



GRACE NOTES

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

MAY 2023

Poem by Brian McLaren

Let us weep for the world
being broken apart
by humans,
Let us grieve the desecration
of forest and stream,
of glacier and ocean and humans,
like us.
Let us be mindful of the children,
being born today,
in a world torn apart
by humans.
Let us show our children
a more excellent way
to walk on the earth and be human,
truly human.
Let us love this world
we've been breaking apart
and let our love bring wholeness.
And let us love one another
with a compassionate heart
for it is love that makes us human, human.
Let us weep for the world
We are breaking apart,
so we can love it back
to wholeness.
Let our hearts be stretched
by great sorrow and love,
so they will never contract
to being less than human.

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SECOND CHANCES

“The Christian Century” is a wonderful publication. In the May 2023 issue, on the back page is the picture you see here. It is the work of Jose' Ignacio Fletes Cruz who is from Nicaragua, and “paints in a native style rooted in Nicaraguan folk art.” He mastered his craft in the 1960's on remote islands in Lake Nicaragua at a commune that sought to put the egalitarian principles of liberation theology in practice.

Having visited Nicaragua as part of a seminary program to help build schools in that part of the

world, our time there was communal. Our group was about a dozen students, their spouses including Judy, and a wonderful professor who led this journey, which included El Salvador, and introduced us to the Seeds of Learning program. Just a reminder, I did not attend seminary until I was sixty, yet I do deeply remember the 60's as I lived through them. I was sixty-two years old on this trip.

The 60's in my memory were a time of great upheaval in our country and a growing distaste with things as they were. Viet Nam, poverty, racism, the growing public witness, and challenge of young people saying "no" to conscription, the "draft", and did all they could to bring about change. Civil rights were demanded, as well as the end to militarism and death. It was time for renewal. The music said it all. We sang it together, we marched, and we took risks.

The flood story as presented in Fletes Cruz's art might make us look at this Ark and pull away from it, as it challenges our images of this last chance story. Notice that it depicts people, not a bunch of images of lots of different animals of all types and sizes, as they walk together two by two into the ark. In this oil painting, we see that the ark is not shown as a figure of "divine wrath", rather it seems to be a "bustling community center" where all are welcomed. Hmmm. This remarkable work of art is illustrating a second chance for humanity. It's not the end, it's the chance to try again to find our humanity. We might think of it as a time to remember how important it is for us to welcome, love, trust, risk, and pray together for what God has done for us.

Whether it is inherent in our politics to hate, we must find ways to stop it. If it is for us to take care of ourselves and to help with those who can't, we must find ways to stop our self-centeredness and find a new way of being. The story of the commune ends with their support of the Sandinista Liberation Front's rebellion against the dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle. Fletes Cruz remains true to the community's original mission, "even as its utopian ideals now lie in tatters in postrevolutionary Nicaragua." What can we learn from this?

We witnessed the "tattered" Nicaragua, and the scene of the massacre of El Mazote where by way of a conservative account, 794 men, women and children were shot and killed. All the weapons were American made, as well as the bullets. The killers themselves were trained by the U.S. and we met and interviewed the only survivor who watched her husband and children murdered as she escaped herself into a tree.

Our country's interest in militarism, guns, and the like have made mass killings in schools a major cause of death of children in this country. Americans now own 400 million guns (per-capita) more guns than any country in the world. A large number of states permit the ability to carry your weapons openly, and some have no requirements to register them. Background checks are non-existent. It's easier to get, carry and use a gun in this country than it is to drive a car. All those victims, young and innocent, died and we seemingly don't care.

If we were to think about viewing this Ark as a metaphor for our churches, lost in the sauce of violence and hatred, its relevance questioned and its future uncertain, perhaps we could see the people pictured here as innocent and wanting. Perhaps they await their leader. They seem restless, and searching, just as we are as a "resurrection" people. Where is Jesus?

Elsewhere in this issue you will read about some very serious ruminations of our own church body, the ELCA. The depth of the self-examination is noteworthy.

Do we, may we have another chance? Look at the picture yet again. “There is no hint of ecclesiastical stuffiness.” Crowds are milling around the high and dry boat. The people have taken over it. No room for anything else. Are they looking out for the captain of the ship? Perhaps, the one that comes in the name of the Lord? Would that Captain care about justice and salvation?

Now, read aloud Brian McLaren’s poem shown next to the ark. Arks are about new beginnings, and we need one. We will not get there by fighting or jousting or pretending or wishing. We will get there when we are committed to find a place for each one of us, all the different flavors of humanity, living together, working together, and paying attention to everything and everyone around us.

ELCA CHURCH COUNCIL APPOINTS MEMBERS TO THE COMMISSION ON A RENEWED LUTHERAN CHURCH



CHICAGO (April 26, 2023) — The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) met electronically April 20. The council serves as the ELCA churchwide organization’s board of directors and interim legislative authority between meetings of a churchwide assembly.

The council took the following actions:

- Appointed members to the Commission on a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC), which will hold its first meeting in July. The 2022 Churchwide Assembly called for the council to establish the CRLC to reconsider statements of purpose for the church and its organizational structure. The commission will present its findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a possible reconstituting convention. A summary of the nomination process and the names of the appointed members is available at <https://www.elca.org/CRLC>.
- Adopted “Earth’s Climate Crisis” as an official social message of the ELCA.
- Authorized development of a social message on the epidemic of gun-related trauma in the U.S. in consideration of existing social teaching and in accordance with “Policies and Procedure of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018).
- Maintained the pending status of requests for development of a social message on child abuse and child protection and a revision of the 1990 “Message on Homelessness.” These requests will be assessed by the Theological Discernment team in the Office of the Presiding Bishop for possible recommendation to the council following the 2023-24 social message development cycle.
- Received the report and recommendations from the Task Force on the ELCA Discipline Process for Rostered Ministers of Color; referred recommendations concerning the discipline process to the Office of the Secretary and the Conference of Bishops for a report in November 2023; referred a recommendation for the creation of an ombudsperson position or office in the churchwide organization to the Administrative Team, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops; and referred recommendations regarding revisions to the roster manual to the Task Force on Specialized Ministry and On-Leave-from-Call Status.

