



# GRACE TO YOU

## December 2025

**Grace United  
Protestant Church**

**266 Somonauk St.  
Park Forest, IL 60466  
Phone: 708-748-4567**



### HANGING OF THE GREENS

On Sunday, November 30th, after church, we will join with the Love of Christ congregation to decorate the church for the Advent Season in preparation for celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Please plan to stay for this special time. Many hands make for light work! (Besides, it's fun!)

A chili lunch will be waiting to reward the "elves."



### POINSETTIAS FOR THE SANCTUARY

Each year we decorate the sanctuary with beautiful poinsettias for Christmas. There is an order form in the narthex for red and white poinsettias. They come in a 6" size for \$10 or a 10" size for \$20. Orders will be taken until December 7th. If you have any questions, please contact Sue Cassara at 708-785-5186.



### CHRISTMAS MISSIONS

There are many opportunities to support local non-profits at Grace Church during December.

\*The Rich Township Food Pantry is dedicated to providing essential groceries and personal care items to area households. The need for food assistance is especially urgent now.

\*The Pediatric Oncology Treasure Chest Foundation distributes toys to children when they receive cancer treatments. A box for new toys is by the hallway coat rack. *Please check the suggested list of toys to donate on page 8.* Let's fill it to overflowing.

\*Kids Above All works to provide early childhood education, safe housing and counseling to Chicago area children. A coin jug is in the hallway for donations. Dig out your loose change to support kids.

\*The mission of Jones Memorial Community Center is "to strengthen family ties, emphasize the worth of God's children, and answer a community need." Our sock & mitten tree will be up in the hall to decorate with winter clothing for children and adults. New toys are also collected by Rebekah Circle for Jones. The director will speak at the WCA luncheon on December 13th to inform us of the programs this agency provides.

Please be generous in sharing God's love this Christmas and donate as you are able using the blue pew envelopes. Checks should be payable to Grace Church, indicating for which specific organization.

### **Mission Statement of Our Reconciling Ministries:**

Through God's grace and as apprentices of Christ's living example, we stand united in our commitment to welcome and embrace the diversity of all children of God, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and wish to reach out to those underserved to provide a safe space for spiritual growth. We strive to create an inclusive fellowship welcoming of the LGBTQ+ community, their families, and support networks, and to foster fairness, justice, peace, love, and understanding among all as is reflected in our name—Grace United Protestant Church.



***A spiritual home for  
worship and service.***

**Website: [graceupc.org](http://graceupc.org)**

### UPCOMING CALENDAR

**December 21st—  
Nine Lessons and Carols**

**PLEASE CHECK OUT THE  
CALENDAR ON PAGE 13.**



# GRACE TO YOU

## THE PASTOR'S PAGE

December 2025

2025: A Year to Remember

On Wednesday, December 31st, we will say goodbye to 2025! It has been an incredible year filled with surprises, upheavals, disappointments, and unexpected political drama. As we reflect on 2025, it will be remembered in this country's history with mixed feelings. People's experiences of the year will vary depending on their political affiliation, with phrases like "fulfillment of campaign promises" and "destabilization of communities" shaping the narrative. However, the best part is that God is with us, both as individuals and as a nation.

The events of this year have led us to eagerly anticipate the Advent season, a time when we celebrate the arrival of new life in Christ. As a baby, Jesus brings a message of hope in the face of our frustrations, peace amid our uncertainties, joy in our sufferings, and the spirit of unconditional love to all of God's children.

**This year, the Advent season begins on November 30, 2025.** In the midst of the current political upheaval, we are witnessing a decline in trust and an increase in divisions among people. Ongoing tensions have left many feeling anxious and uncertain. However, this reality calls us to seek understanding, healing, and hope. **In response to these challenges, we have chosen the theme "The Will to Dream."** This theme encourages us to envision a brighter future. It empowers us to confront despair, embody justice, and embrace hope as a powerful act of defiance, to dream not as a means of escape, but as a strong expression of spiritual resistance. We look forward to celebrating this special season together. Feel free to invite your family, friends, and neighbors to the upcoming Advent events.

