



APRIL 2025

EL SALVADOR AIN'T NEVER BEEN PRETTY!

We've just watched Russia's best friend, Donald Trump, show us how to pave the way for Russia to take over the United States, while strengthening his position in our country, and indeed in the world. His slick maneuvering, and diseased sense of power, has led to more calamities than we can count. And he has only been "president" for a matter of weeks. This is our President who knows all about the world and what he is doing.

Well, it reminded me of our trip to El Salvador in January 2006. With Seeds of Learning, and while in seminary, Judy and I embarked on a life-changing experience as we traveled to Nicaragua, and El Salvador. There were 15 Group Members - Seminarians, 2 Professors, 2 partners 15 70-pound containers and we were all set for our Border Crossing. Pre-planning was extensive. We were to help build schools, attend churches, and meet with people along the way and learn about their cultures and their lives.

"Stepping into a new, unfamiliar and in some respects scary place; it was about taking risk, being open to what might happen and to learn about yourself and the "other" at the same time." It was about trusting in what you might find, and from the Christian perspective, welcoming and embracing the "other" with love and respect.

We don't care much about these things, these days. We know that our country is the best of the best, a source of unlimited resources, lots of money, and power. The new kids in town, Trump and his minions would and will "Make America Great Again".

I will share what we saw and learned, but I was truly crushed to watch a so-called "gang" of people placed on planes and shipped to El Salvador by the "president" of the United States. There was no due process, they had not been arrested and tried, in fact they were simply taken, put on planes and shipped to El Salvador where they would be jailed for, oh, perhaps the rest of their lives? We have got to get these bad guys out of our country. They're not like us white supremacists. They were the bad guys and we're cleaning up our country. Getting rid of these vermin, these human beings who we have decided to have no rights, no value, and no purpose.

When judges became aware of the plan to send these people away, our "president" sped up the plan so that it would be too late to stop it. While the planes were in the air and could still be ordered to turn around, he ordered them to continue towards their destination, even as it was into the night. They ignored the judges and did as they wanted. Just as they ignore all thoughts of human rights and decency.

Our trip to Nicaragua and El Salvador had us building schools, meeting with families; staying in their homes, hearing and giving witness to the violence and suffering they shared. With all that they welcomed us with joy giving us what little they had and celebrating our presence. We tasted poverty.

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But it was the violence and suffering that stopped us in our tracks. In 1978 Father Rafael Palacios and Father Alirio Napoleon Macias were assassinated. Thousands of people fled El Salvador. The United States offered military and economic aid to the Salvadoran military; the U.S. backed Napoleon Duarte appointed to head the junta and was later elected president.

During Duarte's first two years of governance, 30,000 were killed. In 1980 troops opened fire on a major, peaceful demonstration calling for land reform; 50 were killed. They killed, they mutilated, seeking to frighten the population. On March 24, 1980, Archbishop Romero was brutally murdered while celebrating the Eucharist. In Romero's words, "The church cannot remain silent before injustice; to remain silent is to be an accomplice." To this very day I wear a simple wooden cross I purchased at the location of his murder as a reminder of his suffering.

600, mostly women and children, were massacred by the Salvadoran. In December of 1980, four U.S. church women were raped and murdered. In December of 1981, 1,000 mostly women and children were massacred at El Mozote. We met the sole survivor, Ruffina Amaya, as she hid in the bushes for days; she watched her husband and two of her children tortured and murdered.

Was it a surprise to find these people shipped to El Salvador? The prison that they have entered is a modern one. Heads and faces shaved, all needing to bow as they walk to the places where they are to stop. They all wear the same clothes, their own clothes no longer visible. They are not to talk unless spoken to, and the prison is an example, I suppose, of a very modern dungeon. These people made me wonder, would they be better off dead?

The bullets and military equipment left on the ground in the massacre were all made in the United States. We reinforced all that we knew. We sell guns all over the world, you know. With the oligarchy that exerts its power all over the world, without care, threatening lives throughout our country, with hate and delusion, God save the United States of America.

We need to give love a chance, not hate. We need to find a way to live together, without threatening the world with our wealth and power, and with remembering what it means to live in peace, and once again may we be the shining star as we remember our Lord and Savior, Jesus, Christ. Amen.

RUFFINA AMAYA



RECENT DEPORTEES

“WE MUST HOLD ON “ - PASTOR’S MESSAGE

With ICE people stopping people on the street, surrounding them, with black covering their faces, literally take people from the street and throw them in a vehicle and ship them miles away to determine their fate. Social Security is at risk, plans to bomb targets in Yemen are mistakenly sent to a journalist for the Atlantic. As a result, people throughout the world are worried about our country and how it responds.

Immigrants and refugees are at risk; even as we welcome them. People are protesting, “they can’t take it anymore” as the words of the man who cries out of the window as he reaches the end of his rope... as the film says.

Mr. Trump who was to end the war in Ukraine “on the first day” he takes office, “or even sooner” he said with glee. It is not over yet, and Putin makes it look like his plans are so far beyond what Mr. Trump sees.

Canada, Greenland, Panama, and others are in his sights. The incompetence and the fear mongering are still alive. It looks to me that this is far from over.

With tornados, storms, and weather, fires, floods and volcanos, “yes there is climate change... “ Yes, our planet is vulnerable, just as all of us.

This is a time for us to hold on.

Hold on to each other.

Hold on to our brothers and sisters, care for each other, love each other, even as our differences are not likely to go away.

Let’s thank God, that we still live.

Let’s take our hands and hold each other tight.

Knowing that there is someone else is in charge.

And, it is NOT, the one who believes he is. **Amen.**





FRIDAY GATHERING

- **Entertainment** - if you would be interested in/willing to entertain at a Friday Gathering Dinner, please let Judy Butterworth-Kremer know at judyvbk@aol.com.
- 183 guests were served at Friday Gathering dinners in the month of February

THURSDAY GROCERY DISTRIBUTION

- 249 people were served in the month of February.