ELCA CHURCH COUNCIL APPOINTS MEMBERS TO THE COMMISSION ON A RENEWED LUTHERAN CHURCH

(continued from page 3)

- Formally received a proposal for exchangeability of the diaconate between The Episcopal Church and the ELCA. Through the proposal, endorsed by the Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee, the ELCA and The Episcopal Church recognize each other's deacons as authentic. It also provides for the possibility of interchangeability for occasional ministry or extended service.
- Increased the spending authorization for ELCA World Hunger from \$25,250,000 to \$26,770,000.
- Added \$1.7 million to the Budgeted Operations Support designated fund to provide support for future budgetary needs.
- Approved a \$300,000 designated fund for the work of the CLRC that will be used to cover the costs of meetings and other resources.
- Received a progress report on the "Salary Equity in the ELCA" resolution and affirmed commissioning of a survey concerning inequitable gaps in compensation for rostered ministers in the ELCA.
- Received a response on the "Gun Violence Advocacy" resolution from the Witness in Society team in the Service and Justice home area and commended the continued advocacy efforts being implemented across this church related to gun violence and universal background checks.
- Received a response on the "LGBTQ+ Programming for Events" resolution from the ELCA Christian Community and Leadership home area and encouraged consideration of the development of LGBTQ+-focused sessions for churchwide events whenever gatherings include such sessions for other communities.
- Referred the "LGBTQIA+ Presence Among ELCA Governing Bodies" resolution to the Office of the Secretary for a report at the November 2023 Church Council meeting.
- Received a response on the "Council of Nicaea 1700th Anniversary" resolution and commended the ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations team in its efforts to engage ELCA congregations and synods in observing the anniversary.
- Approved changes to the churchwide organization personnel policies and to the Mission Investment Fund's supplemental executive retirement plan.
- Approved recommendations for successor beneficiaries of various endowment funds.
- Approved appointments to various seminary boards.



JOY BEYOND EXPECTATION: PASTOR'S MESSAGE

There is no way that we can say we knew that Judy's cancer would disappear. But it has. And we deeply believe that it was the prayers of those who believe that helped us believe and trust even as things got tougher and tougher.

Science can be used for good. The researchers and doctors working on cures for so many diseases are making progress. Maybe research of the ills that you or a family member have may give you or your loved one another chance. We didn't think Dr. Fauci was some power monger either. Millions of people lived through the pandemic. Without the new vaccines, more death would have resulted.

We can trust and learn from our medical communities. Without the coordination and trust that we had or found, we would not be where we are now.

There is another joy to be found as GHIAA has stepped up to deal with major issues facing our state, and yes, our country, once again. But politics and the demand for justice and equal treatment, have long separated us from real and positive change. We celebrated and learned more about GHIAA on Sunday, April 30th. See what it is doing, learn about it, engage in it and bring whatever you have to help make it happen.

We can do it. But doing it requires that we come together and act. It's not about a passive response, it is about ACTION. Write letters if you can't walk, make phone calls if you can't physically engage. But if and when you can... march, give witness, give testimony, raise your hand, volunteer, work with others, even as they are different from us.

Let's thank Darrell Urban for his efforts to lead the Grace Core Team. Let's grow the team and widen its impact. We can have fun as we do it, just as we will have on Sunday listening, singing, and yes, maybe even dancing.

This is the time that God has made for Grace. It is the Grace of God that helps us see what others miss, that has us pulling together with other faiths and churches. We are better together than apart.

Enjoy this issue and let's become together who we can't be apart.



JOIN US FOR CONNECTICUT FOODSHARE'S WALK AGAINST HUNGER!

by Louisa Barton Duguay

Register or Donate now for the 2023 Connecticut Foodshare Walk Against Hunger.

The Walk will take place on Saturday, May 20th at Dunkin' Park — home of the Hartford Yard Goats! Spirit Walkers welcome!

The Friday Night Gathering benefits by receiving a check from FoodShare for donations made. When you make a donation you must choose Grace Lutheran Hartford for Friday Night to benefit.

<https://p2p.onecause.com/ctfoodsharewalk>



The Walk is a fun-filled event with live entertainment and giveaways, hosted by local media personalities Renee DiNino and Scot Haney.

Join us as we continue to bring awareness to the issue of food insecurity in Connecticut. The Walk not only benefits the work of Connecticut Foodshare, it also benefits our amazing partner programs throughout the state. These partners help us serve the estimated 1 in 10 residents and 1 in 8 children who struggle with hunger.

His words.
Your journey.
Together.



THURSDAY APRIL 27, 2023

“Praising God is like breathing pure oxygen: it purifies the soul, it makes you look far ahead, it does not leave you imprisoned in the difficult and dark moment of hardship. Chosen and loved by God, we are called to live "as is fitting among the saints" (Eph 5:3), to clothe ourselves with sentiments of goodness, humility, magnanimity, bearing the fruits of the Spirit. God's gaze never stops with our past filled of errors but looks with infinite confidence at what we can become.”

Pope Francis

AN INVITATION TO EXPLORE THE WITNESS OF BONHOEFFER

SOJOURNERS

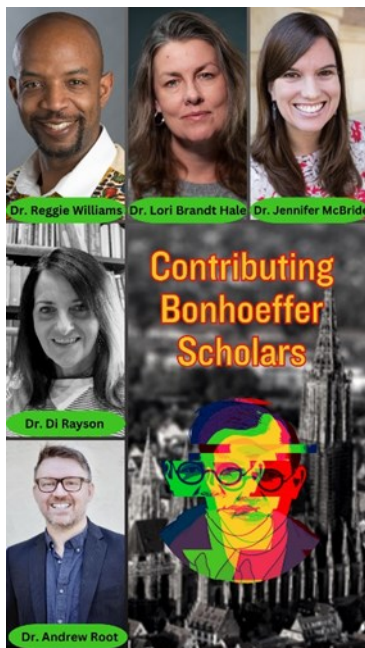
Hello Friends,

Dietrich Bonhoeffer — the German pastor, dissident theologian, and co-founder of underground seminaries and the Confessing Church movement — has a lot to teach us today, nearly 80 years after his execution in a Nazi concentration camp for defying fascism

Bonhoeffer was known for soul-piercing questions as much as for the answers he offered. Questions like:

- “Who is Christ for us today?”
- “Are we [people of faith] still of any use?”
- “What is religion-less Christianity?” — and
- “Who am I?”

