



January 2024

Grace Lutheran Church

## Special Music; Pageant Tell Story of First Christmas



Above, Chancel Choir under the direction of Slade Trammell with David Ensley playing piano, singing during the December 17th cantata. At right, Lorraine Huyuh lights the Advent Candles.

Above photo by Stan Long  
Photo at right by Pat Hope



See additional pictures from Holiday Happenings at Grace on Pages 8, 10, 12, 14, and 15.

**PASTOR ROSY WILL BE OFFICIALLY INSTALLED AS OUR NEW PASTOR BY PASTOR RICK OSIEK (CONFERENCE DEAN) ON JANUARY 28 , 2 P.M.**



## 'Arise and Shine' To be Sung for Epiphany Sunday

As we enter 2024, we give thanks for the musical treasures of 2023 while also eagerly planning for the future.

The Chancel Choir will bring in the new year by singing "Arise and Shine, Your Light Has Come!" by Lloyd Larson on January 7. This piece was first heard at Grace on December 17, as the finale of Larson's cantata "A New and Glorious Morn."

The piece's celebration of the light of Christ will be the perfect music commemoration of Epiphany Sunday. Please join us in observing this glorious occasion. Happy New Year!

## Stephen Ministry - Caring Friends Available

The loss of a job, a new baby, the diminishing returns of a long life, caring for an infirmed parent or spouse; all these can create stress and, often, isolation. Sometimes, just having someone who can listen and be there reliably can make all the difference. It seems simple, but an empathetic ear can be an enormous support during troubling times.

Stephen Ministers are just this kind of support. A Stephen Minister is a child of God who walks beside someone who is hurting. When someone receives a Stephen Minister, they get the care and confidential listening of a carefully matched and trained congregation member who is thoughtfully selected to be a Christian friend, someone who listens, cares, prays, supports, and encourages them. A Stephen Minister meets faithfully each week with his or her care receiver for as long as there's a need. Having a Stephen Minister is an opportunity to have someone you can talk to about the anxieties and concerns of this world with all its uncertainties. Having a Stephen Minister means you've got someone to turn to when the circumstances of your life seem overwhelming.

Stephen Ministers lend an empathetic ear and can be a caring touchpoint to the Christian community when it is needed the most. If you would like to find out more about Stephen Ministers or the services provided by Stephen Ministry, contact the Grace Lutheran Church office or any Stephen Minister in our congregation. We are here for you.

### **BOTH SERVICES ARE NOW IN THE SANCTUARY**

**9:00 a.m. Contemporary: In Person, Sanctuary**

**11:15 a.m. Traditional: In-Person, Sanctuary**

Services on YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHKKSX\\_JwSTrvl-LqdrbGlw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHKKSX_JwSTrvl-LqdrbGlw)

## Pastor Rosalina (Rosy) Rivera

# 'The Light Within Us' Should Not Be Dimmed



*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.- Matthew 5:14-16*

Although the holiday season is now behind us, there are still messages of light lingering in the air as we enter into the season of Epiphany. Epiphany means "to reveal." So too, as we begin the year 2024, there is much that remains to be seen for our church this year. Before, we talk about the church stuff; I thought I would share some "light."

When we think about light, we are often either blinded by it; in need of it; have too much of it and can be overwhelmed by its beauty. I am a person who prefers to have nightlights in every room of my home. There is some comfort in knowing that if I must venture out of my warm bed on a cold winter night that there will be light to light wherever I want to go.

I might remember a long time ago that there used to be those Christmas lights that had liquid in them and as the electricity heated them, they would bubble up creating quite a spectacle on a Christmas tree. I miss seeing those. I think they served as a reminder of the light that "should" bubble up in us after the Good News of Christmas!

We began a new church year together as I began my ministry here at Grace on December 1. It has been a very busy time to start in the church; however, I have been overwhelmed by the compassionate grace shown to me by many of you. Many of you carry "your light" brightly to others in and outside of our church and I am proud that you do. The various ministries we do as a church should remind us all of the light we do indeed share with others.