JANET'S CLOSET

- Volunteers are still needed for Wednesdays and Saturdays 11 to 1.
- We need gently used seasonal clothing, blankets and shoes. Clothing racks are needed.
- 63 people were served during the month of February.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- 550 people reached during the month of February - (CRT, Mutual Housing and New Life Church)

SPECIAL UPCOMING DATES OF NOTE

April 13 - Palm Sunday 10 a.m. Service - Coffee Hour follows Service

April 17 - Maundy Thursday - 7 p.m. Service

April 18 - Good Friday - 7 p.m. Service

April 20 - Easter Sunday - 8:30 a.m. Continental Breakfast - 10 a.m. Service

April 26 - CT Foodshare Walk - 8 a.m. registration; 10 a.m. start

Please consider contributing an Easter Plant to adorn the church!

Easter Plants are \$15.00 each, and you are asked to sign up by Sunday, April 13, 2025.



Please either contact the church office at 860-527-7792, call Emma Coleman-Carr at 860-930-1793, or during Sunday's Service complete the available form and drop it in the offertory basket.



Grace Lutheran Church-Justice and Food (Friday Gathering)



SATURDAY, APRIL 26, 2025

Walk Against Hunger



Dunkin' Park
1214 Main Street, Hartford

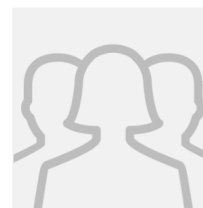


Check-In: 8AM
Walk: 10AM

Our annual Walk Against Hunger takes place each spring at Dunkin' Park, home of the Hartford Yard Goats! Register to raise funds and awareness about food insecurity in Connecticut. If you can't attend the Walk Against Hunger in person, you can still participate online by fundraising!

Use this path: <https://donate.ctfoodshare.org/event/walk-against-hunger/e666985>

or
<https://ctfoodshare.org/> - then at the top of the page select "Register today" and join our team!



JOIN TEAM

DONATE

A federal judge ruled that Elon Musk's DOGE team could not have the unlimited access to the Social Security Administration's record systems that they sought. Clearly stating that it would expose "personal, confidential, sensitive, and private information that millions of Americans entrusted to their government," the judge successfully stopped the onslaught...for now.

More than 70 million Americans have earned Social Security benefits through decades of hard work.

Social Security is one of the most popular things in America—so why have Wall Street billionaires spent nearly a century trying to dismantle it?

I put this question to Nancy Altman, President of Social Security Works, the leading organization fighting to protect and expand our earned benefits, and she quoted the famous outlaw **Willie Sutton, who, when asked why he robbed banks, replied, "Because that's where the money is."**



Every working person in America pays into Social Security with every paycheck. Social Security pays out more than \$1 trillion in benefits every year, and it has amassed a \$2.7 trillion trust fund that is invested in the safest product on the market—United States Treasury Bonds. Wall Street has wanted for years to get their hands on that money so that they can extract fees—gambling our money on the stock market, and then charging us for the privilege.

Anyone who retired in 2008 and watched their 401k crumble will tell you, that's a bad deal. The Social Security Administration, which paid every Social Security payment in full and on time for almost 90 years, is extraordinarily efficient. It spends less than 1 penny of every dollar on overhead, while private retirement funds spend more than twice that on average. **That's the money that Wall Street wants to put in their own pockets.**

President Donald Trump and Elon Musk have been spreading misinformation about fraud in Social Security. Let's be clear: There's absolutely no evidence to back their claims.

What they won't tell you is that Social Security is only facing a shortfall because millionaires and billionaires like Trump and Musk don't pay into the system at the same rate as everyone else. If they did, we could afford not only to keep paying Social Security in full and on time, but to *increase* benefits.

[**We're partnering with Nancy and Social Security Works on a petition to send a clear message to Donald Trump, Elon Musk and DOGE: Cuts to the Social Security Administration are cuts to Social Security! We want to PROTECT and EXPAND, not cut, Social Security!**](#)

Thank you for your support,

Jane O'Meara Sanders
The Sanders Institute

GOSPEL INEFFICIENCY IN THE AGE OF DOGE

God doesn't count the same things we do.
by Brandon Ambrosino
February 27, 2025

The
Christian
Century

Thoughtful,
Independent,
Progressive



It's only February and we might already have our Word of the Year: "efficiency." As in the Department of Government Efficiency, created by President Donald Trump and led, according to Trump, by Elon Musk. Officially, the White House has walked back Trump's original claim, which he posted on Truth Social, about Musk's leadership, and maintains that Musk is not even a DOGE employee but simply "a patriot." Regardless of his official title, he seems to be intimately involved with DOGE's work, which has inspired speculation that he stands to gain from this work personally.

An Executive Order from President Trump makes it clear that "efficiency," though never quite defined, has to do with the elimination of "waste" and "bloat" by way of "reforming the federal workforce to maximize efficiency and productivity." According to Trump, there's a lot of bloat in "The Bureaucracy," which Musk calls the fourth branch of US government. Appearing with Musk and his four-year-old child at an Oval Office press conference, Trump said Musk's team has "already found billions of dollars. Not, like, a little bit: billions, many billions of dollars. And when you get down to it, it's going to be probably close to a trillion dollars."

Musk says that DOGE will cut \$55 billion from the annual US budget. Reporters have questioned the accuracy of this claim. *Politico*, reviewing DOGE's first comprehensive public listing, called it "messy" and "inaccurate." And the *New York Times* pointed out that an \$8 billion contract DOGE bragged about canceling was in reality just \$8 million. Elizabeth Linos, a public policy researcher at Harvard, wondered if the endgame is really the destruction of any recognizable form of US government. Whether Musk's DOGE will save any real taxpayer money by dismantling public goods in the name of "efficiency" remains to be seen.

What is absolutely clear, though, is that people have lost their jobs. A lot of people. The number is tough to nail down, but the terminations number so far into the thousands and span multiple agencies, including the Department of Veteran Affairs, Department of Health and Human Services, National Parks Service, and the Internal Revenue Service. The Associated Press notes that by the time the dust settles, hundreds of thousands of people will have lost their jobs.

Trump ran as a candidate who cared about the working class, which is tough to square with DOGE's actions. Perhaps layoffs are at times unavoidable. Fair enough. But the glee with which these terminations have been celebrated is horrifying. These are our fellow citizens who have worked hard contributing to the public good, and in reward they were fired unceremoniously (some of them had to piece the news together via Reddit threads) and dismissed by their president as "bloat" and "waste."

What's being lost in all of this talk about efficiency is the humanity of the very real people who are receiving these phone calls. You don't get the sense when listening to Musk and President Trump brag about eliminating waste that they have any concern for the working-class people whose lives are being upended for the sake of—what? Politics? Winning another election? Shoring up their base?