It is with great pleasure that we invite you to join a bunch of Bonhoeffer scholars for our upcoming online class - [**Bonhoeffer and the Future of Faith**](#). We will explore the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and examine how his ideas remain relevant to the challenges we face today.



In this class, we will unpack Bonhoeffer's reflections on faith, ethics, and resistance and dive into important questions about what it means to live out our beliefs in challenging times. We will also examine the ways in which Bonhoeffer's work speaks to the present moment and how we can draw on his insights to create a more just and compassionate world.

The class is offered entirely online, is donation based (including 0), and will include:

- five keynote lectures from leading Bonhoeffer scholars
- weekly sessions to dig into Bonhoeffer's texts with live QnA
- curated readings for personal reflection
- an online community with fellow participants.
- a resource page with ongoing access to all the content in video and audio

No prior knowledge of Bonhoeffer or theology is required, and all are welcome to join. The class is structured so individuals and groups can utilize this unique learning opportunity to engage with Bonhoeffer and explore new ways of thinking about faith and our challenges.

We hope you will join us for this exciting online class launching in May. To register or learn more about the course, head over to www.RiseOfBonhoeffer.com.



TOGETHER, WE CAN HOLD THE PENTAGON ACCOUNTABLE

WIN WITHOUT WAR



For decades, the Pentagon has dropped bombs on communities from control centers thousands of miles away. **The New York Times found that one in every five people killed in the Pentagon's lethal drone strikes are "ordinary" people.** This is a shockingly high rate, and likely even to be an undercount.

When these tragedies strike, there is little recourse for their survivors. While Congress has allocated \$3 million each year for condolence, or "*ex gratia*," payments, too many victims never see a cent. The Pentagon's track record is unconscionably low: In 2021, just one *ex gratia* payment was made, and NONE the year before. Instead, these millions roll back into the Pentagon budget — and too many wrongful victims are left to endure a tragedy without support or acknowledgment from the party responsible: the U.S. government.

This system is broken, and even now, as the Pentagon updates its condolence guidelines, we're hearing that they are unlikely to go far enough. **The Pentagon is reluctant to use this money to pay victims of past strikes — preferring to pay only for future harms.**

That's why advocates and activists alike are raising the alarm: This policy leaves past victims out in the cold, excluding the exact people it should be serving. Every wrongful victim of the Pentagon's violence deserves justice and accountability. **Let's make sure Defense Secretary Austin hears from people across the country before the ink dries on another bad policy! [Together, we'll call the Pentagon's "proactive" approach for what it really is: petty and deeply unjust. Raise your voice with us: Tell the Secretary of Defense that we demand the inclusion of all strike victims in the new guidance on ex gratia payments.](#)**

Lethal drone strikes are the keystone of the U.S.'s endless wars – they're a crucial part of the current strategy governing the "war on terror." They're also reckless in their targeting. Among the targets of these U.S. bombings have been parents in West Mosul driving a car with their children in the backseat, a family's tent encampment in a Yemeni desert, and so many family homes in one Iraqi neighborhood that its inhabitants started sleeping in shifts.

With the U.S. no longer willing to put service members in harm's way to achieve the unachievable in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, lethal strikes from above became a "low cost" means of waging conflict, all while disregarding human rights and life along the way.

The victims at the front lines of this violence deserve justice. Instead, \$3 million sits on commanders' desks every year, as our broken foreign policy continues to fail families who we've already torn apart. **New policies about how to compensate victims are being drafted as we speak – and we have to act now to make sure these policies don't ignore the same people that they should be helping.**

The good news? It's rare for the Pentagon to hear from activists like us, and when tens of thousands of folks like you make their voices heard, we CAN push even the most powerful generals to listen to the will of the people.

It's time for the Pentagon to right its wrongs when it comes to compensating innocent victims of lethal drone strikes. Can we count on you to stand up for justice and accountability today?

[Call on the Defense Secretary: Include ALL strike victims in the new ex gratia guidance.](#)

Together, we can hold the Pentagon accountable to those it has gravely failed, and push for a better future we know is possible: one where U.S. endless wars are finally put to an end.

Thank you for working for peace, Sarah, Yint, Shayna, and the Win Without War team

DEMAND CARE NOT CUTS: DON'T TAKE FROM THE POOR TO FEED THE RICH

SOJOURNERS

Editor's note: This article was written on April 26th and the vote has been taken. You can still act!

No economic challenge facing the country can be morally or practically solved by cutting life-saving programs for those that have the least. Everybody needs an affordable place to call home, healthcare to prevent illness and to heal when sick, and nutritious food to grow and sustain life.

Today, Members of Congress in the House are debating and voting on a budget proposal that reflects the priorities of the majority party for the future of our nation and curtails access to vital programs serving our communities! **Today's vote will serve as a moral statement that reveals who is most valuable in our society and how we respond to the needs of the most vulnerable and historically under-served.**



The budget proposal being considered is attached to negotiations to raise the debt ceiling, or legal limit on how much the United States can borrow to pay its bills. For decades, Congress has repeatedly increased the debt limit, so that the U.S. does not fail to pay its debts. However, in recent years, some lawmakers have used debt ceiling negotiations as leverage to force federal budget cuts that harm vulnerable communities. This is shameful since the debt ceiling is not tied to future spending, but funds what Congress has already spent, including on services such as housing, health care, veteran's supports, and child care.

Unfortunately, this Congress is no different. The majority party in the House has introduced a dangerous proposal that has nothing to do with the debt ceiling and is an attempt to make further cuts to programs many in our communities—perhaps even ourselves—use to survive. The plan increases day-to-day costs for hardworking Americans—from health care, to housing, utility bills and child care costs—and threatens Social Security and kids' lunches, just to give more tax breaks and less accountability to billionaires and big corporations.

As people of faith, we share a common call to work for an end to hunger, homelessness, and poverty. All of our sacred texts inform our passion for mercy and justice. In the Christian tradition, Jesus calls the faithful to prioritize the needs of the "least of these" and to be moved by compassion and love to meet the needs of one's neighbor.

By emailing your Representative today, you can match the energy of James 2:14-16, which reminds us that faith without works is dead. People of faith are called to do more than offer thoughts and prayers in the face of suffering—we must move quickly to put our faith into action to prevent suffering and address inequity!