When we turn on the television or read the news today, it is easy to say, "Joy is NOT present" in our daily lives. But in the stillness of the lights we have probably taken down, among the cold of winter, and certainly in the manger, joy was and IS present today. Despite all the negativity of our world today, joy is often something that we must seek to find—just as the wise men did years ago.

These words from Matthew's Gospel should serve as a reminder to us all that just because the "physical lights" of the season may be gone, that does not mean that the light within us should be dimmed! Instead, it should serve as a reminder of the light of Christ, which continues to shine within us all. As we enter into this short Epiphany season, may YOUR light always shine brightly so that others may see your good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

We will do much together as a church in 2024. I look forward to visiting with all who have signed up for home blessings this Epiphany season. As I mentioned in church, it really is not a "Lutheran" tradition, but it is a good way to ensure that every time you leave your home, you carry the knowledge that you and your home have been blessed. If you have not signed up, there are still slots available. You can sign up on our website under the Pastor page or we also have a paper sign up here at the church.

Other things on the horizon; as requested, we will add morning services during the Lenten season on Wednesday mornings, beginning on Ash Wednesday at 11 a.m. This will allow those who cannot drive at night to worship during the Lenten season. We will keep Wednesday services short with no communion, except on Ash Wednesday and during Holy Week. Services will follow a similar format as we did during Advent. I hope to see more of you during the Lenten season.

In the meantime, please know that I am here in the office most days from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and would welcome visits from time to time. May your light shine bright this Epiphany and always!

Always a servant of Christ,  
Pastor Rosy

## Grace Mission Statement

Love Jesus and help others love Him  
through word and actions.

# Dec. is Busy Month for Grace Food Pantry

In December, the food pantry served 120 families. There were 306 individuals served. Of those 306 individuals, 69 were under 17 and 135 were over 60. The pantry was able to get USDA chicken leg quarters, canned peaches, raisins, walnuts, lentils, tomato sauce, & rice during the month of December. We were also able to get potatoes, onions, and baby carrots. All USDA products and produce are free. This helps to keep the costs down.

The food pantry could use a volunteer who would be willing to learn how to use the computer to help with the signing in of those who come to receive food. We could also use another truck to help pick up food on Wednesday afternoon. We have volunteers scheduled to pick up each week, but sometimes we need a second truck for pick up. We don't have a regularly scheduled driver on the 5<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month, so we call upon our back-up drivers. For more information or to volunteer, please contact Donna Hoglund at 931-248-5101.

The food pantry can still use egg cartons. **Right now, we have all the bags that we need.** Donations of food, toilet paper, soap, and money are always welcome.

Thank you to all of those who volunteer in any way and to all of those who have donated items and money to this important ministry.

**The Grace Food Pantry needs your help, because funds are running low. Many thanks to those who have donated either money or food recently. Please make a generous donation, earmarked for the Food Pantry, so that we can continue this important ministry.**



## Night Out for Christmas Play

Four Grace ladies attended the Christmas play "Oliver" at the Oak Ridge Playhouse in Early December. From left are Audrey Elam, Ruth Smiley, and Claudia Lever and (taking photo) Pat Hope.

## Coffee, Tea, and Candy For Sale

DON'T FORGET we sell coffee, tea and chocolate.

A portion of all proceeds from LWR Fair Trade products sold at Grace goes to the LWR's Small Farmer Fund.

These items are located in the church entranceway.

## The President's Corner by Valerie Hansen

# Volunteers Provide Grace Ministries 'Near and Far'



Happy New Year! As we begin a new year, I would like to thank everyone for their volunteer work in and around the church.

Many volunteer quietly behind the scenes, many volunteer on various committees, many volunteer in the limelight. Lay leaders such as these make Grace a wonderful

congregation providing many ministries near and far. If you are looking for a new way to get involved, please let me know as there are many rewarding opportunities!

News from the December Council meeting include:

- Annual Reports are due in early January.
- January Congregational meeting is

scheduled for January 21 at 1 p.m.

