



Grace Lutheran Church
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www.graceistheplace.org



GRACE NOTES

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH, 46 WOODLAND STREET, HARTFORD, CT 06105 860-527-7792

May 2020

God Reigns! An Unexpected Surprise in the Midst of a Pandemic!

Just as we began writing our May issue of Grace Notes, the digital version of the following article was released by AHNA (The Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association) and then printed in the Hartford News, Asylum Hill section. The story is about Grace's Friday Gatherings written by our dear partner and friend, Bernie Michel. He hadn't even hinted what he was up to, and as I read his story I found my heart expand, my gratitude and thankfulness further fill up, and God once again interrupted us, right in our tracks... just at the right time.

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Volunteer of the Month - Grace Friday Night 2.0

Volunteer Of The Month

Grace Lutheran Church began feeding neighbors in need more than nine years ago, and up until March, the protocol was always the same. A rotating group of volunteers would arrive at about noon and begin going through the fresh food that had been secured the day before from Foodshare and arrive at the menu. They then prepared enough for at least 150 or more people so that after everyone had their fill, there would be leftovers for those who needed it to take home.

Other churches from surrounding communities would often volunteer to prepare something ahead and bring it along when they came to help serve. It's been one of the most social free dinners in Hartford because people would gather beginning at 4:30 and just share company until 6:00 when the food was served. So when the Governor's order was announced, they had to make some quick changes. They determined that they could still figure out how to prepare the hot meals, and disposable containers and utensils had to substitute for the church's stoneware china and stainless forks and spoons.



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Pastor’s Message – Earth Day Whizzed By

The original plan for my message in this May issue was going to be about how Earth Day got little notice, and yet the largest existential threat to the planet is climate change. The pandemic has, at the same time, grown in proportions way beyond what our leaders suggested it might, and now in reaction to being “shut-in” or “locked down”, many are now saying let’s open the doors and get back to normal. The problem is it is not normal to have 70,000 deaths in the United States in a month or two. Nor is it normal to have hospitals over-flowing, medical and support workers working 24/7 while everybody else is furloughed or simply let go from their jobs.



What’s that got to do with Earth Day? Well, our concerns about the earth and creation are as chronic and urgent as COVID-19. And, the issues that exist envelope the entire globe, just as the pandemic does. And, most importantly, both of these are threats to our very existence and are clearly due to humankind’s excesses, ignorance and selfishness.

At Grace we are planning on installing 60 solar panels in the coming weeks. We do this as much as a statement of our concern for the environment as our feeding, clothing and advocating for people who are vulnerable, poor and wanting. Giving out masks, providing information about the pandemic, and doing all we can to continue to serve even as there may be some risk in doing so. We mitigate those risks by learning how to do better, to pay attention to the risks... to wear masks, to distance ourselves, to continue to open our doors but to sanitize as necessary and to encourage people to get medical advice and help... and, if we can, bring them there.

We worship every Sunday and through Holy Week on Zoom. We have a wedding planned for this Friday at Grace, but mostly on Zoom. We can do things with care for people and the environment and we must.

The proof about our environment is to be seen as a result of the pandemic. Yes, that’s right you can see, smell and wonder at the beauty of the skies, the clarity of them, the way the air smells, tastes and seems cleaner... all because it is! Less airline traffic (or near none), fewer trucks and cars on the road and remarkably the skies are cleaner. We can witness it ourselves!

Were we to make the kind of change that Jesus calls us to make, 180 degrees, we could reclaim the climate by moving away from oil, gas, fracking and drilling.



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Volunteer of the Month - Grace Friday Night 2.0

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Pastor Alba Perez has also been part of the team, attending almost every Friday’s event, offering prayer in Spanish, a keen eye for the medical/ emotional circumstances of people who are guests, and she typically counts the numbers of people who come to satisfy Foodshare requirements.



Let it be known that this magical part of our ministry is all about the people who give of their time, regularly, faithfully and with love.

Foodshare itself recently gave a big thanks to all who have been a part of it, particularly during this difficult time. The food is good, the care is genuine, the people are remarkable and the cause and need is serious and large. May we all learn from this that what we do together is so much better than what we can do on our own.





