



GRACE TO YOU

July 2025

**Grace United
Protestant Church**

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

FAMILY FUN NIGHT — MAY 31ST



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.***

UPCOMING CALENDAR

**PLEASE CHECK OUT THE
CALENDAR ON PAGE 14.**

**CALENDAR CAN BE
PRINTED AND POSTED
FOR REMINDERS!**



GRACE TO YOU

THE PASTOR'S PAGE

Page 2

July 2025

Adieu Bruce Neel

At the conclusion of Men's weekly breakfast fellowship on Tuesday, June 3rd 2025, we agreed that our next time together would be Tuesday, June 17th because Bruce Neel would be travelling to Oklahoma to visit his daughter from Wednesday June 4 to June 11, 2025 and Pastor Amos would be at the Northern Illinois Annual Conference from June 9-11, 2025! We had a good fellowship as we always do, unknowingly that would be our last breakfast with Bruce Neel. When I received a call from Rev Dennis Condon on Sunday, it was not good news. Marge (Bruce's wife) told him that Bruce had a massive attack on Saturday, June 7th. Members of the church were immediately notified to pray. Prayers intensified. On Monday, June 9th, there was a call from Bruce's daughter that Bruce Neel transitioned into eternity that afternoon. It was a very somber afternoon for me as we were still conducting business at the Annual Conference. Leslie Langmeyer was immediately contacted to disseminate the information to members. Both our ART chairperson, Valerie Nicholson, and our DS, Rev Audrea Nanabray, were notified.

Bruce Neel may be gone, but his legacy will endure forever. He dedicated his life to God's mission at Park Forest and hardly missed a Sunday since joining the church. As treasurer, he managed the church's finances with great commitment, ensuring his integrity was never in question. His dedication to Special Religious Education (SPRED) was unmatched, having launched the program for our beloved friends decades ago. His efforts with Men's Breakfast were an inspiration for men to gather for food and fellowship on Tuesday mornings.

Oh, Bruce, we will miss you! You have touched many of our lives in various ways, and there will come a time when we will celebrate your life. For now, we say goodbye. Rest in the arms of your Creator, whom you faithfully and selflessly served. Our comfort lies in Jesus' promises for His disciples in John 14:1-3: He came to take you home when your room was ready! Farewell, my friend; farewell, faithful soldier of Christ; farewell, beloved child of God. We will continue to uphold Marge and Bruce's family in our prayers for comfort and strength at this time.

On Sunday, June 8, the sermon focused on the joy of salvation, emphasizing that true joy originates from salvation, as all other forms of joy are contingent upon our earthly circumstances. I believe Bruce experienced this joy while serving the Lord on earth, and he will continue to experience it in the presence of his Savior. Rest well, Bruce! Until we meet again on that glorious day, farewell!

The Annual Conference was conducted as scheduled on June 9-11, 2025. Please see the Conference Reports on another page.

Bible Study is on break until September 10, 2025. Vacation Bible Study is planned for July 15-17, 2025, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Please invite friends and neighbors to this event.

Let us celebrate our birthday and anniversary celebrants and wish them God's blessings. Let us continue to support one another in prayer as we enjoy our summer vacation.

Yours, By His Grace,
Pastor Amos Oladipo



GRACE CHURCH
FAMILY FUN NIGHTS

**COOL
WATERS**

**JULY 15-17
6:30-8:30**

**MUSIC, CRAFTS, FELLOWSHIP, GAMES
ALL AGES – FREE AND FAMILY FRIENDLY!**

708-748-4567 OR GRACEUPC.ORG

**GRACE UNITED PROTESTANT CHURCH
266 SOMONAU, PARK FOREST, IL**

SPECIAL “MUSIC” FOR SUMMER

Choir practice has finished for the summer. However, bells will continue as announced.

There are many different ways to contribute your talents throughout the summer. Pick a Sunday and let Valerie Nicholson know what you'd like to share!



PLEASE REMEMBER THAT...

Grace Church has a Pastor's Discretionary Fund, which as the name states, is used at the Pastor's discretion. This fund has been nearly exhausted. There are immediate local needs that have been popping up unexpectedly. Please feel free to donate to this fund making sure that you designate your donation for the Pastor's Discretionary Fund. Thank you for your generosity and the willingness to help others.