- Pastor Rosy's installation is scheduled for January 28 at 2 p.m.
- The Budget Task Force will continue work on the 2024 Budget. If you haven't turned in a pledge, please do so to help us estimate our revenue.
- Stan Long, Proclaiming Commission, presented information on partnering with ASAP of Anderson County to become a Recovery Congregation. People in substance misuse recovery would be invited to attend the Writer's Group to learn about journaling and writing as a therapeutic tool. More information was requested.
- Council approved Administering's request to remove half of one or two pews in the left rear of the sanctuary to provide space for audio/video operators.
- Council retreat is tentatively scheduled for February 10.

Many blessings for a joyful and peaceful 2024!

## *January Birthdays*

Priscilla Lingle	05
Holly Niehaus	05
Shenodoah Weber	07
Crista Froeling	08
David Joy	08
Rachel Lorenz	12
Heidi Moehl	12
Donna Gurecki	21
Christy Gipson	22
Vicky Marrow	27
Phil Stumbo	29

*If you have a name you would like to add to the birthday list or a correction, please call the church office at 483-3787.*

**Pastor Rosy is doing home visits and house blessings in January. Sign up here: [Pastor's Page – Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church – Oak Ridge, TN](#) ([graceoakridge.org](http://graceoakridge.org)).**

# Upgrades Planned to Grace Audio-Video Systems

During the pandemic, Grace began streaming our services, a practice that continues as an important part of our ongoing outreach program. It has evolved from Zoom using an iPhone to YouTube and a video camera. Feedback from those watching online has identified numerous shortcomings. In an attempt to provide a higher quality presentation, both online and in person, efforts have been underway to identify improvements to the audio-video systems. Activities include observing what other congregations are doing and identifying desired upgrades to our systems. Proposals and quotes have been solicited from several local companies specializing in church solutions. Included in the planning are additional cameras, monitors, and better microphones and speakers in the sanctuary.

These proposed changes will be presented to the congregation in the near future. In the meantime, input is welcome. Contact Terry Domm, Ingrid Busch, or any member of the Administering Commission with your thoughts or questions concerning the direction Grace is moving.

Terry Domm

## KALE SALAD

1 package of coleslaw mix (I use Kroger brand, alternatively you can chop cabbage; will need 4 - 5 cups)  
 3-4 cups of chopped kale  
 1/3 c. pepitos (pumpkin seeds)  
 1/2 c. dried cranberries

dressing:

1/3 c. oil (I use avocado or grape seed oil because of the mild flavor)

3 T. lemon juice  
 2 T apple cider vinegar  
 1 clove of garlic minced  
 2 T maple syrup  
 1 T stone ground mustard

Mix all ingredients together. May add 1 T. poppyseed, but optional.

Dress the salad and refrigerate. Allow several hours for the flavors to meld.

People have been asking for my kale salad recipe.

Could you please put the recipe in the Light.

Thanks,

Donna

## SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING

The semi-annual congregational meeting will be held in person on Sunday, January 21, 2024 immediately after the 11:15 service.

**2024 Flower Calendar**— There are plenty of spaces on the 2024 flower calendar in the back hallway. Sign up today. You may sign up for a Sunday to provide flowers in honor or memory of someone, or to celebrate a special event. The member donation of \$25 provides flowers for both the contemporary service and the traditional service.

# January Happenings

**Sunday School (Christian Education) for children and youth** meet at 10:00 a.m. in Jacob's Ladder room. If you have any questions about youth Christian Education, please contact Donna Gurecki (865-599-1238).

**The adult Sunday School class** meets in Room 101 at 10 a.m. every Sunday. Everyone is welcome.

**Is there interest in a CPR class??** Please let Donna Gurecki know if you would be interested in a class.

**The prayer shawls** are now located in the Narthex credenza.

**Help for Lutherans in Ukraine:** Lutheran Disaster Response: Eastern Europe Crisis Response (ELCA.org/ disaster). The ELCA is sending aide to our sister Lutheran churches in Ukraine and several neighboring countries. You can help!

**Blanket Workshop:** makes blankets for distribution to Lutheran World Relief. Meetings are on the first, third, and fifth Thursdays of the month from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Everyone is wel-

come to join in, or just stop by to see what is happening. Sewing skills are not required.

