty-three years ago when I was doing an internship, my primary mentor told me something like

this, “change, even for the sake of change, is good”. To fully explain what that statement was about would take far too much space, but suffice it to say, we have experienced our fair share of change this past year and I am really proud of the way you all have embraced it. I think that is one of the reasons my mentor made the comment to me he did, life is full of changes and if we don't find a way to embrace that change, we turn into bitter and sad people. This congregation since my family and I have become a part has seen and embraced it's fair amount of change, and I think

that is one factor that makes us a strong faith community.

Clearly, one thing that does not change is God's promise to us. Those of us who attended the joint Bible study between Christian, Judaism, and Islam on Abraham and Sarah heard about God's promise to us that started with Abraham and goes through Jesus. The rest of what we think, believe and do is probably subject to change. The reason I bring this up as my last message to you is to remind you that we will continue to experience change as a faith community. This next five months a strategic planning team is going to be doing some important work and I suspect that when all is said and done in late May, their report is going to contain some changes that we will need to embrace; again.

I am not speaking of change that is going to be controversial but rather change that may mean we do things differently from how we do them now. And that is another reason why my mentor said to me what he did, change for the sake of change is good. It

helps us to not get so comfortable with a way of living or doing things that we then are unable to do things in a different way. We are still struggling with our financial condition that we may need to do some things in ways that we don't even think about at present. I hope and pray that when change occurs, again, we will meet that change with open hearts and a willingness to embrace it.

I have truly enjoyed my time as president of this congregation and feel very confident in the new leaders that have been chosen to keep us moving forward. I get enthused every time I see some new children singing in the choirs or see some new faces in our Sanctuary Choir. I get even more enthused when I see new faces that look different from the majority come and worship with us. It tells me that we really are welcoming and that we chose the right place to be. I hope the rest of you feel like I do and I look forward to continuing my place as an active member of Amazing Grace Lutheran Church, the most Amazing place where God meets us and keeps God's promise.

Peace and Grace Be to you All,
Jim Zentner

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS OFF TO A STRONG START

Submitted by Kent E. Rhein-Medina

*For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord,
plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.
Jeremiah 29:11*

If you think long range and strategic planning is dull and boring then you did not attend the congregational "dream" session on January 31. Using an appreciative strategic planning model, with the intent of focusing on the assets, strengths, and possibilities already present in our faith community, we were led through a variety of exercises that will be the foundation of future programs, services, and activities that join God at work in the world. "What Can Be" is an overarching theme of this part of the process and isn't it an exhilarating idea to be able to bring ideas that might seem out-of-reach into practical reality?

The Core Team of the Strategic Planning Committee, consisting of Pastor Julie, Annie Morgan, Julie Lindscheid, Andrew Jeyachandran, Patty Johnson, Kent Rhein-Medina, and Renee Skogland, have been working behind the scenes since early January to gather information and data that may be useful when creating the final goals and objectives of the strategic plan. For example, we are researching the demographics of Dakota County, Inver Grove Heights, and our congregation; remembering the history of our congregation; looking at the number of churches in the area and their services; and asking questions such as, "How far are people willing to travel to their worship community?"

It is important to remember that this is YOUR strategic plan for our church. The Core Team members will continue to elicit and listen to your feedback, ideas, and dreams. Your engagement in this process is not only welcome, but necessary, to ensure a vibrant, God-centered plan for the future of Amazing Grace!



**AMAZING
GRACE**
LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Mailed on February 4, 2016



Amazing Grace Lutheran Church
Joining God at Work in the World!
All are welcome!!

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His Harmony Choir Director: Susan Young
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King's Kids Choir Director: Angy Thelemann

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Amanda Vesta

Main Office Hours:

(Typically)
Monday: Working Offsite
Tuesday—Friday: 9:00 a.m.—4:30 p.m.

Deadlines:

The newsletter article deadline
is always on the 15th of the month. Bulletin
announcements or additions are due on
Wednesdays.