Like many Americans, I'm in favor of balancing our budgets and prioritizing our spending. Inefficiencies ought to be addressed and corrected justly. If people—not jobs but *people*—must be let go, then let those who send the emails or make the phone calls proceed with compassion, foregrounding the dignity and concerns of those who are now tasked with finding creative ways to pay next month's rent.

All this talk about efficiency is deeply concerning for several reasons. First, it carries forward the mass media project of stripping persons of their personhood and dignity. To DOGE, people are numbers. To President Trump and Musk, they are described as bureaucratic bloat. To the President's supporters, they are collateral damage in the zero-sum game of American politics. But people are bigger than their jobs, and a nation's greatness is measured in ways that can't be tallied on a ledger. How is the common good being pursued? Are its citizens inspired to create art? Do they consider themselves bound to one another in mutual obligation and responsibility? Do government programs designed to help people who are down on their luck truly reflect the goodwill of taxpayers? Caring for people who do not (and in some cases—as in many of the disabled who will suffer from slashed DEI initiatives—cannot) contribute to the country's coffers is not efficient; and yet how can a nation who neglects its vulnerable ever be judged as great?

An obsession with efficiency is at odds with the kind of beings we are. Humans are terribly inefficient. That's what makes us *us*. We waste time by telling jokes and listening to records and setting off fireworks. We tap dance and drink Old Fashioneds and read comics for no reason other than we want to. Much of what we do has no direct survival value. Our five-course meals go beyond the needs of sustenance; our romantic practices are in excess of our Darwinian urge to procreate.

Christians of all people ought to delight in inefficiency. Ours is a God of reckless, embarrassing waste. "God is the prodigal who squanders himself," says Karl Rahner. If Pharaoh commands his people to work 24/7, God insists his people take an entire day off. Rest and rest well and rest regularly, God says. Pharaoh is a master of efficiency; God wants his people to waste their time.

It's no surprise, then, that one of the central actions of Jesus' ministry is table fellowship. Come, Jesus calls to some of society's most inefficient members, and let's waste the next few hours drinking and gorging on food and getting to know one another. If, during one of these parties, someone wants to waste expensive perfume on Jesus' feet, so be it! In God's kingdom, the name of the game is extravagance. There's no need to worry, there won't be enough. This king owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10).

Of course, you probably can't run a country this way. Checkbooks have to be balanced. People like me, who swipe credit cards without much thought, need to be reined in by people like my husband, who know how to count. (We might start, for instance, with taking a look at the lavish tax breaks enjoyed by Musk's companies, and Trump's taxpayer-funded trips to Florida and all those golf clubs.)

The problem isn't primarily what "efficiency" rhetoric will do to the economy but what it's already doing to our moral imaginations. Some of my conservative friends who are cheering on Musk's team seem to believe that the morality of this administration, and the new direction in which it's taking this country, ought to be judged solely by how much money it's cutting from the budget. But there are more important ways of judging a nation: its character, the kindness of its leadership and citizens, its artistic and cultural achievements, its shared understanding of the common good. I don't know how efficient these things are, but history will certainly judge us by these categories.

So, it seems, will God. One of the lessons we've learned from our inherited biblical and moral traditions is that God isn't fooled by wealth so we shouldn't be either. God counts differently than we do. That's the lesson of Jesus' parables of the lost coin and the lost sheep and the lost son. If you lose something or someone, you should be sad about that loss, and you should work hard to restore it. So, inefficient as it is, forget about the 99 and waste your time looking for the insignificant one. Likewise, don't celebrate the nine coins you have; set them aside and go hunt for the inconsequential penny. You might be tempted to write off these losses as gains in efficiency, but God, it seems, isn't okay with our losing count of any of his gifts.

Like it or not, we are all—DOGE employees and protestors, red-hat-wearers and their opponents—each other's gifts. And God is taking note of how we decide to account for one another.

Brandon Ambrosino has a PhD in theology and ethics from Villanova University and is currently studying bioethics at Loyola University Chicago. He is an online columnist for the CENTURY.

HOW WE'RE ENCOURAGING DEMS TO FIGHT BACK & APRIL 5TH



I'm going to keep this intro short, because when you've got the goods, it's better to show than tell. And last week we showed what democracy looks like! This last week was the Senate's first and the House's second congressional recess of the year. And Indivisibles showed up everywhere -- we tracked about 200 local events nationwide.

Republicans: Out of sight, but not out of mind. The vast majority of the local events were Republican "missing member" town halls -- i.e., town halls held on behalf of Republicans who are currently hiding from their own voters. These took place in states Maine, Alaska, Montana, and North Carolina -- states with the most vulnerable Republican senators up next year. The 15 most vulnerable House Republicans did not show up for public town halls last week -- but in every single one of those districts, there was an Indivisible group (and many partners!) holding a missing member town hall. We saw empty chairs, cardboard cut outs, ridiculous masks, and chicken costumes galore. The message broke through with dozens and dozens of local, state, and national media stories about all these cowardly Republicans.

How we're encouraging Dems to fight back. With a few exceptions, like no-show Fetterman, the Democratic district and state events generally looked like normal, old-fashioned town hall events with the actual Members of Congress. Indivisible pushed these members to fight back with everything they've got. Two of them -- Glenn Ivey in Maryland and Delia Ramirez in Illinois -- called for Chuck Schumer to step down from Senate leadership. Over the weekend, I was talking to a Member of Congress who hadn't yet called for Schumer to step down. "Why not?" I asked. "Well nobody has asked me at a town hall yet -- if they did, I probably would." As I told Chris Hayes after his Schumer interview last week, we get the Party we demand -- if you want something better, demand it.

April 5 is coming up next. We're now building the largest one-day mobilization in years: the April 5 *Hands Off!* day of protest. As of this morning, there are more than 600 local events planned, and we've got nearly two weeks to go. Nothing stops authoritarians in their tracks like organized people power -- and we're organizing it in communities throughout the country right now. All this work depends on real life people taking real life action.

See below for some practical things you can do this week to tell the authoritarians to keep their grubby little hands off our families, our schools, our communities, and our democracy. As you think about how to take action locally, feel free to hit me or Leah up on BlueSky, or join us for the weekly *What's The Plan* live Q&A on Thursday!