**Grace Photography Club:** The club will not meet again until March 16. Let Stan Long (865-356-2871, Longse@aol.com) know if you're interested in participating in this group.

**Grace Writers** is on hiatus until March 4, when in-person meetings will resume. **Poetry Pie**, which meets on Zoom will resume meetings January 29.

**Church decorations will be taken down on January 7 after the late service. Many hands make light work.**

**There will be a luncheon to discuss and work on changes to the contemporary worship service on Sat. Jan. 20 at 11 am in the fellowship hall.** Those who are involved with the contemporary worship are asked to attend but all are welcome. If you have any questions, please see Donna G.

## A Message from Pastor Paula:

Good People of Grace,  
Thank you so much for the wonderful send-off at the end of November. I've not felt that much love surrounding me in a long time. I have appreciated all the prayers, gifts, notes and emails, and I especially want to thank you for the extremely generous monetary gift. I have also appreciated the texts, emails, cards, and calls of concern following my recent hip replacement. God's blessing is with you all! Merry Christmas and a New Year filled with good things is wished for you all!

Pastor Paula

## Prayer Opportunities

**Prayer Chain Coordinator:** If you have a prayer chain request or would like to be added to the list of those who provide prayer, please email or text Donna Gurecki (865-599-1238, dlgurecki60@gmail.com).

Prayer meeting is on Friday afternoons at around 5:00 p.m. for 30-60 minutes, wherever we are. We are gathering prayer requests from our group as the week unfolds, with praises and petitions being texted to Paul Gurecki (865-566-6807). All members of the group are on a group text, so everyone sees the prayer requests. If you are interested in joining our group, text Paul to get on the list. Please note: all prayer concerns need to be handled with strict confidentiality. Also, please be aware that being in this group should be a weekly commitment, not a casual option. "Lord, teach us to pray."



Photos  
By  
Pat  
Hope





## Glorious Music Fills Grace During the Christmas Season

On Sunday, December 17, at 10 a.m., Grace Lutheran Church Chancel Choir and Praise Team members sang “A New and Glorious Morn” by Lloyd Larson (Photos on Page 12). Currently based in Minnesota, Larson has been writing music, especially music for choirs and worship, for the past forty years. “A New and Glorious Morn” is his newest cantata.

During the 4 p.m. Christmas Eve service at Grace Lutheran, a Christ-based holiday song entitled “Christmas Is Love” made its “world debut,” being performed live for the first time anywhere. Dr. Paul Gurecki presented the song as a solo with piano accompaniment by David Ensley.

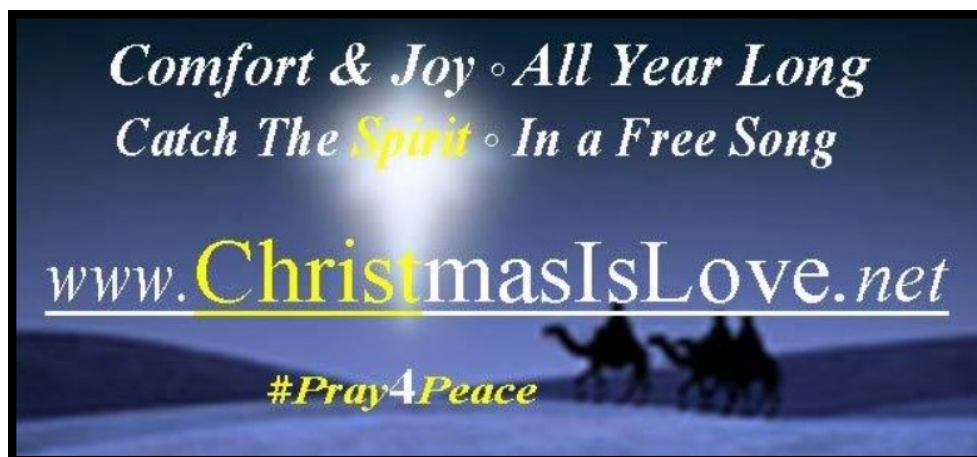
Christa Froeling, an Educational Audiologist with Tennessee Schools for the Deaf (and an American Sign Language specialist), interpreted it with sign language.