While many lawmakers deny the intricacies of reproductive health, most people in the U.S. hold more nuanced views.

by Liz Cooledge Jenkins

The reproductive health landscape in the United States has changed drastically in the last year, and it continues to change. But some things remain the same. One consistent aspect of our ongoing national conversation is that many of those who support the greatest restrictions, including on access to abortion and other elements of reproductive health, claim Christian faith as a primary motivator.



I spent much of my young adulthood in evangelical contexts where people had strong opinions about faith and reproductive rights. Most evangelicals I knew believed that life begins at conception and thus abortion should be broadly prohibited by the law as akin to murder. In these spaces, the Bible was considered the main — sometimes the only — source of authority when it came to navigating ethical questions. I’ve come to realize, though, that the Bible hardly speaks anything straightforward into the intensely personal realm of when human life begins and what decisions should be made in complicated, real-world situations.

I wonder, then: What does it look like to wade through this murky territory as people of faith? Who are Christians called to be in a post-Roe world?

The intricacy of life

JESUS ONCE TOLD this pithy story: *A person throws seed on the earth, and she sleeps and wakes up, night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, she does not know how. Of its own accord the earth bears fruit, first stalk, then head, then the full grain in the head. And whenever the fruit presents itself, immediately she sends the sickle, because the harvest has come* (Mark 4:26-29, my translation). A person plants seeds, Jesus says, and that person has no idea how these seeds grow up into grain.

This is what God’s kingdom is like, metaphorically. It is also what life is like — literally. I know this from gardening. I can do my best to plant in good soil at the right time of year, water well, and fertilize as needed, but I do not make the plants grow. I can no more create a tomato or a pumpkin than I can conjure a unicorn out of thin air. The vegetables develop of their own accord. I can only tend and support the process. There is so much beyond my control.

Life, at its essence, is a mystery to us. It may seem easy to say that life begins at conception, but the reality is more intricate. The beginnings of human life are anything but clear-cut — and not only because in natural conception 50 percent of fertilized eggs stop developing before pregnancy can be detected. Melissa Florer-Bixler, writing for Sojourners online, explores this complexity beautifully. She describes sitting in the hospital with people nearing the end of their life and with pregnant women facing difficult choices; as a pastor she has seen the often-blurry lines that divide life and death. She calls these liminal spaces “the gray edges of life” — a “holy space of in between.” Pregnancy, Florer-Bixler writes, can be thought of as “the holy gray of life’s beginning.”

Wrapped up in the phrase “holy gray” is a sense of profound mystery — a recognition that the journey of human life, like the growth of grain in a field, can be influenced and nurtured but will not be controlled. Life grows of its own accord, and we watch in wonder — as plants grow up and bear fruit, and as zygotes become blastocysts become embryos become fetuses. Perhaps the unease many of us may feel around attempting to define the beginning of a human life is appropriate. Perhaps this unease is sacred.

Grappling with the mystery of human life and its beginnings includes contending with the fact that a human life does not begin in isolation. The new life grows within a pregnant person’s body, within the web of relationships in which they reside. We can hold the mystery of life’s beginnings in productive tension with the agency of the humans who tend this process.

Listening for God

I AM DRAWN to Indigenous thinkers’ embrace of God as Mystery. Cherokee theologian Randy Woodley often refers to God as Creator, Great Spirit, or Great Mystery. In Woodley’s own spiritual practice, as he has written, he’s looking for the “[m]oments in which Great Spirit’s silence can be heard in [his] heart. Moments in which Great Mystery’s unspoken words can take root and grow.” These moments are often found in the natural world. Likewise, Potawatomi author and poet Kaitlin B. Curtice urges Christians to “[seek] to know what it might mean to feel the sacred pulse of Mystery around us and in us.”

Great Spirit’s silence. Great Mystery’s unspoken words. Mystery’s sacred pulse. These, to me, are beautiful visions of God and faith. We can see this mystery not as threatening but glorious. Sometimes, though, Christians respond to Sacred Mystery by trying to draw boundaries — not unlike Peter’s response to the Transfiguration. As the gospel stories tell it, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to a mountain to pray, and as Jesus was praying, his face began to shine like the sun and his clothes became a stunning bright white. Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. What does one do with such a stunning vision? Peter had an answer. *Let’s put up three shelters: one for Jesus, one for Moses, one for Elijah.* In the face of an extraordinary miracle beyond his understanding, Peter had his own ideas about what an appropriate response looked like. And he wanted to jump into action to implement these ideas.



Mary’s response to the supernatural events she witnessed stands in contrast to Peter’s. When an angel appeared to Mary, speaking of divine favor and an invitation to mother the Most High (Luke 1:26-38) — and then again, when shepherds showed up at Jesus’ birth with wild tales of angels singing “peace on earth” (Luke 2:8-20) — Mary responded by pondering these things in her heart. She also responded by seeking out the company of her older relative Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-45) — creating communal space to hold her contemplation.

Mary’s choice (“Let it be with me according to your word,” Luke 1:38) to carry God in her womb was meaningful because it was just that: a choice. It was something she beheld with awe and delight. *My spirit rejoices, she sang. God has been mindful of me. God lifts up the humble and fills the hungry with good things* (Luke 1:46-55). The implication: *The child in my womb will be a part of this. That is amazing, and it is exactly what I want. I want to raise this child to delight in God, to be about justice, to defy empire and build community and extend God’s mercy always.*

Mary had a vision — a strong and beautiful one — for the life forming inside her. She did not rush into action or need control. Instead, she pondered. She drew on inner and communal

wisdom. She listened for God's Spirit, and she moved with strong, courageous humility. Perhaps this posture is the invitation that Sacred Mystery holds for us.

Questions for flourishing

IN THE FACE of Mystery, what *do* we as Christians know? I find myself returning to the origin stories of Earth and all her systems, and of humanity, in the first two chapters of Genesis. I return to the *goodness* of all creation. And of humankind — all humankind, all genders — made in the image of God and given the incredible gift and responsibility of caring for our world (Genesis 1:26-28). We are different from other created beings (Genesis 2:19-20) but not separate from them.