- Ezra Levin
Co-Executive Director, Indivisible

Your weekly to-dos

1. Find or register an event for our April 5 mass mobilization.

https://handsoff2025.com/?SQF_SOURCE=indivisible

Donald Trump and Elon Musk think this country belongs to them. They're taking everything they can get their hands on and daring the world to stop them. On April 5, we're taking to the streets nationwide to fight back with a clear message: Hands off! Use the path above to find or plan an event near you.

2. Join a phonebank to get out the vote in Wisconsin

https://www.mobilize.us/indivisible/?tag_ids=26001

With just one week to go until Election Day, we need all hands on deck to stop Elon Musk from buying a seat on the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Sign up for one of our six upcoming phonebanks to help boost turnout and keep our liberal majority on the state supreme court.

3. Call your Democratic senator(s) and tell them Schumer must step down.

https://indivisible.org/resource/call-now-tell-your-democratic-senator-its-time-chuck-schumer-step-aside?akid=117141.1310893.luNQOD&rd=1&t=24&utm_medium=_20250317&utm_source=email

With Trump and Musk actively working to dismantle our democracy, we need Democratic leaders who recognize the crisis we're in and are willing to fight back as hard as we are. Through his words and inaction, Chuck Schumer has told us that he is not that leader. If you have a Democratic senator, call and tell them Schumer must step down.

4. Process the news with Indivisible co-founders Ezra Levin and Leah Greenberg this Thursday at 3pm ET/12pm PT.

https://indivisible.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_JOG0NW09QUS3rSVRa1HmDw#/registration

Every Thursday at 3pm, we take a step back to absorb the news of the past week, draw inspiration from the work Indivisibles and allies are doing all across the country, and talk about how we fight back.

Help combat disinformation with the Indivisible Truth Brigade

Disinformation thrives in our overwhelming "attention economy," where human attention is the most valuable resource driving profit and political outcomes. Algorithms and sensationalism exploit our emotional responses, luring truth-seekers into false narratives. In a society where sound decision-making depends on access to accurate information, inattention poses a serious threat.

Join us on April 9 at 6:30 pm ET/3:30 pm PT for a discussion on how to protect truth, combat misinformation, and restore focus on what matters most in today's media landscape.

<https://indivisible.zoom.us/meeting/register/0E2s3IPXQISVg1wm24SqwQ#/registration>

IMAGINING A HUMANE WORLD

SOJOURNERS

How Gwendolyn Brooks' poetry helps me dream again.
by Sarah James

MARCH 2025

IN "KITCHENETTE BUILDING," Gwendolyn Brooks, the first Black Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, considers the challenge of dreaming in grim places. The setting of this 1945 poem, published as part of Brooks' first collection, *A Street in Bronzeville*, is the titular kitchenette building, a housing unit of many cramped, run-down apartments, often rented by Black residents in that era in cities like Chicago. Tenants are "grayed in, and gray," worn out by systemic injustice and the demands of daily life, such as paying rent and putting food on the table. Still, the speaker — who speaks on the behalf of a collective "we" — wonders if a dream could rise "through onion fumes" and "sing an aria" in the building.



The dream in "kitchenette building" is delicate and "fluttering," something that requires time and contemplation — luxuries that systemic oppression makes nearly impossible. Brooks' biographer, Angela Jackson, in *A Surprised Queenhood in the New Black Sun: The Life & Legacy of Gwendolyn Brooks*, describes this poignantly: "Life is grim in these kitchenette buildings ... entrapment as in a prison. People here are not people; they are things, dehumanized by the nature of a system they did not volunteer for." Later, she asserts that kitchenette residents "cannot even consider" a dream greater than a cold bath "[before] a realistic necessity comes up ... They take what they can get."

Brooks makes it clear, though: Imagination is a vital precursor to liberation. "Kitchenette building" plants seeds in questions: What would happen if dreams of freedom and freshness had space to grow? What would liberation look like for Black communities and the U.S. as a whole?

Brooks, who died in 2000 at the age of 83, seamlessly blended art and activism with poems exploring the intersection of racism, sexism, and economic inequality. Her body of work begins during the Great Depression and extends to the end of the 20th century.

Even 80 years after the publication of "kitchenette building," the poem remains relevant, as bigotry, inequality, and xenophobia persist in ugly, intractable ways. But Brooks reveals some keys to liberation: Dreams, though fragile and not deemed urgent, are essential to transforming lives and systems.

In another glistening work from Brooks, "A Little Girl's Poem," a young child describes her desire to see the thriving of children and families all over the world — from refugee camps to English villages. The pure beauty and hope she senses within herself stands in stark contrast to the global violence and dehumanization that threaten not only survival, but also joy. Yet unlike "kitchenette building," this poem ends with optimistic resolve: "Life is for us, and is

shining. / We have a right to sing.”

The young narrator claims our collective right to dream of a humane world. In the early days of another Trump administration, I am struggling with despair, but Brooks’ work helps renew me. As she shows us, collective liberation begins in the corners of the human heart.



Sarah James

Sarah James, a biracial Indian American woman of color, is a graduate of Yale Divinity School and founder of [Clerestory Magazine](#).

kitchenette building

by **Gwendolyn Brooks**

*We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan,
Grayed in, and gray. “Dream” makes a giddy sound, not strong
Like “rent,” “feeding a wife,” “satisfying a man.”*

*But could a dream send up through onion fumes
Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes
And yesterday’s garbage ripening in the hall,
Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms*

*Even if we were willing to let it in,
Had time to warm it, keep it very clean,
Anticipate a message, let it begin?*

*We wonder. But not well! not for a minute!
Since Number Five is out of the bathroom now,
We think of lukewarm water, hope to get in it.*

Copyright Credit: Gwendolyn Brooks, "kitchenette building" from *Selected Poems*, published by Harper & Row. Copyright © 1963 by Gwendolyn Brooks. Reprinted by consent of Brooks Permissions. Source: *Selected Poems* (Harper & Row, 1963)



YOU DON'T HAVE TO UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING ABOUT TRANS PEOPLE TO LOVE US

SOJOURNERS

'Will & Harper' reminds viewers that trans rights are about real relationships, not simply a divisive political issue.

by Taj M. Smith

THE DAY AFTER I told my mother I was transitioning, I sat across from a childhood friend, who I'll call Sarah, in Los Reyes, my favorite Mexican restaurant in my hometown. It was 2009, and I had come home from college specifically to give my mom the news. I hadn't seen Sarah in six years but I remembered she had a strong faith that she shared openly and invitationally. As soon as I sat down, she asked how I was doing. Something in me broke open, yearning to be seen. I was a mess — sadness and anger dipping in and out of despair. I said something like, "My mom's just never understood me, and now she's not going to try to understand." Sarah got quiet and nodded before replying, "So? I don't understand either, but I'm here because I love you."