“Christmas Is Love” was written by Rod Guge (Slade’s cousin) in 2015 as a Christian response to a number

of much-publicized terror attacks that occurred that year, some during the holiday season. He says the song was “written in response to the Christmas-season attacks in San Bernardino, CA (where I used to live), where 14 were killed and dozens seriously injured by gunfire, and Paris, France, when 500 people were killed or badly injured.”

If you were unable to attend the Christmas Eve event in person you can access the entire program online via Grace’s website. The song “Christmas Is Love” can also be accessed online by two means: 1) via the website at [www.ChristmasIsLove.net](http://www.ChristmasIsLove.net), which has been visited by some 2 million people (primarily from overseas); or 2) via the lyric video at this address on the YouTube platform: Christmas Is Love 122520.

On December 31, one service covered Lessons and Carols and everyone sang familiar Christmas carols with special accompaniment by Susan Gunning on violin and Barbie Schmitt on flute.



# Grace Afloat



Photos  
By  
Christy  
Gipson



Volunteers work on Grace's float for the Oak Ridge Christmas Parade December 9. From top clockwise, April Fritts tries out the float seat while Crista Froeling and Jacob Stewart check it out. Above, Rick Rawl uses zip ties to hold it all together and (left) April decorates the bottom of the float. At right, Valerie Hansen, Robert Stewart and Janet Rawl all showed up to help.



Volunteers work on Grace's float for the Oak Ridge Christmas Parade December 9. From top clockwise, April Fritts tries out the float seat while Crista Froeling and Jacob Stewart check it out. Above, Rick Rawl uses zip ties to hold it all together and (left) April decorates the bottom of the float. At right, Valerie Hansen, Robert Stewart and Janet Rawl all showed up to help.

## **Proclaiming Commission Has Been Busy**

Proclaiming Commission has been busy with getting our hospitality ministries of coffee fellowship and name tags restarted. We also supported the new outreach event, "Cocoa, Cookies, and Christmas Fun," with publicity in several venues including social media and a new sign that was placed on our Manhattan Ave. lot close to the four-way stop. We recruited volunteers and were present to lend a hand as needed. We supported the Christmas float financially and publicized it in the congregation. We continued to support the ESOL classes as needed. Our big Christmas Eve banner was updated and placed on the Manhattan Ave. lot to advertise our Advent and Christmas Eve services. Many thanks to all the volunteers who have assisted with these various activities!

## **Thank You for Wearing Name Tags!**

Thank you for helping welcome Pastor Rosy by wearing name tags! Proclaiming has added a supply of lanyards for those who need them. We appreciate your putting the nametags back on the table in the narthex after worship services. The logistics of all this is a work in progress and we appreciate your patience. We will continue to have Name Tag Sundays whenever we have a single service. Please keep in mind that this is showing hospitality to our visitors and newer folks as well as Pastor Rosy!

## **Coffee Fellowship**

Coffee Fellowship logistics are still evolving so please bear with us as we work to make it as accessible as possible for congregation members and efficient for volunteers to provide. If you want to support Grace's efforts to be green and choose to use a Grace mug, please wash it at the coffee closet sink and put it to dry there—dishwashing liquid and a brush are available to you there. Thank you!

## **New ESOL Class Hoped For**

Our ESOL program is looking for a new volunteer to teach either beginners or early intermediate students on three weekday mornings a week. We would like to add an early intermediate class on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings from 9:30 to 11:30. This would be a follow-on to Eunice Search's morning beginner classes and use life skills textbooks just as she and the evening classes do. Eunice could teach either level so the volunteer could choose whichever they were interested in. If you're interested or know someone who might be, you or they could visit the current morning beginner class. You could also take a workshop on teaching ESOL that is offered quarterly by the Knoxville Internationals Network.

Please let Nancy Munro ([nbmunro318@icloud.com](mailto:nbmunro318@icloud.com), 865-483-6811) know if you or someone you know are interested in trying your hand at teaching either beginners or an early intermediate class.

# Christmas Eve Services Filled with Singing, Sights, and Sounds of the Season



Photos by Stan Long





The Love Offering for January will support TORCH (Tennessee Out-Reach Center for Homeless).