God has created a gorgeous, tough, wonder-filled planet that brims with life in every corner. Humans are invited to enjoy, to take responsibility, and to join God in working for good in the places we live. As Christians, we know that humans are God's image-bearers, meant to have agency and live lives of dignity. And we know that we are to support the flourishing of Earth and all her beings — to love God and love people (e.g., Matthew 22:37-40).

When I think of what love looks like in the complex space of reproductive rights, I think of what I learned from my pastor, Lina Thompson, about the way the Maasai people of Kenya traditionally greet one another. The greeting: "How are the children?" The answer: "All the children are well." What if Christians carried this question at the forefront of our minds: How are the children? How are *all* the children?

We might, then, ask of our laws: Is this policy helping kids thrive? Is it providing what parents need to raise healthy, flourishing children? In a debate often centered on defining life's beginnings, these questions broaden the picture. They look toward the well-being of whole families and whole communities. They are also the kinds of questions often asked when considering whether to continue or end a pregnancy. *Do I have the resources to take care of this child such that he or she will be well? If I have children already — are they well? And am I well — both because I matter, and because my children may suffer if I am not well?*

These questions call forth wisdom and responsibility. And they are different for different families. Some families might ask, *What vision might God have for this child's life? What calls forth this child into the world?* Other families might ask, *What is our capacity to care for this child well?* And even, *What does wellness mean? What do health and flourishing look like? What biases do we possess?* The answers are not easily assumed.

It is crucial to ask these kinds of questions — questions that take seriously the complexities of specific lives and circumstances. Questions that resist the urge to draw rigid lines, and that honor the dignity and agency of children, pregnant people, and their families.

Leading with humility

WHILE CURRENT LAWS that prohibit abortion access in many states deny the intricacies of reproductive realities and women's health, most people in the U.S. hold more nuanced views. A 2022 Pew Research study indicated that 42 percent of U.S. adults believe abortion should be legal with some exceptions while 29 percent believe it should be illegal with some exceptions. Most people can see gray areas and complexity. Some faith-based pro-life arguments may leave many Christians wondering if their instincts toward nuance, mercy, and the moral agency of individuals and families stand at odds with their religious commitments. But this is far from the case.

As a former evangelical, I once felt the need to draw clear lines and offer concrete answers to complex questions. I now believe that the God who is Sacred Mystery does not expect us to have all the answers, let alone impose these answers on anyone else. Our aim as Christians should not be coercion or control but deep listening and faith-filled pondering. As people of faith, what we have to offer our world is not a set of simple answers to life's difficult questions; rather, we offer mercy, freedom, and love.

Social psychologist and public theologian Christena Cleveland writes beautifully in *God Is a Black Woman* of a dream where God invited her out of everything she had known of (white-male-dominated) religion and into a wild place of beauty and life. "I sat up in my bed," Cleveland writes, "and pondered the dream. I had a choice: I could follow the mystical, intuitive path toward life or stick to whitemalegod's barren but certain world with its overreliance on logic, reason, tradition, certainty, and consensus." Perhaps God is inviting Christians more broadly onto that "mystical, intuitive path toward life." We may have to give up previously held certainties. But we may find something more beautiful and wonderful — if also sometimes disorienting in its mysteriousness — in their place.

As we learn to live on this intuitive path, with the openness it calls forth in us, we learn to hold our own beliefs with humility. After all, as Rachel Held Evans wrote in *Faith Unraveled*, "to be wrong about God is the condition of humanity." We all have things we are wrong about. We do well to remind ourselves that our views are not the only conclusions reached by thoughtful people of faith.

As Christians, we are called to approach our world with more humility than arrogance, more courage than defensiveness, more of Mary's pondering and less of Peter's rushing-to-action. As we do so, we become less concerned with perfecting definitions and drawing lines, and more concerned with exploring together what full, abundant life looks like. We learn to ask whether all the children are well. We honor the image-bearing dignity and agency of all humans — and especially of pregnant people, whose agency has been taken away in many places and is threatened everywhere. We listen to others and trust their wisdom about what is best for their lives, families, and communities.

In a post-Roe world, this is where we find ourselves as people of faith. It is where, at our best, we've always been: choosing to love, honoring agency, embracing mystery, upholding dignity, seeking communities' flourishing, relinquishing control. It is not an easy path, but it is a good one.

Liz Cooledge Jenkins is a Seattle-based writer and preacher who blogs at lizcooledgejenkins.com and Patheos.com.

RABBIS SAY: DIVEST FROM ISRAEL!



March 12th, over a dozen JVP chapters across the country turned rage into action. From Seattle to New Haven, we took to the streets, demanding divestment from Israel Bonds.

The largest protest was held in Washington, D.C., at the Grand Hyatt hotel, where far-right Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich was fundraising for the Israel Bonds conference. JVP rabbis and

THE WIRE

students attempted to take over the hotel's atrium, planning to transform it into a Beit Midrash (house of study) and teach the Torah of Divestment, chanting:

*"Israel Bonds is a shonde, Israel Bonds is a shame.
No funding apartheid in our name!"*



After they were forced outside by security, the JVP rabbis continued their Torah of Divestment in the streets, where 1,000 people had protested Smotrich for hours despite the cold and rain. Protesters included JVP's DC Metro and Baltimore chapters and many others, covering the full spectrum of progressive Jews. It was an indication of the many new people who are deeply upset about, and potentially open to being convinced that Smotrich actually represents Israel's true face.

These new people represented an opportunity to grow the movement. And JVP members delivered a message intended to give the assembled protesters' anger a demand: **Divest from Israeli apartheid and end U.S. military funding for Israel now.**

As we discussed in last week's Wire, billions of dollars have been sent to Israel by holders of Israel Bonds including 80 U.S. state and municipal governments and the Jewish Federation, among countless other U.S. organizations. You or your child may have even received one as a bar/bat mitzvah gift!

Israel Bonds fund up to 25% of Israel's foreign debt, which means that they support a state that has proven itself committed, over decades, to maintaining its apartheid regime. Divestment from Israel Bonds would halt the flow of money to the Israeli government and call into question the legitimacy of the Israeli government before the world.

This political moment presents us with real opportunities to bring new people into the struggle for Palestinian liberation. We need to tell all the local and state government entities, all the Jewish Federations, and all the other organizations invested in Israel Bonds that now is the time to divest. <https://act.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/a/divest-israel-bonds?>

SELMA IS STILL NOW



by Michael Waldman

BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE **The Briefing**

On March 7th in 1965, state troopers attacked John Lewis and more than 600 civil rights activists at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. "Bloody Sunday" provoked national outrage that led to the passage of the landmark Voting Rights Act.