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.*

The link for the service is:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81653139195?pwd=SDNiRy9VY0pDcEtYRIQ4OFpHUFkdz09>

If you are joining by phone, please call 312-626-6799; ID# 816-5313-9195; password 740463 when prompted.

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.

WCA NEWS

WCA Board monthly meetings are on hiatus for the months of July and August. The next meeting will be on Thursday, September 4th at 10:00 AM.

THANK YOU!!

We appreciate everyone for supporting our Panera Night!
With your help, we were able to raise \$90.82 for missions!

ANOTHER SUMMER FUNDRAISER

NOTHING BUNDT CAKES



**You have another opportunity to help the WCA raise funds for missions!
This is a new fundraiser for us and we hope you enjoy it!**

The WCA will be taking orders for **Nothing Bundt Cakes** Individual Bundtlets!

Cost: \$7 each

Sales dates are July 6th, July 13th, and July 20th before and after church
or contact Sue Dukes (815-931-5145).

Delivery will be Sunday, August 10th at church.

Orders need to be pre-paid.

Flavors available: Carrot, Chocolate Chocolate Chip, Classic Vanilla, Confetti, Lemon,
Oreo Cookies & Cream, Red Velvet, Snickerdoodle, Strawberries & Cream,
White Chocolate Raspberry,
Gluten-Free Chocolate Chip Cookie, and Gluten-Free Lemon Raspberry.

SAVE THE DATE!

The WCA fall field trip this year will be to

The Shrine of Christ's Passion

on Saturday, September 27th.

We will meet at the Shrine at 10:30 AM

10630 Wicker Ave., St. John, IN

followed by an optional, self-paid lunch at

Round the Clock Restaurant

909 W Lincoln Hwy, Schererville, IN

Although I find devotions from my daily readings that I like to share, it's always from the same sources. I would love some other contributions to this 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!

From *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young

I want you to know how safe and secure you are in My Presence. That is a fact, totally independent of your feelings. You are on your way to heaven; nothing can prevent you from reaching that destination. There you will see Me face-to-Face, and our Joy will be off the charts by any earthly standards. Even now, you are never separated from Me, though you must see Me through eyes of faith. I will walk with you till the end of time and onward into eternity.

Although My Presence is a guaranteed promise, that does not necessarily change your feelings. When you forget I am with you, you may experience loneliness or fear. It is through awareness of My Presence that Peace displaces negative feelings. Practice the discipline of walking consciously with Me through each day.

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From *God's Way — Day by Day* by Charles F. Stanley

LIVING LIKE CHRIST

He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do.
John 14:12

Jesus challenged His disciples to be perfect—to be made whole and complete—to lay down their old lives and pick up the new life He would give them.

No friend will ever challenge you to the heights that Jesus challenges you...Whatever Jesus commands us to do, He enables us to do. He is a Friend who not only tells us what to do, but a Friend who walks through life with us every step of the way, guiding us and empowering us to live out the life He Himself led.

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From *Seasons of Prayer in Word and Image* by Kenneth Boa, photos by Carl Alan Smith

O sing to the Lord a new song;

Sing to the Lord, all the earth.

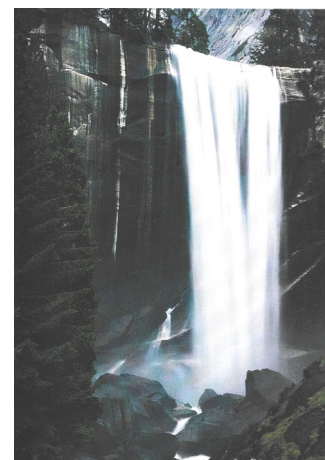
Sing to the Lord, bless His name;

Proclaim the good news of His salvation day after day.

Declare His glory among the nations,

His marvelous works among all people.