November 30	<b>The Will to Dream: Vigilant Hope (Hanging of Greens)</b>
December 07	<b>The Will to Dream: Prophetic Peace</b>
December 14	<b>The Will to Dream: Unexpected Joy</b>
December 21	<b>The Will to Dream: Merciful Love (Nine Lessons &amp; Carols)</b>
December 24	<b>Christmas Eve at 5 PM: Embodied Promise (Mary's Story)</b>
December 28	<b>Generational Praise: Reflection Time</b>

**Please bring your Christmas gifts of God's love to Church on Sunday, December 21, or on Christmas Eve.** We will usher in 2026 with Wesley's Covenant Service, dedicating ourselves to the Lord and being sealed by the Holy Communion on **Sunday, January 4.**

We want to extend our congratulations to those celebrating their birthdays and anniversaries this month. May their days be filled with hope, joy, peace, love, and good health.



As we look ahead to 2026, let's take a moment to reflect on how we can deepen our spiritual journeys and strengthen the relationships within our church family. **I encourage everyone to commit to their membership through presence, time, talents, and service.** We pray that 2026 will bring fulfillment, transformation, and growth. At this point, I want to express my gratitude to God for His blessings upon us in 2025 and to thank each of you for your dedication.

**I wish you a Merry Christmas and a bright 2026!**

Yours by His grace,  
Pastor Amos Oladipo.

## WCA NEWS

WCA Board monthly meetings are held on the first Thursday of each month at 10:00 AM in the parlor. All women are invited to attend any of the meetings.

### REBEKAH CIRCLE

On Monday, December 8th, Circle members and guests will meet at the home of Sue Dukes at 6:30 PM for their annual Christmas potluck dinner. Each December Rebekah Circle collects new, unwrapped toys for Jones Memorial for their Christmas party. We invite anyone who would like to contribute toys to bring them to church by Sunday, December 7th.

### CHRISTMAS POTLUCK

**Saturday, December 13th**

**12:00 noon**

Please mark your calendars and plan to join us for a wonderful time of great food, fellowship, and fun. Bring your favorite dish to share.

We are excited that Juana Morales from Jones Memorial Community Center will be our guest speaker.

This is a terrific opportunity to bring socks, mittens, scarves, and hats for the Sock and Mitten Tree (a long-time Christmas mission for Jones Memorial)!

### BIZARRE BAZAAR

**November 30th**

A funny name, but it's a way to contribute to the WCA without having to make items for a bazaar or purchase items from each other. Again this year, there will be a table of "trinkets" to choose from and a basket for a free-will offering. *This is a good opportunity to donate items you might have to share.* This is also the same Sunday as Hanging of the Greens followed by chili, so after the decorating you can have lunch AND shop! Please give as you are able. As always, the proceeds will go to WCA missions. Thank you!

### 2026 BOOK

The book for 2026 is in the process of being updated. If you have any information that you would like added or corrected, please let Leslie Langmeyer know by December 14th...email: llangmeyer@aol.com, or phone: 708-481-1578. The plan is to have them ready for distribution just after the first of the year.

### AFTER-CHURCH COFFEE AND FELLOWSHIP



Enjoy good fellowship and good food in the SPRED room every third Sunday...in December, it's after Nine Lessons and Carols! There is a sign-up sheet in the narthex to help with these coffees. We need help with baked or bought items and help to set up and clean up. This isn't an activity for only the women...*men can sign up, too!* Thank you to those who have signed up to help in the past! You have helped this to be a wonderful success! There will be a WCA board member to work with you. The new sign-up sheet is ready to be filled in. Please pick a date to help!

**WATCH FOR A FUN NEW BIBLE TRIVIA GAME COMING IN JANUARY!**

STAFF GIFTS

During the holiday season we show appreciation to our staff for their dedication to the life of Grace Church with a monetary gift. Pastor Amos Oladipo, Elaine Degenhart (administrative assistant), Val Nicholson (music director) and Sean Gorman (custodian) all work to maintain this spiritual home for worship and service. Donations can be given to Chris Long, Leslie Langmeyer, or Glennace Rocker before December 28th. Thank you!