Over the past 58 years, it has become de rigueur for many presidents and candidates to make a pilgrimage to Selma to remind the nation of unfinished work. President Biden went there the weekend of the 4th and declared that the fundamental right to vote "remains under assault." In fact, with the Supreme Court poised to wreak further mayhem in June, this could be the last commemoration of Bloody Sunday with even a semblance of a meaningful Voting Rights Act.

Critically, the president again called for national legislation, even if it requires changing Senate rules on the filibuster. The Freedom to Vote Act and John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would set national standards, ban gerrymandering, and restore strong civil rights protections. These bills must remain a national priority. Recall that voting rights failed in 1957, 1960, and 1964 before Lewis's sacrifice brought them into being in 1965.

This use of the presidential bully pulpit is in the highest tradition. Plainly, Biden cares deeply. But there is more he can do without Congress.

In 2021, Biden signed an executive order on Bloody Sunday that directed federal agencies to pull all the levers within their reach to make it easier for citizens to register and vote. U.S. election participation is poor compared to our peer nations. Nearly 63 percent of Americans of voting age cast a ballot in the 2020 presidential election, a recent high for our country but still far behind others such as Sweden (80 percent), Belgium (78 percent), and Australia (76 percent). The 2021 executive order could inch us toward where we should be.

But here is where Biden's record becomes slightly clouded: too many of the agencies in his administration have failed to deliver the reforms that the 2021 executive order envisions, as my colleague Lisa Danetz explains in an article on the Brennan Center's website.

For example, voter registration should be offered at every touchpoint citizens have with the federal government. When an immigrant becomes a U.S. citizen, they should be offered a chance to register after the naturalization ceremony. When an American applies for health insurance through [healthcare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov), there should be an opportunity to register to vote. And yet, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Department of Health and Human Services dither.

The General Services Administration has taken steps to fulfill its mandate, but it also has been slow to finish the job. The website [vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov), for example, is in serious need of upgrading to become the envisioned one-stop resource where any American can register to vote in any state and in any language.

In too many states, people with disabilities or limited English face barriers to registration and voting. Many people have to travel great distances to fulfill the most basic duty of a citizen. Some states are farcically behind the times — Mississippi and South Dakota still don't offer online registration.

This is where the federal government can fill gaps. The General Services Administration already includes the National Mail Voter Registration Form on [vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov), but it's too hard to find and fill out. This year, the agency must turn it into a fillable web form, and signature capture must be offered, so citizens can easily register to vote in their home states.

Let's acknowledge: The administration has taken some important steps. In the last two years, the Veterans Affairs Department has prepared to offer voter registration in health facilities in three states. (Forty-seven to go!) The Bureau of Indian Education is implementing voter registration at tribal universities. These are significant wins. But there's still much to do, and democracy can't wait.

The singer John Legend declared "Selma is now" at the 2015 Academy Awards. That's even truer today as legislators in several states work to make registration and voting more difficult. President Biden must do everything he can to counteract those efforts.

THIS PROMINENT PASTOR SAYS CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM IS 'A FORM OF HERESY'



Left vs. right. Woke vs. the unwoke. Red State Jesus vs. Blue State Jesus.

There are some leaders who see faith and politics strictly as an either/or competition: You win by turning out your side and crushing the opposition.

Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

The Rev. William Barber II speaks during the Democratic Presidential Committee (DNC) summer meeting on August 23, 2019, in San Francisco, California.

But the Rev. William J. Barber II, who has been called “the closest person we have to MLK” in contemporary America, has refined a third mode of activism called “fusion politics.” It creates political coalitions that often transcend the conservative vs. progressive binary.

Barber, a MacArthur “genius grant” recipient, says a coalition of the “rejected stones” of America—the poor, immigrants, working-class whites, religious minorities, people of color and members of the LGBTQ community can transform the country because they share a common enemy.

“The same forces demonizing immigrants are also attacking low-wage workers,” the North Carolina pastor said in an interview several years ago. “The same politicians denying living wages are also suppressing the vote; the same people who want less of us to vote are also denying the evidence of the climate crisis and refusing to act now; the same people who are willing to destroy the Earth are willing to deny tens of millions of Americans access to health care.”

Barber’s fusion politics has helped transform the 59-year-old pastor into one of the country’s most prominent activist and speakers. As co-chair of the Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, he has helped lead one of the nation’s most sustained and visible anti-poverty efforts.

He electrified the crowd at the 2016 Democratic National Convention with a speech that one commentator called a “drop the mic” moment. And at a time when both political parties have been accused of ignoring the working class, Barber routinely organizes and marches with groups such as fast-food workers and union members.



The Rev. William Barber II addresses the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia on July 28, 2016.

“There is a sleeping giant in America,” Barber told CNN. “Poor and low-wealth folks now make up 30% of the electorate in every state and over 40% of the electorate in every state where the margin of victory for the presidency was less than 3%. If you could just get that

THIS PROMINENT PASTOR SAYS CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM IS 'A FORM OF HERESY' (continued from page 16)

many poor and low-wealth people to vote, they could fundamentally shift every election in the country.”

Starting this month, Barber will take his fusion politics to the Ivy League. Yale Divinity School has announced he'll be the founding director of its new Center for Public Theology and Public Policy. In that role, Barber says he hopes to train a new generation of leaders who will be comfortable “creating a just society both in the academy and in the streets.”

Though he's stepping down as pastor of the North Carolina church where he has served for 30 years, Barber says he is not retiring from activism. He remains president of Repairers of the Breach, a nonprofit that promotes moral fusion politics.

Barber recently spoke to CNN about his faith and activism and why he opposes White Christian nationalism, a movement that insists the US was founded as a Christian nation and seeks to erase the separation of church and state.

Barber's answers were edited for brevity and clarity.

You've talked about poverty as a moral issue and said the US cannot tolerate record levels of inequality. But some extreme levels of poverty have always existed in this country. Why is it so urgent to face those problems now, and why should someone who isn't poor care?