Pastor's Message – Earth Day Whizzed By

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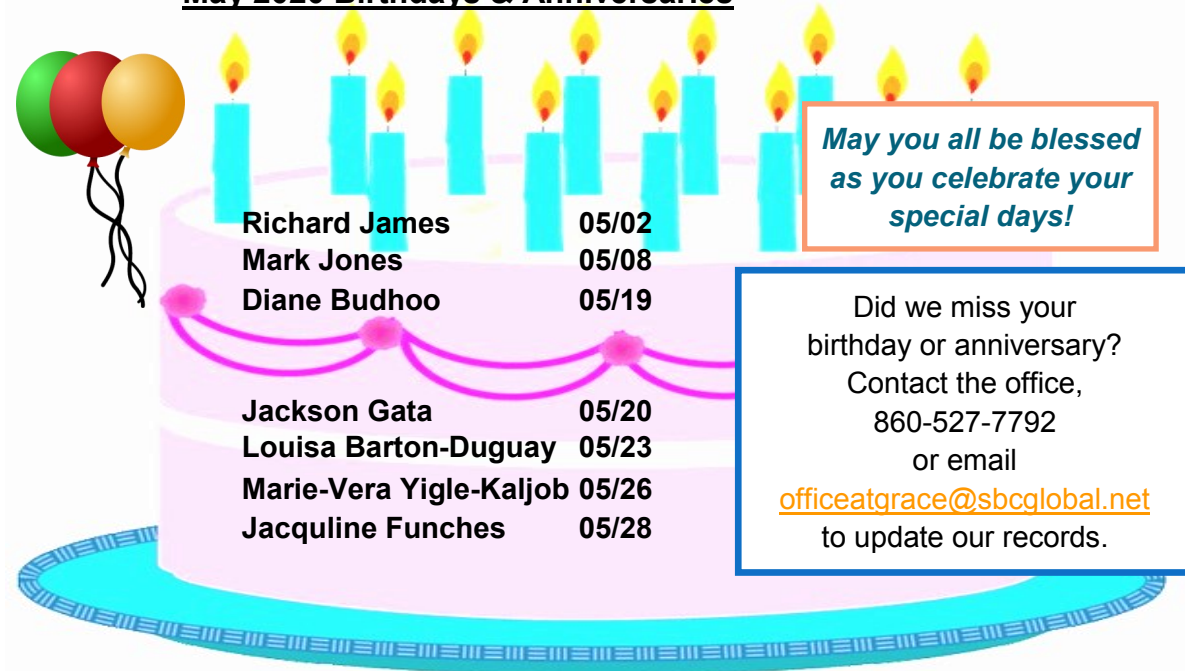
We could move towards more solar and wind, recreate new industries, discover ways to live together without competition but with love, without hording but sharing and without fighting but working toward the same purposes.

Wouldn't it be great... and God reminds us that it can be. Just as Fridays 2.0 are showing us new ways... just as we may find less meats at the food store, and just as we are coming to know our neighbors better and more just because we are not rushing around in our "normal" frenzy.

Join us on a Sunday by Zoom, embrace our daily meditations and come join us by picking up a meal on a Friday, or by helping someone that you know needs it. We all can be better and will get there if we follow what we believe and live by our faith.



May 2020 Birthdays & Anniversaries



Volunteer of the Month - Grace Friday Night 2.0

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The part that was nonnegotiable was the compassionate caring for this very regular community. Protective masks, both for the staff and the clients became a most important addition. Styrofoam food containers are still readily available, so until they can gather and share the food in common it will continue as the container of choice, but disposable masks are still in short supply. Louisa Barton Duguay, Akeva Koulla and volunteers from St. Matthews in Avon, who have been a steady partner since the social distancing order began, have been sewing cloth masks that can last much longer.

What still cannot be replaced is of course the camaraderie, but as Joni Mitchell once said, “you don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone”. I think we’ll remember for quite a while once we get it back.

While Grace Friday Night 2.0 with echoes of the Fresh Start new edition chair referred to as the 2.0, I like the name of “Home-Cooked Meals – Take-out!.” Because all of the effort put into the historic Friday Gatherings, the reaching out for the food from Foodshare, the selecting of what will be prepared, the preparations that the particular week’s chef taking charge, the cleaning and now sanitizing writ large all the time, and then the welcoming, the loving and the listening begins as people coming to dinner know that the Friday Gathering team really cares. And, we have remarkable, talented and creative chefs.

Louisa Barton-Duguay has long been the key coordinator and food distributor, as well as chef. Through thick and thin, when someone is hungry, she finds a way to feed them. Not only has she done that for people coming to Grace, but she has reached out to other churches and been the conduit of getting food, pantry items and other needed things distributed to as many people as possible. The goal - distribute it all. For one thing, the church is full-up, we have little space to store anything... perhaps another intervention of the divine.



Nancy Urban was the first chef to orchestrate the “new”, Friday Night – 2.0. And, how appropriate can that be. She’s been cooking for the community for nearly 9.5 years. She determined that in order to package the “home-cooked” meals properly, a main course that included many of the single ingredients offered in normal times, with a salad and/or fruit second container might create the ideal meal for those hungry and needing good nourishment – good in taste – and good in nutrients.