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL

Our children's Sunday School class will count our blessings as we celebrate our families and friends at Thanksgiving. Then we will remember the Christmas story with Advent lessons and activities.

\*\*Please note that we will remain in worship on two Sundays this season to participate with the congregation for Hanging of the Greens on November 30th and the Nine Lessons & Carols service on December 21st.

LAST MONTH FOR THE PLUMBERS FUND!

As you know our plumber found some cracked sewer pipe in the front yard of our church. Therefore, we needed to have part of the front yard dug up and the original pipe was replaced with new pipe. This cost was \$13,000 for the whole project. With your help, **we are so close to the goal!** We've collected \$12,525 so far! We appreciate all of you and know we'll be able to reach 100%. Please put "Plumbers Fund" on your check or envelope. We will be collecting money for this through the end of December.

WEEKLY PRAYER GROUP

The prayer group meets on Wednesday mornings at 9:30 in the Banner Room (room 116). Everyone with concerns for the church, the community, the country, or themselves, is welcome and encouraged to join this informal group.

Please let Alice Wasney or the church office know of any prayer needs.

HOLIDAY SING-ALONG

Join other church members and Chicagoans on Friday, December 19th to celebrate the season in song. A local musical group will lead us from 6-7pm at Cloud Gate (The Bean) in Millennium Park. A small group from Grace attended last year and had a great time. We'll take the 3 pm Metra train to look at decorations and eat before the sing-along then take the 7:20 return train. This is standing room only (unless you can find a ledge to sit on or bring a chair) and it likely will be cold so bundle up and wear warm comfortable shoes. If you'd rather drive, Grant Park North or Millennium Park garages are close but still require some walking. Contact Chris Long, 708-606-9143, if interested.

On All Saints Day, members of Grace Church lit candles to remember those who have left us.



**FREE TURKEYS!**

**McDonalds Corporation is doing a free turkey giveaway.**

November 14th 8:00-10:00 AM  
14702 Dixie Hwy.  
Harvey, IL

November 15th 8:00-10:00 AM  
19767 S. Halsted  
Chicago Heights, IL

**PANERA NIGHT!**

As you are out and about this shopping season, please plan to take time out for dinner at Panera Bread in Matteson, IL on Sunday, December 14th from 4:00-8:00 PM.

The event flyer that you will need for the church to receive credit, will be sent to you by email once we receive it from Panera.

Thank you for your support!





## The Legend of the Candy Cane

According to legend there was a candy maker who wanted to invent a candy that was a witness to Christ.

First of all, he used a hard candy because Christ is the rock of ages. This hard candy was shaped so that it would resemble a “J” for Jesus or turned upside down, a shepherd’s staff. He made it white to represent the purity of Christ.

Finally a red stripe was added to represent the blood Christ shed for the sins of the world, and three thinner red stripes for the stripes He received on our behalf when the Roman soldiers whipped Him. Sometimes a green stripe is added as a reminder that Jesus is a gift from God.

The flavor of the cane is peppermint, which is similar to hyssop. Hyssop is in the mint family and was used in the Old Testament for purification and sacrifice. Jesus is the pure Lamb of God, come to be sacrifice for the sins of the world.

So, every time you see a candy cane, remember the message of the candy maker.

### ADVENT BIBLE STUDY

Plan to join the virtual study of the first two chapters of Matthew on Tuesdays, December 2nd through December 30th at 7:00 PM. Email the church at [graceupchurch2@gmail.com](mailto:graceupchurch2@gmail.com) for the Zoom link.

# Nine Lessons and Carols

The coming of Christ told  
in scripture and song

**Dec. 21 11 a.m.**

Grace United Protestant Church  
266 Somonauk St, Park Forest, IL  
708-748-4567, [graceupc.org](http://graceupc.org)

**TIPS FROM A FOOD BANK WORKER**

As the holidays approach, please keep in mind these tips from a food bank.