Psalms 96:1-3



MISSION NEWS

As human beings sharing this world, we all seek our own ways of creating a secure environment. Some of us find ourselves facing situations that we could never have imagined. This is especially true for families who have been uprooted from their homes because of war and persecution. All are struggling to make a new life in an unfamiliar place. All have had to give up much of what is most precious to them simply to survive. It can be hard for those of us accustomed to our peaceful lives to imagine what it must be like to be a refugee. And yet as the UN High Commission on Refugees said, "Refugees are just like you and me, except they have nothing." What would it be like to be a refugee?


A Prayer: Loving God, we know we have the means to give, and we know there are people seeking refuge around the world, who need our love and support. God of grace, stir within us. Give us the courage to act, to be generous, and to be part of your work, bringing hope to refugees fleeing violence around the world.. We pray this in your name, Amen.

The Church World Service vision is "a world where everyone has food, voice and a safe place to call home." The attached report highlights the Blankets & Kits program that Grace has supported for many years. In addition to emergency aid, CWS helps to rebuild lives with housing to stand against natural disasters, sustainable farming practices, safe water, nutritional food and refugee assistance. Donations can be made in June and July. Checks should be payable to Grace Church, with a note to use for CWS, or use a blue mission envelope. Give us the courage to act, to be generous, and to be part of God's work.



YOUR COMPASSION IN ACTION

2024 CWS Kits & Blankets Shipping Report



Scan the QR code to see the complete shipping report.



27,275
blankets



10,110
school kits



10,084
emergency
cleanup
buckets



11,179
period
packs



278
welcome
backpacks



30,580
hygiene kits

Thanks to the generosity of donors who support CWS Blankets and CWS Kits, Church World Service was able to respond swiftly to the devastation caused by Hurricanes Helene and Milton. CWS was on the ground quickly, providing essential relief supplies, including **26,536** CWS Kits and Blankets. These critical items are helping families begin the long journey of recovery.

Thank you for making this response possible.

"For many people living on the edge of poverty, they often have to choose between buying food for their family and basic hygiene items. The donations from Church World Service are an essential part of keeping our family healthy."

— KAYLA DAVIS, A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

BP 25 43

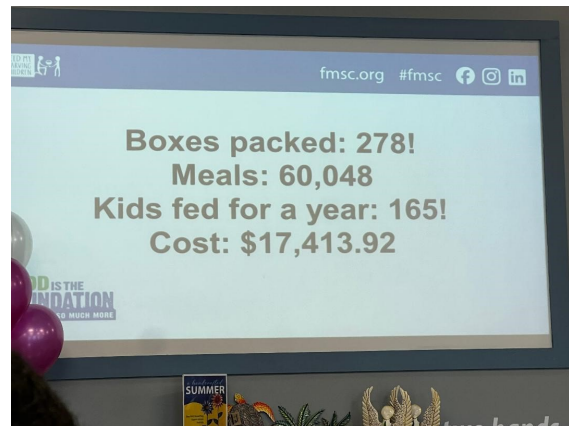
On May 17th, several of us joined a group at **Feed My Starving Children** in Schaumburg, IL. Volunteers sign up for a 2-hour length of time and work to put together “mana packs” that are then shipped to 70 countries worldwide. It is an all-volunteer program and can be supported by either volunteering your time or money or both.

It was a wonderful experience and so rewarding, one of which we’d like to do again! While we worked in Schaumburg, there’s also a location in Aurora, IL.

Would anyone like to join a team? We can easily carpool.

Contact Sue Dukes, Chris Long, or Leslie Langmeyer and we’ll work on a date.

(Check out the brochure on the Literature Rack in the narthex.)



MarcyJo Chachakis was recently recognized for her community service. The proclamation was presented to her by Senator Michael E. Hastings:

This Proclamation Hereby Congratulates MarcyJo Chachakis on receiving the Longevity Award from the Village of Richton Park in recognition of your many years of exemplary service. Your unwavering dedication reflects great credit upon you, your family, our community and the State of Illinois.