Doctor King used to say America has a high blood pressure of creeds, but an anemia of deeds. In every generation we've had to have a moment to focus on the urgency of the right now. We will never be able to fix our democracy until we fully face these issues. We will constantly ebb and flow out of recessions because inequality hurts us all.



Homeless veterans are housed in 30 tents on a sidewalk along busy San Vicente Boulevard outside the Veteran's Administration campus in Los Angeles on April 22, 2021.

Joseph Stiglitz (the Nobel Prize-winning economist) talks about this in his book “The Price of Inequality,” and says that it costs us more as a nation for these inequalities to exist than it would for us to fix them.

Look at how much it costs us to not have a living (minimum) wage. There was a group of Nobel Peace Prize-winning economists two years ago that debunked the notion that paying people a living wage (the federal minimum wage in the US is \$7.25 an hour) would hurt business. They said it's not true.

Well, President Roosevelt said that in the 1930s. He said that any corporation that didn't pay people a living wage didn't deserve to be an American corporation.

We say equal protection under the law is fundamental. Well, there's nothing equal about corporations getting all kinds of tax breaks and all kinds of ways to make more and more money, while the average worker makes 300% less than the CEOs. **Some people cite the scripture where Jesus says, "The poor you always have with you" to argue that poverty is inevitable, and that trying to end it is a hopeless cause.**

To have this level of inequality existing is a violation of our deepest moral, constitutional and religious values. It's morally inconsistent, morally indefensible, and economically insane. Why would you not want to lift 55 to 60 million people out of poverty if you could by paying them a basic living wage? Why would you not want that amount of resources coming to people and then coming back into the economy?



Thousands of people march through downtown Raleigh, North Carolina, in what organizers describe as a "Mass Moral March" near the State Capitol building on February 8, 2014.

God doesn't say it. That's what's wrong with it. The scriptures says God loves all people and that if a nation is going to embrace Christian values, then we got to know what those values are. And those values certainly aren't anti-gay, against people who may have had an abortion, pro-tax cut, pro one party and pro-gun. There's nowhere in the scriptures where you see Jesus lifting that up.

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THIS PROMINENT PASTOR SAYS CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM IS ‘A FORM OF HERESY’ (continued from page 18)

liberation. It attempts to sanctify lies and not truth. At best, it's a form of theological malpractice. At worst, it's a form of heresy.

When you have some people calling themselves Christian nationalists, you never hear them say, "Jesus said this." They say, "I'm a Christian, and I say it." But that's not good enough. If it doesn't line up with the founder, then it's flawed.

Are you an evangelical?

I'm very much an evangelical. I tell folks that I'm a conservative, liberal, evangelical Christian. And what that means is I believe in Jesus, not to the exclusion of other faith traditions because my founder said that "I have others who are not of this fold." I believe that love, truth, mercy, grace and justice are fundamental to a life of faith. And for me to be evangelical means to start where Jesus started.

The word "evangel" is good news. When Jesus used that phrase it was in his first sermon, which was a public policy sermon. He said it in the face of Caesar, where Caesar had hurt and exploited the poor. He said it right in the ghetto of Nazareth, where people said, "nothing good could come out of Nazareth." He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach good news" — evangel — "to the poor." That's what evangelicalism is to Jesus. That's the kind of evangelicalism that I embrace.

You've had health challenges over the years. How do you keep going year after year and keep yourself from being burned out?

I read the Bible one time, specifically looking to see if I could find any person in scripture that God used in a major way that did not have some physical challenge. And I couldn't find it. That helped me get over any pity party.

You know, Moses couldn't talk. Ezekiel had strange post-traumatic syndrome types of emotional issues. Jeremiah was crying all the time from his struggles with depression.



Paul had a physical thorn in the flesh. Jesus was acquainted with sorrow.

Police keep watch as The Rev. William Barber and other activists demonstrate during a rally in support of voting rights legislation in front of the US Supreme Court in Washington on June 23, 2021.

Then then I looked down through history, and I couldn't find anybody. Harriet Tubman had epileptic-type fits. Martin Luther King was stabbed before he did the March on Washington and had a breathing disorder after that.

THIS PROMINENT PASTOR SAYS CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM IS 'A FORM OF HERESY'

(continued from page 19)


During covid, I thought deeply about death and mortality. I have some immune deficiencies and challenges. I've battled this ankylosing spondylitis for now 40-plus years. At any time, it could shut my body down.

During covid, as I kept meeting people, I sat down one day and I said, Lord, why am I still here? I'm not better than these people. I know I've been around covid. My doctor said to me if I caught covid I probably would not fare well.

As I was musing one day, it dawned on me. That's the wrong question. The question is never, why are you still alive? Why are you still breathing? The question is what are you going to do with the breath you have?

Because at any given moment, the scripture says we're a step from death. And so I've decided that whatever breath I have, it is too precious to waste on hate, on oppression and on being mean to people. It's only to be used for the cause of justice.

John Blake is the author of "More Than I Imagined: What a Black Man Discovered About the White Mother He Never Knew."

**GHIAA** Greater Hartford
Interfaith
Action Alliance

Legislative Updates

As of April 27, 2023

Fair Share Zoning Reform HB 6633 was voted out of the Housing Committee. Contact your legislator to support increasing affordable housing.	Mental Health: HUSKY 4 Immigrants HB 6616 was voted out of committee with coverage up to age 19. The Appropriations Committee knocked it back to age 16. Contact your legislator and ask them to raise the age back to 19.	Gun Violence Prevention The Appropriations Committee allocated \$17 million for this issue. GHIAA's ask is \$20 million. Contact your legislator.
MIRA Plant HB 6664 addresses some of the state's on-going trash problems. Contact your legislator to support the bill with amendments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">at least 50% of the board from Hartfordremediation of the Southend plant won't be limited by MIRA's current reserves	Education HB 5003 is in front of the House for a full vote. Contact your legislator to support fully funding the Education Cost Sharing formula and closing CT's racial funding gap.	Dates to Remember May 3- GHIAA Day at the Capitol 9:45am-3pm June 13- End of Session Party 5-7pm



GHIAA DAY AT THE CAPITOL

WEDNESDAY MAY 3, 2023

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING- 300 CAPITOL AVE. HARTFORD, CT 06106

Come join leaders for a day of advocacy around GHIAA's current issues.