1. Everyone donates Kraft Mac and Cheese in the box. They can rarely use it because it needs milk and butter which is hard to get from regular food banks.
2. Boxed milk is a treasure, as kids need it for cereal which they also get a lot of.
3. Everyone donates pasta sauce and spaghetti noodles.
4. They cannot eat all the awesome canned veggies and soup unless you put a can opener in too or buy pop tops.
5. Oil is a luxury but needed for Rice a-Roni which they also get a lot of.
6. Spices or salt and pepper would be a real Christmas gift.
7. Tea bags and coffee make them feel like you care.
8. Sugar and flour are treats.
9. They fawn over fresh produce donated by farmers and grocery stores.
10. Seeds are cool in Spring and Summer because growing can be easy for some.
11. They rarely get fresh meat.
12. Tuna and crackers make a good lunch.
13. Hamburger Helper goes nowhere without ground beef.
14. They get lots of peanut butter and jelly but usually not sandwich bread.
15. Butter or margarine is nice too.
16. Eggs are a real commodity.
17. Cake mix and frosting makes it possible to make a child's birthday cake.
18. Dishwashing detergent is very expensive and is always appreciated.
19. Feminine hygiene products are a luxury and women will cry over that.
20. Everyone loves Stove Top Stuffing.

In all the years I have donated food at the Holidays, I bought what I thought they wanted, but have never asked. I am glad I did. If you are helping a Family this Christmas, maybe this can help you tailor it more. It does for me!

~Susan Cummings

“Family Fun Night” — Such a fun time of games and fellowship!! Join us next time!



GRACE TO YOU  
INSPIRATION PAGE

Please share your devotions, readings, and inspirations that are special to you so that others can be inspired, too. I hope that this will be a page that everyone will enjoy and contribute to. Please email me with your contributions at llangmeyer@aol.com. Thank you!

~ Leslie

*Thank you to Sue Dukes for sharing this from The Upper Room*

*God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*  
~Genesis 1:27

On a recent walk, I spotted an oak leaf lying among maple leaves. The fallen beige leaf stood out on the golden carpet of maple leaves. Its rounded lobes contrasted with the sharp points of the other leaves surrounding it. Still, together, the leaves were beautiful.

How often do we notice someone who is different? Skin color, style of clothing, hairstyle, age, and other features may set them apart from the crowd. Maybe we are the unique people where we work, live, or go to school. Sometimes people stand out, and that's just fine.

God creates each person with unique gifts and abilities. Even though we are different from one another, we all bear the image of God. Together with one another and the Divine, we collaborate to establish justice, make peace, and promote love.

Some people may desire that everyone conform to the same appearance, style, or belief, but God creates variety. The diversity of the natural world and humanity bring wonder and joy in their myriad expressions of God's creativity. Let us embrace God's work of love and our calling to celebrate that labor.

*Prayer:* God who delights in diversity thank you for creating each of us. Help us to appreciate the variety you have made and to treat every person with kindness. In Christ's name. Amen

*Thought for the Day:* I will give thanks for how God has made me unique.



*From Jesus Listens for Advent and Christmas*

My Great God,

Only in *You* can I find lasting Joy. There are many sources of happiness in this world, and sometimes they spill over into Joy—especially when I share my pleasure with You. You shower so many blessings on my life! I want to take note of each one—responding to Your goodness with a glad, thankful heart. As I draw near to You with a grateful mindset, the Joy of Your Presence enhances the pleasure I receive from Your blessings.

On days when Joy seems a distant memory, I need to *seek Your Face* more than ever. Instead of letting circumstances or feelings weigh me down, I can encourage myself with biblical truth. *You are always with me; You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will take me into Glory.* I must hold on to these glorious truths with all my might as I make my way through the debris of this broken world. Help me remember that You Yourself are *the Truth*. You are also *the Way*, so it is wise to follow You. *The Light of Your Presence* is shining on me—illuminating the pathway before me.

In Your Bright Name, Jesus, Amen.