This was sent to Pastor Amos on May 15, 2025:

HAPPY WORLD PASTORS DAY

A TEDIOUS JOB, BUT SEEMS LIKE LAZY JOB

Today is Pastors day

A Pastor

No one knows :

1 What a Pastor hears,

2 What he sees,

3 The secrets he must keep,

4 The temptations he encounters,

5 The tears he sheds,

6 The sorrow he endures,

7 The loneliness he manages,

8 The bitterness he experiences,

9 The Lies levelled against him by some of the people he serves!

10 How he accommodates those who pretend they love him but behind, they destroy him.

11 How he tries to live more than a human,

12 The lack he suffers,

13 The discrimination he must not react to,

14 The accusations he has to mute at,

15 The expectations he strives to cope with,

16 Even a fellow Pastor does not know what the other goes through.

17 He is alive for God and yet he lives for Us!

18 A Pastor & the Pastorhood is what no One can fully understand or comprehend!

19 The Pastor hood is "A Mystery"!

20 The Pastor is a mystery too!

A mystery is an incomprehensible intelligibility!

So ALL you can do for him is do pray for him.

A day must not pass without a standing in the gap for him!

Wish him well, & endeavor to understand him!*

Make him happy at least,

For an unhappy Pastor is a disaster to the Church of God!

1 Respect your Pastor.....

2 Pray for your Pastor.....

3 Encourage your Pastor.....

4 Celebrate your Pastor.....

5 Stop Judging Pastors because of what you heard or saw...

God bless you as you honor your Pastor.

Happy Pastors Day

(There's a link to a wonderful article about Pastor Amos:)

dejiokegbile.com

GRACE TO YOU

CELEBRATIONS FOR JULY

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

Carl Stover—4th
Glennace Rocker—12th
Janet Whitson Markus—15th
Brian Forbes—29th
Marge Neel—31st



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:

Glenn and Sheena Gilbert—1st



We love celebrating your birthday with you! There are many people whose birthdays we don't have and would like to include in the celebration list! **If you haven't seen your name in the last year, PLEASE** just jot me a quick email with your birthday (anniversary, too) so I can add it to the incomplete list that I have. Thank you! Leslie Langmeyer: llangmeyer@aol.com

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.



Helen Abel
Bailey Bachard
Nan Beard
Jackie Ceres
Gabe Chachakis
Daniel Christain
Elaine Degenhart
Ralph Duncan
Officer Tim Jones
Niki Juarez Cummings
Malcolm Knox
Patty McLeod
The family of Bruce Neel
Marge Neel

Lee Nelson
Wylladene Nelson
Stacey Peterson
Kyla Jo Purvenas
Allan Smith
Jennifer Steiner
Szymanski Family
Alma White
Steve Winefka
The Migrants, Immigrants, and
Refugees among us
The Victims of Gun Violence
The People of Israel and Gaza
The People of Ukraine

On June 9th, our brother and friend, Bruce Neel, passed onto his eternal home. We ask Jesus to guide him home. Please keep Bruce's wife, Marge; his daughter, Julie Gustavson; his son, Tim Neel; and their families in your prayers.

Bruce has made such a difference to so many people and he will be truly missed.

There will be a memorial service at Grace Church for Bruce on Saturday, August 2nd at 10:00 AM.

GRACE TO YOU **ABOUT** Scouts

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Congratulations Amari and DeShawn. Their Eagle Court of Honor was held on Friday, May 16th.. They've made it to the top! Next stop: Graduation. We can't wait to see what they do next!





PLEASE CHECK OUT

the Grace Church website!! It's spectacular!

Take the time to peruse the site and its many links. Also encourage others (in and out of the church) to visit it. There are so many wonderful spiritual thoughts and links! Also, check out the many upcoming activities under "events" (found under Worship) that you'll enjoy!

graceupc.org



FLOWERS

Flowers on the piano/altar help to brighten the sanctuary each Sunday. The 2025 flower chart is located in the narthex; be sure to pick your special date(s) and sign up before your date is gone.

There's a slightly different protocol: we are asking that you either supply your own flowers...there are vases at the church...or contact our flower chairperson, Sue Cassara, and she will purchase the flowers for you. The cost will be \$20. **We are also asking that you contact the church office at 708-748-4567 or graceupchurch2@gmail.com to tell Elaine Degenhart what you would like printed in the bulletin.** Thank you!



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.