And then there is Sue... who would rather hide under the table than have herself talked about and pictured as is the case today. Sue in a past life had a role in public health (once again, divine intervention) and she was determined to make Grace a safe place to visit and the food cooked properly and the volunteers, our guests and those visitors or helpers from time to time...

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Urban Alliance—training programs



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NEW TRAINING!

Important COVID-19 Resources

Thursday, June 4 | 9:30 – 10:30am

COVID-19 has intensified existing needs and created new ones for CT residents. This workshop will provide information about common needs and available supportive programming. Participants will leave with a better understanding of the current landscape and information about how to help connect people to services.

Central CT Resource Guide: Support during COVID-19

What is the purpose of this guide?
The Connecticut Housing Resource Program (CHRP) is a statewide program that provides financial assistance to low-income households to help them pay their rent and utilities. CHRP is a critical resource for many low-income households during this time of crisis.

How can I apply for CHRP?
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Coronavirus Resource Library

Click below to access a library of critical resources to help people, programs, and ministries. This library was developed specifically with program and ministry leaders in mind and will be continuously updated. Share this link with your networks so they may access these essential resources, too!

VISIT THE FULL RESOURCE LIBRARY

Questions? [Contact Jessica](#), Senior Director of Research and Strategy

contact: 860-986-6033

jessica.sanderson@urbanalliance.com or angela.colantonio@urbanalliance.com

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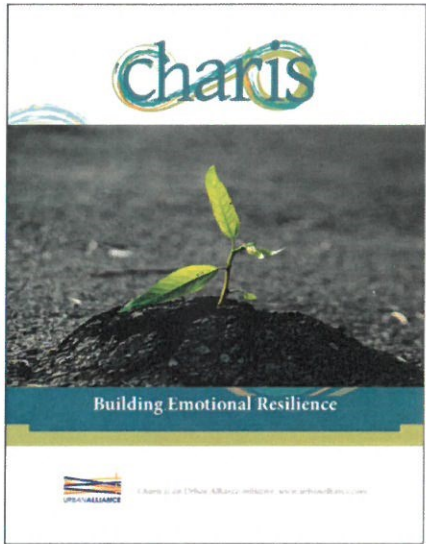
Urban Alliance is offering training programs for assistance in counseling of those with emotional responses to Covid 19. There are 3 webinars being offered to cover different areas including how to help children cope. UA is a Christian based organization and the training will include references to bible verses. Since Grace is a member of Urban Alliance these webinars are available to all of our members and associates.

Check Out Our New Trainings and Resource Library!

Urban Alliance is responding to the COVID-19 crisis by developing resources and trainings that address the real-time needs of the programs and ministries we serve. **Please share this email with any other people from your church or organization who may benefit from attending one or more of these trainings.**

NEW TRAINING!
Building Emotional Resilience
Thursday, May 14 | 1:00 – 2:15pm
Thursday, May 28 | 7:00 – 8:15pm

Resilience is the ability to cope well and overcome adversity. Now more than ever, it is important for children and adults to develop skills that will help them be resilient. This workshop and accompanying handouts will highlight 10 skills that can be incorporated into day-to-day life to improve a person’s capacity to cope as they persevere despite the COVID-19 crisis. Scripture as well as existing research will be used to support the importance of each skill. These skills can be applied personally or shared with the people served through your program or ministry.



NEW TRAINING!
Talking to Kids and Teens about COVID-19
Thursday, May 21 | 9:30 – 10:45am

Children and teens have been dramatically impacted by the COVID-19 crisis –schools have transitioned to online formats, families do not leave their homes unless necessary, children watch the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths rise each day. It is crucial that adults are equipped to facilitate helpful conversations with children and teens about COVID-19. This workshop will provide adults with helpful tips and tools that will equip them to help young people process all that is happening around them.



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Volunteer of the Month - Grace Friday Night 2.0

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that they be all protected, and not only fed, but cared for, as if they were her very own children... not in anyway demeaning... just about loving. Sue, teamed up as a full-time Friday Night Volunteer and is at the church at least all day Friday from beginning to end. Many of the guests know and love, Sue, as I do for she brings her heart into everything she does, and she does a ton.

There is, Walter and Emmanuella, both from Grace, both full of grace. Walter is the one that takes care of the kitchen, the space in, sometimes the spaces out, and he sees Friday Gatherings as “his.” Now I don’t

mean that in a mean way, I mean that by his desire for everything to be done right and well, and his seeing this as a reflection of his church in the world. Grace is very important to Walter and Walter is very important to Grace. If all of us would take responsibility for everything around us, the world would be a better place. Walter is that kind of a guy. He takes responsibility for everything because he cares.