CELEBRATIONS FOR DECEMBER**HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:**

Alma White—1st  
 Ryan Kunkel—3rd  
 Valerie Nicholson—11th  
 Kenny Chachakis—12th  
 Jennifer Steiner—15th  
 Jennifer Forbes—23rd  
 Jessica Kunkel—28th

**HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:**

Steve Jacobson and Valerie Nicholson—27th  
 Dan and MarcyJo Chachakis—29th

PLEASE KEEP IN YOUR PRAYERS:

***We thank God for many answered prayers as we continue to pray for:***

The Members of our church, near and far, Our Veterans, our Troops, and our Country,  
 World Peace, that the hungry can be fed, and the end of violence.



Barbara Abels	Marge Neel
The family of Curtis Bass, Jr.	Forest (Lee) Nelson
Nan Beard	Ronan Nelson
Jackie Ceres	The family of Wylladene Nelson
Gabe Chachakis	Stacey Peterson
Daniel Christain	Kyla Jo Purvenas
Elaine Degenhart	Szymanski Family
Ralph Duncan	Alma White
Niki Juarez Cummings	The Migrants, Immigrants, and Refugees among us
Mona Earving	The Victims of Gun Violence
Malcolm Knox	The People of Israel and Gaza
Jim Lewis	The People of Ukraine
The family of Patty McLeod	
Helen Neel	

Thank you from Marge Neel

I would like to thank everyone who attended Bruce's Celebration of Life, came to the luncheon, made a donation in Bruce's name, and/or sent a card. A special thanks to those who helped to make the service a success, especially Pastor Amos, Valerie Nicholson, Elaine Degenhart, Chris Long, my daughter Lynn Garcia, and the readers Melissa Harms, Josh Gustavson, and Jason Gustavson. Thank you also to everybody who got up and shared their personal experiences regarding Bruce. I only wish someone had recorded them so that I could listen to them again.

# GRACE TO YOU **ABOUT** Scouts

There were many fun activities throughout the summer and fall of 2025!



After consulting all maps and compasses, the Scouts are off to the start of the compass course.





## SUGGESTED ITEMS TO DONATE

**BRING JOY TO CHILDREN AND TEENS FIGHTING CANCER**

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Smaller items are better
- Items **MUST** be new
- **NO** stuffed animals
- **NO** crayons, markers or colored pencils
- **NO** board games

### MOST NEEDED

- Legos (for kids and teens)
- POP! Figures
- Jewelry
- Journals
- Barbies
- Action figures
- Trucks and cars (Hot Wheels)
- Toys from popular movies
- Science or art activities
- Gift Cards (\$10 - \$20)

### AMAZON WISH LIST



### QUESTIONS? CONTACT US!

708-687-8697  
 kendra@treasurechest.org  
 www.treasurechest.org

### ADDITIONAL OPTIONS

- Dolls and accessories
- Nail polish
- Cosmetic bags
- Scarves and hats
- Playdough
- Handheld games
- Sporting goods (balls, mitts, etc.)
- Earbuds (wired and wireless)
- Headphones, gaming ear pods
- Wallets, belts and purses
- Models
- Make-up (not liquid)
- Socks
- Baseball hats
- Crossword puzzles, Word searches, Sudoku
- Adult coloring books
- Selfie sticks, speakers
- Phone chargers, charging station



## REVERSE ADVENT CALENDAR

EACH DAY ADD AN ITEM TO A BOX.  
 ON CHRISTMAS EVE DONATE THE CONTENTS TO A  
 FOOD BANK.

- December 1 - box of cereal
- December 2 - peanut butter
- December 3 - stuffing mix
- December 4 - boxed potatoes
- December 5 - macaroni and cheese
- December 6 - canned fruit
- December 7 - canned tomatoes
- December 8 - canned tuna
- December 9 - dessert mix
- December 10 - jar of applesauce
- December 11 - canned sweet potatoes
- December 12 - cranberry sauce
- December 13 - canned beans
- December 14 - box of crackers
- December 15 - package of rice
- December 16 - package of oatmeal
- December 17 - package pasta
- December 18 - spaghetti sauce
- December 19 - chicken noodle soup
- December 20 - tomato soup
- December 21 - can corn
- December 22 - can mixed vegetables
- December 23 - can carrots
- December 24 - can green beans