Free parking available at the LOB. Shuttle buses will be available from Asylum Hill Congregational Church (814 Asylum Ave Hartford, CT) between 9-10:30am.

9:30am- Continental breakfast (second floor atrium)
 10:00- Press conference (Room 2A)
 10:45- Interfaith prayer and GHIAA roundtable
 11:45- Lobbying Training
 12:00pm- Lunch- cheese and veggie pizza, and salad (second floor atrium)
 12:45-2:45- Legislative Meetings and Lobbying

While not required, a head count would help us better prepare for meals. You can register at: cljct.org/ghiaa-day



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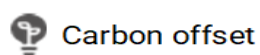
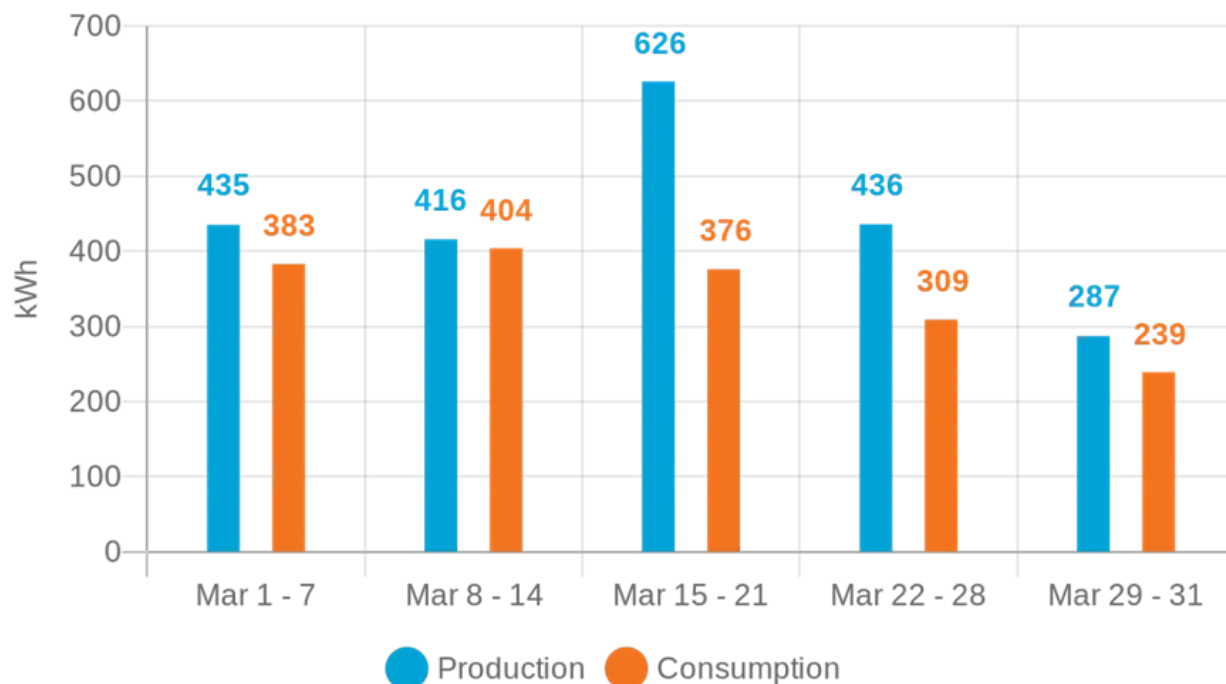
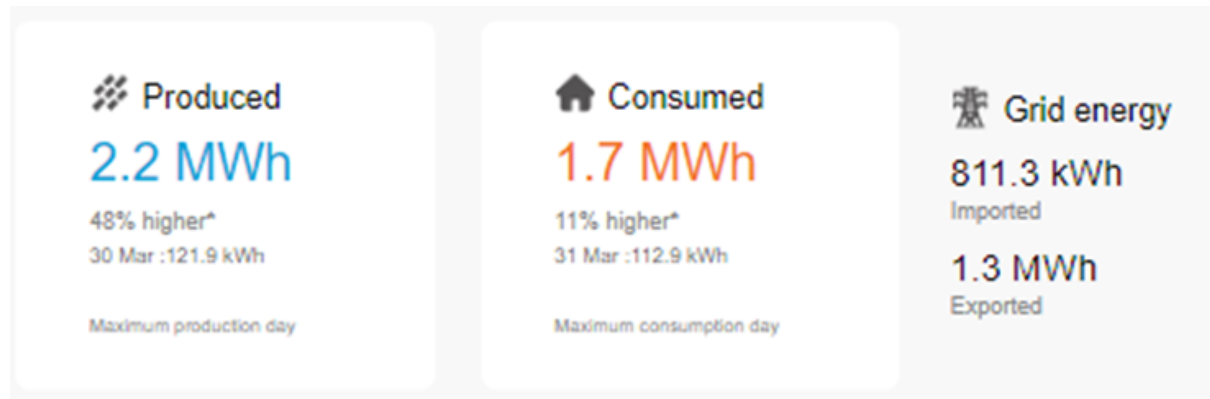
This is a great opportunity to learn more about where GHIAA's issues stand, how the advocacy process works, and what is standing in the way of true justice in our state.



Greater Hartford
 — Interfaith —
 Action Alliance

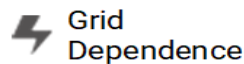
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SOLAR PANEL REPORT—MARCH, 2023



1.56 ton

Offset equivalent to 26 Trees



47%

For this month, 47% of your energy consumption is supplied by the utility grid.

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[Add Storage](#)

Year-to-date production
5 MWh

* As compared to last months records.

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MAY 2023 BIRTHDAYS!

Happy Birthday May!



*May you all be blessed as
you celebrate your
special days!*



Did we miss your birthday or anniversary?
Contact the office at 860-527-7792 or
email office.gracelutheranhartford@gmail.com
to update our records.

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER:

Sunday—May 14th — Mother's Day



Sunday—May 28th—Day of Pentecost

**Friday and Saturday, June 9 & 10th—New England Synod
Assembly, Worcester, MA**



SYNOD ASSEMBLY

death & resurrection in the 21st century church



Grace Lutheran Church
46 Woodland Street
Hartford, CT 06105



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Lloyd Smith, Lay Minister

Louisa Barton-Duguay, Religious Worker,
Artist in Residence

Walter Scott, Sexton

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