Emannuella is relatively new to the team, and does things differently, a reflection of who she is as a child of God. First, she does not expect or want anything for herself. She sees what is needed and does it. She has become a trusted and essential part of this ministry and brings a smile, silence and hard work with her. She is kind to everyone, has a great sense of humor and, I think, was the first who thought of making masks herself. She made masks for the volunteers... and they were each made with love. Since then, Louisa has made masks, and we have had other sources of such things made available to us from partners, friends and other members.



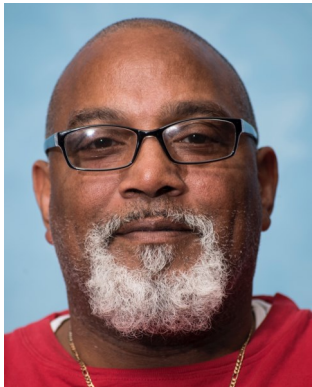
Another one of those, just do it, folks who walks away from the camera is our dear Lee Whittemore who has transformed the Community Room, the All-Purpose Room, our exterior signs, painting portions of the church, and over-all just doing stuff that needs to be done. A master carpenter, Lee was a central figure in the start-up of Fresh Start, and now has pointed his gifts at working at the church, helping and supporting Louisa and Walter, and always ready to give advice and support. Lee’s help has kept the church’s face to the community look better, function more efficiently and directly support the community. He is also engaged with two AA meetings a week at Grace. Another, gift to the ministry here and a faithful member.

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Volunteer of the Month - Grace Friday Night 2.0

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It should be made clear that while most volunteers and chefs come from Grace, we are full of gratitude that we have for years had the support of volunteers from other churches and from the churches themselves! Christ the King Lutheran in Windsor, Our Saviors Lutheran Church in Newington, Saint Matthews Lutheran Church in Avon, and St. Andrews Lutheran Church in Ridgefield. In addition and closer to home, our brothers and sisters from First Calvary have become our partners in a number of different ways, and relative to the Friday Gathering, we are thankful for the wondrous presence of William Harshaw and his wife Luz, and a First Calvary team member, Gregory McCants.



The other part, that has made this food ministry thrive approaching its tenth year is the volunteers who continue to support us, both in person, with financial assistance and with expertise and genuine interest in what we do. Let's start with two of our chefs, Gladys Jackson from Christ the King



Lutheran Church in Windsor, and William Harshaw, member and Bearer of First Calvary Church that worships in our building and at times together with us and those from the CT Myanmar Baptist Church, too. Gladys is a kitchen supervisor, along with Walter, and a chef in her own right. Gladys is a wonder as she deals with very difficult challenges with her husband under medical care while she takes charge of everything and then gives wherever and whenever she can.



St. Matthews has particularly become a central part of our 2.0 as Doreen and Margret have taken on the primary role for packaging the home-cooked meals every Friday Night. Their humor and energy are consistent and a wonder. George Reider at St. Matthews organized a team of cooks at their church, got their church's kitchen to be properly certified and began making casseroles that are delivered to Grace on a monthly basis, along with other things that we ask for and need. St. Matthews also made a large donation to our purchase of new kitchen equipment, and they have taken on hosting when I was unable to do so, and the pastor and assistant pastor have been with us a number of different times.



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God is Our Refuge—Mark Jones

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.

Psalm 34:18 (NRSV)

As the period for confinement caused by COVID-19 lengthens, people may experience isolation, lack of energy and loneliness in ways they have never known. During these unusual times, everyone's mental health is endangered by the pandemic. This piece applies to people who are having trouble with this kind of stress but it also is relevant to people diagnosed with depression who are under professional treatment.

The Bible recognizes that people are vulnerable to stress, isolation and disaster and provides examples. In so doing, the Scriptures recognize that depression, whether temporary or chronic is a part of human nature and not to be stigmatized. The Psalms contain many passages about people being rescued from a pit of despair or lifting up the vulnerable people of low spirit. Psalm 34 is a good example.

The Psalmist writes about the relationship of God to the wicked and the righteous and promises that He sees the latter and hears their prayers. "I sought the Lord," he writes, "and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears." (vs. 4) No one who is righteous and calls upon God for relief will be ashamed. I interpret this to mean that there is no stigma to consulting friends, pastors and physicians about bouts with mental health issues. The Psalmist writes that when he cried out to God, he "was saved from every trouble" and "all my fears." (vs. 6) No righteous believer will be condemned for calling the Lord.

God knows all of the troubles of people and depression or melancholy brought on by stress -a mental health issue-is included. He blames no one for praying to him about their mental afflictions and promises that their prayers will not go unanswered. So the Psalmist writes that God "is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." (vs. 18).

These promises are repeated throughout the Psalms and the promise of healing is part of the ministry of Jesus (Matthew 5:3). There is reassurance and hope in bringing all of our troubles to God, including those originating from the COVID-19.