PASSIONATEPENNYPINCHER.COM



### THE LINK FOR THE SUNDAY VIRTUAL SERVICE

Each Sunday, the church service is available virtually on Zoom. The service is live. *The bulletin and the words to the songs are on your screen each week. If you join by phone and want the bulletin emailed to you, please let the church office know.*

Pastor Amos sends the Zoom link each Sunday morning for anyone who would like to have it. Please let the office know if you want to have him send the link to you. Email the office at [graceupchurch2@gmail.com](mailto:graceupchurch2@gmail.com).

A gentle reminder: It's wonderful to be able to socialize before and after the service, but with the new virtual system in place, we need to mute our own computers during the service. As a courtesy to others, please remember to mute during the service.



### Nature's Lesson from Trails and Trials

The similarity between a trail and a trial is more than a transposed letter.

Just like our weary bodies need a break on a trail, our souls need rest in the midst of a trial. Whether on the trail or in a trial, God provides. *"He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters; He restores my soul."* ~Psalm 23: 2-3

When lost on a trail, we must go to a high place for perspective. In trials, God leads us to His high rock ~ above ourselves and our circumstances ~ enabling us to glimpse the path. *"I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I."* ~Psalm 61:2

While scaling a steep mountain trail, we need balance and stamina. When up against life's trials, God gives us that ability as well. *"He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to go on the heights."* ~Habakkuk 3:19

Trail guides give us direction; so does God. *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you."* ~Psalm 32:8

**Q.** Will we stumble? Yes, in both trials and on trails. But God is there.

*"When I said, 'My foot is slipping,' your love, O Lord, supported me."* ~Psalm 94:18

Thank you to Sue Dukes for sharing all these wonderful inspirations from Carol "Scout" Ruhter & Marty "Acorn" Ramey, Trailbound Trips.



# December 2025



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2 Men's Chat and Chew Breakfast at Big Apple <u>8:00 AM</u> Boy Scout meeting <u>7:00 PM</u> Advent Bible Study 7:00 PM	3 Prayer Group 9:30 AM	4 WCA Board Meeting 10:00 AM	5	6 ART meeting in parlor 9:30 AM
7 Communion Sunday Worship and Sunday School <u>11:00 AM</u> Choir Rehearsal after church	8 Rebekah Circle at the home of Sue Dukes 6:30 PM Toys for Jones Memorial	9 Men's Chat and Chew Breakfast at Big Apple <u>8:00 AM</u> Boy Scout meeting <u>7:00 PM</u> Advent Bible Study 7:00 PM	10 Prayer Group 9:30 AM	11	12	13 WCA Christmas Potluck Luncheon 12:00 noon
14 Choir Rehearsal <u>10:00 AM</u> Sunday Worship and Sunday School <u>11:00 AM</u> Bell Choir rehearsal after church Panera Night 4:00-8:00 PM	15	16 Men's Chat and Chew Breakfast at Big Apple <u>8:00 AM</u> Boy Scout meeting <u>7:00 PM</u> Advent Bible Study 7:00 PM	17 Prayer Group <u>9:30 AM</u> Tabitha Circle in parlor 2:00 PM	18	19 Holiday Sing-Along	20
21 Nine Lessons and Carols <u>Worship 11:00 AM</u> <u>No Sunday School</u> Coffee & Fellowship following church	22	23 Men's Chat and Chew Breakfast at Big Apple <u>8:00 AM</u> Boy Scout meeting <u>7:00 PM</u> Advent Bible Study 7:00 PM	24 Prayer Group <u>9:30 AM</u> Christmas Eve Service 5:00 PM	25 	26	27
28 Choir Rehearsal <u>10:00 AM</u> Sunday Worship and Sunday School <u>11:00 AM</u> Bell Choir rehearsal after church	29	30 Men's Chat and Chew Breakfast at Big Apple <u>8:00 AM</u> Boy Scout meeting 7:00 PM	31			