Whatever I said in response doesn't matter as much as the truth I learned: Friends and family can love and support one another without understanding them.

In last year's documentary *Will & Harper*, Harper Steele, a trans comedy writer living in New York, has one such friend in the comedian Will Ferrell. At the beginning of the documentary, we learn that Steele announced the news of her transition via an email to her loved ones, Ferrell included. Upon hearing the news, Ferrell, who's been friends with Steele since the two met on *Saturday Night Live* 30 years ago, is shocked but wants to be supportive — he's just not sure how.

"So many of us don't know what the rules of engagement are," Ferrell says. "And in terms of our friendship and our relationship, it's uncharted waters." So he invites Steele to go on a road trip with him.

Ferrell describes Steele as a rough-and-tough, beer-drinking Midwesterner who loves finding seedy roadside bars and truck stops on cross-country drives. But both he and Steele are worried those dive bars will not be safe now that Steele is living as a woman. So the motivation for the trip is twofold: They can learn how to navigate the new circumstances of their friendship, and Steele can learn to navigate the places she's always loved — this time as the person she's always known herself to be.

On its surface, this film tells the story of a trans woman finding herself in a country she loves — a country she's not sure "loves her back." At its core, *Will & Harper* is about friendship, belonging, self-acceptance, and learning to love people you don't understand.

The film focuses on Ferrell and Steele's relationship without delving too deeply into the political aspects of transness in the U.S. today. That's part of the documentary's beauty: It reminds viewers that trans rights are not simply a divisive political "issue." Rather, trans people are real people with real relationships. At the end of the day, Ferrell and Steele are just two friends figuring out what love looks like through colossal change.

Loving without understanding is a spiritual experience at the heart of Christianity. We accept God as being three distinct beings at once: parent, child, and spirit. God is a divine

shapeshifter — everything and nothing, all-encompassing yet not immediately visible. When I reflect on the nature of divinity, God's vastness and depth are things my understanding can barely touch, let alone comprehend. But just because I can't fully understand God doesn't mean I can't fully love God. Through that love, I am open to receiving whatever God wants to share.

Human-to-human relationships are not so different. Throughout *Will & Harper*, Steele repeatedly wonders whether her friends see her as a woman or as just another guy in a dress. "The biggest question when people come out of the closet is, 'Will I still be loved?'" Steele says at the beginning of the film. She wonders if her friends and family truly accept her for who she is or if they are just placating her. But then Ferrell shares something that helps Steele feel seen: "Having been on the road with you for two weeks, I'm just with Harper," says Ferrell. "I'm forgetting the dead name. It's just getting fully replaced."

Throughout my own transition, several of my oldest friends shared that, at times, it was hard to remember who I was before, which I appreciated. My dead name, the name assigned to me at birth, escaped them and he/him pronouns rolled off their tongues. Some friends said they couldn't remember what I looked like before I transitioned. They saw me for who I am instead of who I was pretending to be. In some ways, it was like they were seeing me for the first time.

Unfortunately, countless trans people will never have the chance to be seen in this way. When Ferrell and Steele stop on the side of the road somewhere outside of Texas to read some bigoted tweets targeted at them, a conversation about self-hatred and suicidality emerges. When Ferrell asks whether she had "dark thoughts," Steele says yes without hesitating. "There were moments where I thought, 'I wish I had that gun,'" she says to Ferrell. "But the moment I transitioned, all I wanted to do was live."

Transitioning saves lives. My transition made me feel alive for the first time. Seeing my new-found vitality only made my friends more interested in my life. They welcomed my vulnerability, and together we began to explore what it means to live.

Will & Harper is a gentle invitation into Steele's world. We see how hard it can be to accept yourself, especially when who you are goes against what so many people believe to be true about the world.

After Steele experiences unexpected acceptance at both a bar and a racetrack in Oklahoma, she reflects to Ferrell: "I'm not really afraid of these people; I'm afraid of hating myself." When she breaks down crying, Ferrell sheds some of his own tears, and we witness the vulnerability and sympathy made possible by love.

When love is present, difference can be bridged through honest and compassionate conversation. From an early age, I also knew I was different, so I did what I could to squash that difference — until it nearly killed me. My friends are what saved me, particularly the friends who didn't understand me but loved me anyway — the friends who supported me even while having questions of their own about what my transition would mean for our relationship.

A few days after I told a pastor at my church that I had changed my name and pronouns, she invited me to lunch. I remember her first question clearly: "So what does this mean to you?" she asked.

Today, I would say that being trans means not having to hide who I am. It means being able to show up fully as myself. It means being honest with my loved ones and myself about who I am, what I'm capable of, and what I want from life. It means having a definition of "integrity" under-

lying every action I take. To me, transness means freedom — like an open road.



Taj M. Smith

Taj M. Smith is a writer, speaker, and spiritual leadership coach based in Massachusetts. You're most likely to catch him at a coffee shop or in a park with a sci-fi or fantasy novel when he's not in front of his computer.



WEEKLY NEWS DIGEST

March 3, 2025

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Proposed \$2 Trillion U.S. Spending Cuts Could Slash Food Benefits Used by a Third of Philadelphians, *Philly Voice*, February 27, 2025

A Republican budget proposal, which narrowly passed in the U.S. House last Tuesday, calls for \$2 trillion in spending cuts over the next decade, and SNAP benefits could be impacted. According to FRAC, about 14 percent of Pennsylvania residents participate in SNAP, receiving \$285 per month on average in 2022.