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School class is on hiatus for summer break. The class will return on September 7th. Look for new material and books in the library to use during worship and room 103 is always open if properly monitored and cleaned. **Watch for details on the summer Family Fun Nights including July 15-17 activities.**



WE'RE ASKING FOR YOUR HELP!

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 replaced with new pipe. This cost was \$13,000 for the whole project. We would appreciate all you can give towards this fund. Please put "Plumbers Fund" on your check or envelope. We will be collecting money for this during all of 2025.

Thank you in advance for all your help towards this expense.

The Northern Illinois Annual Conference, June 9-11, 2025, was a productive and worshipful experience, sharing this year's theme, "Grace is Sufficient."

The Bible study on the 10th was based around 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. Rev. Dr. Reginald Blount reminded us that Paul refused to boast of his accomplishments, but rather of his weakness, of the thorn in his side that God allowed to remain, in order to remind him to rely on the strength of God, that God's power is made perfect in weakness.

Bishop Schwerin spoke on Hope, and explained that the purpose of the Conference is to equip local churches, so they have resources and guidance for us if necessary. He also reminded us, in a passionate statement, that God calls us to care for widows and orphans, not make them.

- One of the main pieces of business of the Conference was to vote on four Constitutional Amendments passed by the 2024 General Conference. These were:
- to reorganize the denomination into geographic regions in order to make us more global and less US-centric,
- to add "gender" and "ability" to the list of characteristics that do not bar people from membership in the UMC,
- to make a stronger statement committing to combating racism, and
- to clarify educational requirements for clergy voting rights in the denominational conferences.

We won't know the results of those votes until about October, because the amendments have to be ratified by 2/3 of the votes of the entire denomination, so they won't be counted until they are received from all Conferences worldwide.

In legislation within the NIC, we approved the formation of a new committee to support and affirm LGBTQ+ members and needs. This had not been possible until last year's changes in the Book of Discipline, which removed the restrictions on LGBTQ+ participation in the denomination. We also approved changes to the apportionment formula, which will make it much simpler to use. This was a contentious issue, with 3 amendments needing to be voted before the final vote, where it passed by a significant margin.

I think we accomplished important things for our denomination and for our local congregations, but one of the other benefits of Annual Conference is the gathering with other parts of the body, to celebrate, to commemorate, and to learn. In this case, the retirement service honored our own Pastor Amos Oladipo for his years of service.

I want to thank Grace UP for trusting me with this opportunity to represent you at the Annual Conference, and for the chance to learn and grow in these interactions.

Alice Wasney
Lay Delegate, 2025 NIC Annual Conference.

MORE FAMILY FUN NIGHT PICTURES



We have such a great time when we get together!



Panera Night Fundraiser — June 1st





July 2025



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
MISSION FOR JULY IS CHURCH WORLD SERVICE — BLANKETS 6 Communion Sunday Worship <u>11:00 AM</u> WCA Fundraiser orders taken 13 Sunday Worship <u>11:00 AM</u> WCA Fundraiser orders taken 20 Jazz Sunday <u>Worship 11:00 AM</u> Coffee & Fellowship <u>following church</u> Celebrating our <u>Graduates</u> WCA Fundraiser orders taken 27 Sunday Worship 11:00 AM		1 Men's Chat and Chew Breakfast at Big Apple <u>8:15 AM</u> Boy Scout meeting 7:00 PM 8 Men's Chat and Chew Breakfast at Big Apple <u>8:15 AM</u> Boy Scout meeting 7:00 PM 15 Men's Chat and Chew Breakfast at Big Apple <u>8:15 AM</u> Boy Scout <u>meeting 7:00 PM</u> Family Fun Night COOL WATERS 6:30-8:30 PM	2 Prayer Group 9:30 AM 9 Prayer Group 9:30 AM 16 Prayer Group <u>9:30 AM</u> Tabitha Circle in parlor <u>2:00 PM</u> Family Fun Night COOL WATERS 6:30-8:30 PM 23 Prayer Group 9:30 AM	3 10 17 Family Fun Night COOL WATERS 6:30-8:30 PM 24 31	4  11 18 25 JULY 15TH, 16TH AND 17TH 	5 12 ART meeting— virtual 9:30 AM 19 26