TORCH opened its doors in January 2013 as the only comprehensive homeless service in Anderson County, TN. Because there is no shelter in the county, TORCH operates the Housing First model. Efforts are made to find affordable, sustainable housing as quickly as possible. If extra financial assistance is needed after an address is established and a client qualifies an agreement may be made to assist for a predesigned amount and/or time. The plan is called “Shelter in the Future Home” and is a much more cost-effective way to assist those housed in reaching self-sufficiency. The first step in future success is establishing a permanent address.

Finding homes is becoming more difficult as much of the available local housing is no longer locally owned. The new owners are reluctant to house the homeless and approval can be a lengthy process. TORCH determined that it would be more cost-effective to build temporary housing than to pay for hotel stays.

TORCH recently purchased lots from the Oak Ridge Land Bank and constructed Bookhart Village on Hamilton Circle. Six families with children or up to 30 people now have housing up to one month while they try to find more permanent housing. The Village has been so successful that TORCH is raising funds to build more temporary housing.

To contact TORCH phone (865)318-4788 or email [info@oakridgetorch.org](mailto:info@oakridgetorch.org).

**January Love Offering -  
TORCH  
(Tennessee Out-Reach Center for Homeless)**

# First Cocoa, Cookies, and Christmas Event Well Attended



On December 9, Grace opened its doors to area children for a celebration of Christmas with “Cocoa, Cookies, and Christmas” fun. We met for one hour in the front vestibule, where we opened with the Christmas story, illustrated by the appearance of the large Nativity figures that are currently in front of the tree. Children then decorated the Christmas tree with shiny brass ornaments showing the Nativity, red ornaments with the different names by which Jesus is described in the Bible, and Chrismon ornaments created by the youth at Grace. After decorating the tree, we sang “Away in a Manger.”

Turnout was good. We had 13 children, all with family members in tow. After singing, we had cocoa and cookies. Our next item of fun was creating Nativity suncatchers so that each child could take home a Nativity scene. After another song, we said goodbye and sent the kids home with Nativity-themed goody bags containing crafts for them to do at home.



Many thanks to all our helpers. Judging from reactions, everyone had a great time with a Christ-centered celebration.

Top right on Page 10, Raquel Rodriguez' children help decorate the tree; top left Pravin Ajmeri hangs some ornaments; bottom left Sarys (Pravin's sister) adds her ornaments to the tree. This page, top photo, Pastor Rosy helps the children make decorations; center photo, a child holds a goodie bag each of the children received. Below left, Brianna Weber (standing) and Kennedy Weber (sitting) help the younger kids prepare their ornaments. At right, one of the children waits her turn to help.



Photos by Nancy Munro and Ruth Smiley

## Love offerings for the first five months of 2024:

**January – TORCH (Tennessee Out-Reach Center for Homeless)**

**February - Easter Baskets**

**March - Second Harvest**

**April - Milagro Women’s Education Center**

**May - Blanket Workshop**

## Bulletin Boards Revamped

Members of the Photography Group have taken on the responsibility of changing out the bulletin boards each season.

In early December Gloria Caton, Pat Hope and Ruth Smiley changed the boards to a “winter” theme, highlighting Grace events that take place in December, January and February.



Dear GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH FOOD PANTRY (JU364),

The Kroger Co. Family of Stores is committed to bringing hope and help to the local neighborhoods we call home. Our stores are on a mission to not just part of, but to help create a stronger community. We recognize that every community has unique causes that need support. Thank you for being such an important organization in our community.

We encourage you to ask your supporters to link their rewards card to your organization. Community Rewards is easy to use, The more your supporters shop with us, the more money your organization will earn!

We are committed to carefully protecting our customer's personal information. In order to meet their expectation of privacy, we have adopted a simple policy to never share a customer's personal information. Our privacy policy applies to Community Rewards participation as well.