Pa. Looks to Safeguard Accounts After SNAP Cyber Theft, *Government Technology*, February 28, 2025

SNAP recipients are being left in the lurch by electronic benefits fraud. In Meadville, Pennsylvania, at least 71 residents filed reports of Electronic Benefit Transfer theft between February 12 and 13, their losses amounting to over \$10,000 in SNAP benefits. A total of 105 cases of benefits theft were reported in Crawford County, which includes Meadville, over the same two days. Yet as Pennsylvania Department of Human Services Press Secretary Brandon Cwalina said, "benefits stolen after December 20, 2024 cannot be replaced due to the end of Congressional authorization."

'It's Been a Lifesaver': Millions Risk Going Hungry as Republicans Propose Slashing Food Stamps, *The Guardian*, February 27, 2025

42 million people rely on SNAP to put food on the table. "Hunger and poverty aren't going to stop because you cut a program," said FRAC SNAP Deputy Director Gina Plata-Nino. "The price of food keeps going up, things are more expensive, people are concerned about tariffs in terms of consumer good and people relying on these benefits will not have any recourse."

Healthy School Meals for All

Oregon Considers Universal Free Lunch, Breakfast for K–12 Students, *Eugene Register-Guard*, February 25, 2025

Oregon could become the next state to offer Healthy School Meals for All. House Bill 3435, currently under consideration in the state's legislature, would make free school meals available to all students, regardless of their household income. If passed, the program would start in the

2026–2027 school year. Alongside free school meals, the bill also expands time for breakfast after the bell programs and provides funding for school kitchen equipment upgrades.

Cost Questions Stall Bill That Would Offer Alaska Students Free Meals, *KTOO* (Juneau, AK), February 28, 2025

The Alaska Legislature is reviewing a bill submitted by Rep. Maxine Dibert (D-AK-31) that would fund free breakfast and lunch for all state public school students. “We know that hungry children do not have the concentration and energy they need to thrive at school,” said FRAC Deputy Director of Child Nutrition Programs and Policy Clarissa Hayes. “Studies have shown participation in school meals improve students’ attendance, behavior, and academic achievement, and also reduces absenteeism and tardiness.”

CT Officials Consider Alternative Plans as Future of Federal School Meals Funding Uncertain, *CT Insider*, March 2, 2025

A proposal in Congress to dramatically reduce the number of schools and school districts eligible to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) could impact hundreds of thousands of students in Connecticut. With confusion in Washington, Connecticut lawmakers are considering alternative avenues to fund free school meals. A recently proposed bill would fund free breakfast and lunch for all students by levying a tax on sugary, sweetened beverages.

Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (Summer EBT)

NYC Is Offering Summer Food Benefits: How to Apply to Get \$120 Per Child, *SILive*, February 26, 2025

For the second year in a row, New York is participating in the Summer EBT Program, which offers eligible families \$120 in grocery buying benefits per eligible child over the summer months. Summer EBT benefits remain accessible and available for use on an EBT card for 122 days after their date of issuance.

Food Insecurity

State Sen. Hinchey on Efforts to Tackle Food Insecurity Across Upstate N.Y., *Spectrum News* 1, March 2, 2025

According to a report from the New York Department of Health, one in four New York adults experienced food insecurity last year. In this interview, State Sen. and Agriculture Committee Chair Michelle Hinchey (D-NY-41) spoke on food deserts in the state, including in rural areas, the rising cost of groceries, and her support for Healthy School Meals for All. “We’ve been fighting to make sure that every student gets free breakfast and lunch in their schools,” Hinchey said. Also addressed were proposed changes to New York’s Farm to School program and strengthening the Nourish NY program, which provides locally grown foods to food banks.

FRAC Chat

Protecting States’ Rights to Streamline Food Assistance Access to Prevent Increased Administrative Costs, March 3, 2025

FRAC SNAP Deputy Director Gina Plata-Nino discusses the importance of state flexibilities in

administering SNAP, including “broad-based” categorical eligibility, which streamlines the application process by eliminating the need for a separate financial eligibility determination for households already deemed eligible for other assistance programs.

Celebrate National School Breakfast Week by Calling on Congress to Protect School Meals, February 28, 2025

“March 3–7 is National School Breakfast Week, a celebration recognizing the critical role school breakfast plays in students’ health and learning,” says FRAC Senior Child Nutrition Policy Analyst Erin Kennedy Hysom. Join FRAC in opposing cuts to school meals by using the FRAC Action Network to send your Members of Congress an email in a single click.

New State-Funded Food Assistance Program to Replace Summer EBT — 96 Percent of Tennessee Children in Households With Low Incomes to Be Left Without Benefits, February 26, 2025

Tennessee opted not to participate in Summer EBT this year. Instead, the state will roll out a state-funded summer food assistance program. Yet, as FRAC Senior Child Nutrition Policy Analyst Kelsey Boone writes, the program will only serve 15 of Tennessee’s 95 counties, and will also limit eligibility to children in households receiving benefits through SNAP or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

GHIAA UPDATE

It’s been another full week, with more actions coming up soon. Please see the issues update below for some highlights and save the dates.



Immigrant Rights & Protections



This week’s public hearing on proposed modifications to the Trust Act (**HB 7212**) was covered by the **CT Mirror**, which quoted GHIAA leader Jess Hickey’s written testimony and noted the many people who spoke of the teachings of their faiths and their families’ own immigrant histories.

Many thanks to the 66 GHIAA leaders so far who have submitted testimony in support of strengthening the Trust Act through **HB 7212**. If you have not yet had a chance to voice your support, written testimony may be submitted for 7 days following the hearing (through Tuesday, 3/25). Our **GHIAA Trust Act testimony guide** <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Yu51at4AB1-rtzbmCxZlu9PcICts2SQE/view> has all the details.

Save the date for a **Know Your Rights training on ICE preparedness**, to be held via Zoom on Thursday, April 10, from 12:00-1:30 pm. This is an opportunity to equip our congregations and the other institutions with which we are in relationship to be prepared if and when ICE should show up in our facilities. Please **register online**. https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdpHH1iqCvd_WFc50wi-QIW3dQXwE0IC1VjKCpJPGOrzGjFqQ/viewform

Fiscal Policy Reform

You are invited to a **community forum** on fiscal policy reform at Universalist Church of West Hartford on March 30 at 11:30 am, with Rep. Kate Farrar and our own Cori Mackey.

We are excited to announce that GHIAA and CT For All will hold a Conversation on CT's Fiscal Roadblocks with House Speaker Matt Ritter, joined by members of the Hartford Legislative Delegation, on Tuesday, April 8, from 6:00-7:30 pm, at Immanuel Congregational Church in Hartford. Please **register here** <https://www.tfaforms.com/5170834> and spread the word by sharing the event flyer in **English** and **Spanish**. We are grateful to core team leaders from Immanuel and Asylum Hill Congregational Churches for organizing this event.

Municipal Housing Action Teams (HAT)

GHIAA and CLJ staff shared about our HAT strategy in two panel discussions this week, one hosted by the Partnership for Strong Communities, and the other at Yale Divinity School. We are grateful to be in collaboration with allies who are working toward housing affordability in a variety of ways. To learn more about our HAT strategy, catch up on trainings, or get connected with HAT leaders near you, contact Bea Santiago at bsantiago@cljct.org.

Just Cause Eviction Protections

Now that **HB 6889**, which would expand Just Cause eviction protection to tenants of all ages and disability statuses, has passed through the Housing Committee, it can move on to the full House and Senate. We will seek support and co-sponsorship for this bill in our upcoming constituent meetings.

Combating Racial & Religious Hate

Our "Broadening Understanding, Deepening Solidarity" (BUDS) spring series is ongoing. We are actively working to schedule additional trainings around these themes in the summer and fall, and will keep you posted as those become available.

Thank you, as always, for your faithful leadership in the work of justice.
Peace,

Jocelyn and the GHIAA Team

Rev. Jocelyn Gardner Spencer (she/her)

Lead Organizer, Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance

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47 Vine Street, Hartford, CT 06112 | www.cljct.org

*Developing leaders who act collectively
for social justice in Greater Hartford*



As someone who served in the White House during a national crisis, I understand the sacred responsibility of handling classified information. I've been in the Situation Room numerous times throughout my career, discussing sensitive policy decisions and planning intelligence and military operations. I've witnessed first-hand the consequences of breached operational security. That's why Jeffrey Goldberg's recent story in [The Atlantic](#) left me stunned, even after everything I've already seen.

Goldberg, *The Atlantic*'s editor, was *accidentally* added to a Signal group chat where Trump administration officials—including Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and National Security Adviser Michael Waltz, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, CIA Director John Ratcliffe, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Stephen Miller—openly discussed plans for U.S. strikes on Yemen. The conversation included specific timing, targets, weapons systems, and real-time updates as bombs began to fall. A journalist was silently observing these discussions two hours before the world even knew what was happening.

This wasn't a parody or a simple leak—it was a catastrophic failure of judgment and security that offers a first-hand chilling glimpse into the current administration's dangerous recklessness.

This Is Not Normal—and It's Definitely Not Safe

I've worked in national security, so I know the protocols. Sensitive operations are discussed inside SCIFs, secure rooms designed to protect against surveillance. Classified information travels through encrypted, government-approved systems—not commercial texting apps. When military action is imminent, the circle of knowledge is kept tight, with clear responsibilities.

What happened here was the complete opposite. Trump's top national security officials used the [Signal App](#) to coordinate military action as casually as planning lunch. The fact that no one noticed Jeffrey Goldberg—"JG" in the chat—was included speaks volumes about their attention to security details. This situation is even more absurd because most of these Cabinet members likely have classified secured phone lines and communications equipment installed in their homes. As senior officials handling national security matters, they have access to STEs (Secure Terminal Equipment), encrypted government devices, and secure video teleconferencing capabilities specifically designed for these exact scenarios. They deliberately chose to ignore these secure channels—which taxpayers fund at considerable expense—in favor of a commercial app on their personal phones.

This incident fits a disturbing pattern within this circle, but as they say, leadership comes from the top. Donald Trump has consistently treated classified information as his personal property. During

his first term, he revealed Israeli intelligence to Russian officials in the Oval Office, tweeted a satellite image of an Iranian missile site, and dismissed his intelligence agencies' findings to side with Vladimir Putin. And we can't forget the Mar-a-Lago scandal—boxes of highly classified documents, some related to nuclear secrets, found in ballrooms, bathrooms, and storage closets. Trump defied subpoenas and was indicted under the Espionage Act before the case disappeared after his re-election.

This isn't mere sloppiness. It demonstrates contempt for rules, institutions, and the people risking their lives to protect this country.

Politics Over Security

What struck me most about the Signal thread wasn't just the security breach but the tone of the conversation. These officials weren't simply planning a military operation—they were gaming out political messaging, complaining about "European freeloading," and weighing the optics of oil price spikes. Vice President JD Vance questioned the timing based on political messaging concerns rather than military strategy. Hegseth pushed for speed before news leaked; oh, the irony...Others responded with emojis and then "kudos."

Note from the editor: This incident and many more point to the dangers of selecting amateurs and the risks that our country is taking. The full text of what Goldberg heard has now been made public. Not one person has been held accountable.

AN UNGOVERNABLE FAITH

By refusing to swear oaths, 16th-century Anabaptists took away the state's primary tool for control.

by Melissa Florer-Bixler in the March 2025 issue
Published on February 28, 2025

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Century illustration

On the first day of kindergarten, I emailed each of my children's teachers to let them know that my kids would not join their peers in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Our family is Mennonite, I explained, and we do not pledge our allegiance to the state. It felt strange, sometimes uncomfortable. At times I wondered if this tradition, handed down through generations of Mennonites, is too quaint for our current realities.

But I also know that at the birth of Anabaptism oath-taking was debated as fiercely as infant baptism. By 1527, a group from the Reformation's radical wing had broken away and penned their conviction in a document called the Schleitheim Confession. In their final article, these proto-Anabaptists rejected the civic oaths many people in Europe took each year, which served as a binding legal agreement for each person who agreed to uphold their obligations to the town. Political leaders

asserted that violation of the oath would be met with both civic and divine punishments.

For the writers of the Schleithem Confession, Christians should refuse to take oaths as a simple form of biblical obedience. Jesus commands that our “yes be yes and no be no” (Matt. 5:37, NKJV). Christians do not lie. We have no need to superimpose checks on our truthfulness. By extension, and in conformity to Christ, we do not swear oaths.