Thank you for being such an important organization in our community,

Community Rewards Staff

**29-Aug-2023 to 28-Nov-2023**

**19**

**Households**

**\$65.88**

**Total Donations**

### Quilt Collection Report

Another successful collection occurred at all of our seven ingathering locations in August. South-eastern Synod donations are still a little below pre-pandemic numbers but donations of Quilts & Kits continue to rise. The totals for the SES August 2023 collection were:


- Quilts: 3189
- Personal Care Kits: 2690
- School Kits: 3235
- Baby Care Kits: 1001
- Fabric Kits: 226
- Total weight of all items: 28,682 pound



# Pet Fest Thank You Notes

**grrreen**  
BY PAPER RUSSELLS

Printed on paper that is 100% recycled, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Certified, manufactured with 100% renewable green electricity, and also Processed Chlorine Free (PCF).



Golden Retriever

Thank you for the wonderful check!

Sadly, Heartland will be closing its doors after the End of the year. This check will help with our final expenses.

We've enjoyed participating in the Pet Blessing over the year it's a great event!


Thanks again,  
Suave Stoenberg

**Paper Russells**  
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STYLE: GBCN62  
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A portion of the profits will go to support various charities and non-profit organizations.

Our dearest Friends at Grace Lutheran Church -  
Thank you so much for your donation to FORAS! We miss attending the Pet Blessing, but really appreciate your continued support. Thank you again!

Jeannie Parker  
FORAS VP



**FORAS**

**Friends of Oak Ridge Animal Shelter**  
P.O. Box 6014  
Oak Ridge, TN 37831

www.FriendsOfORAS.org  
friendsfookridgeanimalshelter@gmail.com  
facebook.com/FriendsOfORAS

Dear Pet Rescue Group Support Team,  
Thank you for your generous donation to the Stray Connection. Your support by the Stray Connection is both humbling and exciting. We remain committed to helping stray cats find that awesome, forever home. I am including my personal contact info as I want to be notified about the 2024 Pet Fest & Blessing.

Holly Frey, Founder + Director

Hope this season brings many things that make you smile.

I thank you + the cats  
thank you,  
Holly Frey

**BRONDOS MISSIONARY NEWS****OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2023****DIALOGUES AROUND THE CROSS**

This past September 22, in coordination with our congregation, the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, and the Chaplaincy Program of the Theological Community of Mexico where I serve as professor, I began a weekly online activity via Zoom called "Diálogos en torno a la cruz," or "Dialogues around the cross." Those hosting the activity have been Rev. Miguel Angel Solórzano, the pastor at Good Shepherd, and Rev. Hugo Gallardo, a Presbyterian pastor and professor at the Theological Community directing the Chaplaincy program (with me in photo at the church where he serves).



I came up with the idea for this activity after teaching a course in the spring semester on my primary area of research, namely, the meaning and interpretations of Jesus' death and the cross. The activity is open to anyone who wish to connect to the Zoom session and runs from 7:00 to 8:30 pm Mexico City time every Friday evening. I begin with a reflection that lasts for about 25-30 minutes, and this is followed by two ten-minute reactions to the reflection from participants invited by Pastor Miguel and Pastor Hugo. Every Friday different participants are involved and include pastors, theologians, congregational members, and past and present students. After the reactions, we divide up into small online discussion groups and continue the dialogue by reflecting for another 20 minutes or so before coming back together and sharing some of the things that were discussed in the different groups.

While all of the reflections revolve around the cross in some way, the themes vary considerably. On some occasions, we look at Bible passages that relate to Jesus' death and the cross. On other occasions, we explore themes related to history and Christian thought. In October, for example, we reflected on "The Cross and the Conquest" in connection with what is traditionally known as Columbus Day but is now commonly called Indigenous Peoples' Day (October 12), and also dedicated two sessions to examining Martin Luther's theology of the cross.



In November, we focused on the subject of the cross and violence, relating it to the "femicidios" or killing of women that is rampant in Mexico and other forms of gender violence. Beginning in Advent, we have been relating the cross to themes such as the account of the massacre of the infants of Bethlehem ordered by King Herod and the story of the manger.

While the number of those attending each week has varied between 10 and 25 or so, in total over 80 different persons have attended at least one of the Friday sessions. These have included people from many different countries in Latin America as well as the U.S. The sessions are recorded and then made available on my [Youtube channel](#) for those who are not able to attend. Plans are to continue the Dialogues in the coming year. All are welcome, though the activity is of course in Spanish! For more information, please contact me or visit the [Facebook page](#) of the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd.



**BRONDOS MISSIONARY NEWS****OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2023****LAS POSADAS IN MEXICO**

One of the most important traditions in Mexico revolving around the celebration of Christmas is known as Las Posadas. In Spanish, a posada is a lodging or inn. The name refers to the story of Joseph and Mary asking for lodging at the inn in Bethlehem and being turned away. In homes and at other localities throughout Mexico, such as churches, schools, and places of work, that story is reenacted every year in combination with group celebrations and festivities.

The celebration of Las Posadas dates back several centuries to the colonial period of Mexico. The festivities begin on December 16 and last until December 24, although nowadays people often participate in them only once or twice during that period rather than doing so every evening during the nine days.



According to the traditional manner of celebrating a Posada, a group of people carry a small figure of the Virgin Mary and Joseph, who are called the “peregrinos” or pilgrims. With candles in their hand, they stand outside the closed door as they sing a stanza of a traditional song in which they ask to be allowed in and given lodging. Another group of people inside responds with a stanza in which they tell the pilgrims to go away because there is no room and they do not know them.

The two groups continue to alternate stanzas of the song, with the group outside the door begging to be shown mercy and let in, while the group inside the door insists that the pilgrims go away and leave them alone. Finally, however, the group inside recognizes the pilgrims as Joseph and Mary, the mother of God, and opens the door to let the pilgrims in.

After the participants are all joined together, the festivities begin. These often include more singing and reenactments of the Christmas story. In many cases, children dress up as the Virgin Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men, who are known as the three kings. They also take turns breaking piñatas, which are filled with fruit, peanuts, and candy. Usually the children are lined up according to their height so as to give the smaller children the opportunity to try to break the piñata first. In this way, all the children have a chance to try, since it is the larger ones who generally have the strength to actually break it.

Although today there are many different sizes and shapes of piñatas, the piñata traditionally used for Las Posadas is the one with seven spikes or cones. These are said to represent the seven deadly sins of anger, lust, pride, envy, greed, laziness, and gluttony. The bright colors bring to mind the temptation to sin, while the breaking of the piñata symbolizes the overcoming of that temptation.



Naturally, there is plenty of food and drink at the Posada as well. These include sweet bread, tamales, tostadas, and buñuelos, which are large round disks of crispy fried dough covered with sugar. Traditional Christmas punch with a variety of fruits and sugar cane is also a must!

**MORE NEWS AND INFORMATION AT:**

<https://dbrondos.mx> or <https://94t.mx>

Donor site:

<https://www.elca.org/missionarysponsorship>

E-mail: [david.brondos@elca.org](mailto:david.brondos@elca.org)

Invitations to preach or give presentations at your congregation online are always welcome!

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## Condolences

**Doris Gross — December 9**  
*Carol Hulse's sister*

**William "Nelson" Lingle — December 10**

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**Want to win a gift card? Find the three snowmen. NOTE: We are continuing this game for a few more months (to use existing gift cards).**

January makes us think of cold and snow and days spent by a warm fireplace or playing in new, fresh snow to build a snowman or make snow angels. See if you can find the three snowmen in this issue.

Please send the page numbers where you find them to Pat Hope ([thetwohopes@aol.com](mailto:thetwohopes@aol.com)) by Jan. 31. Only email or

text messages (865-310-0722) accepted. Prize to be awarded in February.

**The one pictured here doesn't count.**

The three poinsettias in Dec. were on Pages 5, 9, and 12.

**Congratulations to past winners:**

- Susan Gunning — Dec. Poinsettias
- Anne Douglas — Nov. Fall Leaves
- Bethany Lemons — October Pumpkins
- Betty Anne Domm — Sept. Coffee Cups
- Pastor Paula — August Hot Dogs
- NO CONTEST IN JULY
- Anne Douglas — June Caps
- Rhonda Ashburn — May Hearts
- Janet Rawl — April Eggs