But these early Anabaptists also believed in a distinct border between the world governed by kings with swords and the church ruled by the Prince of Peace. Oaths are promises that fetter us to the state’s way of organizing the world through coercion and violence. After all, a pledge guarantees the possibility of perjury. As theologian Marius van Hoogstraten reminds us, the church’s operation is different. We gather, we discern, we pray, we listen. We repeat these actions over and over because the Holy Spirit’s movement forms and reforms our common life as the body of Christ. Oaths barricade against the possibility for transformation because swearing them binds us to a fixed way of interpreting reality. They assume an outcome and hold us to it.

“The Anabaptist refusal to swear oaths was the most radical political act that could have been undertaken by anyone,” writes historian Edmund Pries—other than “declaring war against one’s overlords.” Anabaptists made themselves ungovernable, taking away the state’s primary tool of control. Instead, the radical reformers created alternative communities. Authorities sensed the threat and mounted a campaign against the growing peasant movement, killing thousands of believers in its first decade.

I am thinking about oaths and ungovernability here in the first months of the second Trump administration. I’ve been reading Timothy Snyder’s *On Tyranny*, paying special attention to lesson number one: do not obey in advance.

In recent months, Snyder’s warning has gone unheeded. Media corporations shifted toward collegiality with the new administration, while tech companies and governments curried favor with Trump. What is the role of the church in this new landscape, as we witness actions that threaten people made in the image of God? What good is my small refusal to pledge allegiance?

Authoritarianism thrives on inevitability. Enough institutions acquiesce to the structure of power, enough lawsuits freeze media coverage, enough leaders are jailed as enemies of the state that repression becomes a fact of life we learn to tolerate. Countries that have faced down authoritarian regimes did so by organizing ordinary people at each juncture. They cultivated the kind of imagination that refused to let the future be preordained.

We are, by baptism, a people who do not obey in advance.

Under the Milosevic regime in Serbia, each time police arrested an activist, within ten minutes the opposition made a press release and gathered hundreds of people outside the police station. Under the Pinochet regime in Chile, miners organized a national day of protest. People from all walks of life went into the street, banging their pots and pans through the night.

After Hitler invaded their country, Norwegians organized an “ice front.” They changed seats on buses, refusing to sit next to soldiers. They pretended they could not speak German. They gave wrong directions and altered street signs. “We must not provoke these people,” wrote the editor of an underground paper, “but we should refrain entirely from any intercourse with them and let them feel that they have set themselves totally outside society.”

"In times like these," Snyder writes, "individuals think ahead about what a more repressive government will want, and then offer themselves without being asked. A citizen who adapts in this way is teaching power what it can do." Symbolic actions break the spell of conformity with the regime.

When Christians abstain from the national anthem or decline to swear before a jury, we put on display what the government cannot do. Each time we refuse the Pledge of Allegiance or remove the American flag from our sanctuaries—each act cultivates a pattern of nonconformity to state coercion. Debra Dean Murphy reminds us that baptism "is an act of disaffiliation, conferring an identity at odds with the ways we are named and claimed by family, nation, and ideology." We are, by baptism, a people who do not obey in advance.

In baptism, we have already given our fealty, and we cannot give it again. Jesus says that we cannot have two masters (Matt. 6:24). Dietrich Bonhoeffer observes that "those who are baptized no longer belong to the world, no longer serve the world, and are no longer subject to it. They belong to Christ alone, and relate to the world only through Christ." And when the acts of the state contradict our allegiance to Jesus, Christians have made our resistance public and clear.

We cannot be governed according to the state's will. We are already governed by the law of love.



Saturday, March 29, 2025

"One word should suffice this evening, that is the Cross itself. The Cross is the word through which God has responded to evil in the world. Sometimes it may seem as though God does not react to evil, as if he is silent. And yet, God has spoken, he has replied, and his answer is the Cross of Christ: a word which is love, mercy, forgiveness. "

Pope Francis

SOLAR REPORT - FEBRUARY 2025



☀️ Produced

1.4 MWh

12% higher*

28 Feb :95.1 kWh

Maximum production day

🏠 Consumed

1.7 MWh

13% lower*

28 Feb :99.6 kWh

Maximum consumption day

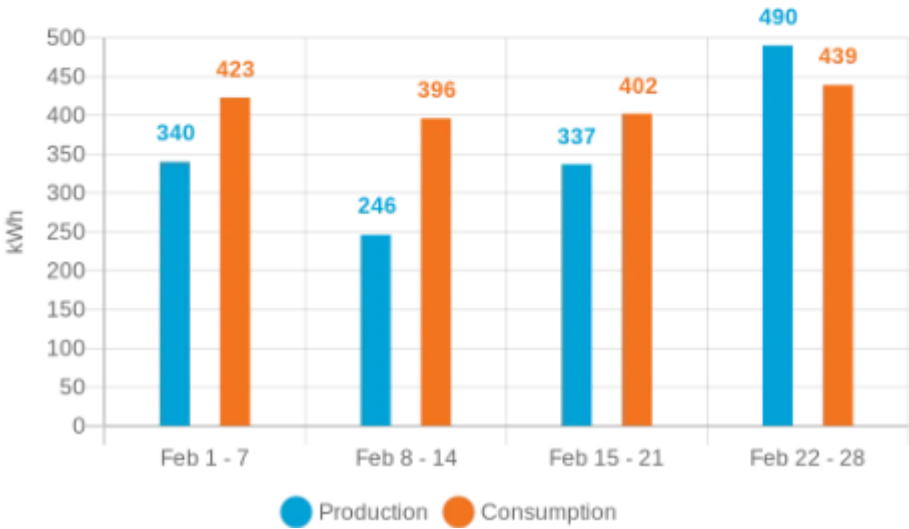
⚡ Grid energy

1.0 MWh

Imported

772.0 kWh

Exported



🌳 CO2 reduction

1.0 ton

Offset equivalent to 17 Trees

⚡ Grid Dependence

61%

For this month, 61% of your energy consumption is supplied by the utility grid.

Get grid independence with Enphase

Add Storage

Year-to-date production

3 MWh

* As compared to last month's records

APRIL 2025 BIRTHDAYS!



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.

Grace Lutheran Church – Readers for April 2025

Note: If you are unable to read on your assigned Sunday, please switch with someone else.

Date	Reading #	Reading	Reader
4/6	1	Isaiah 43: 16-21	Barbara Ruhe
	Psalm	Psalm 126	Unison
	2	Philippians 3: 4b – 14	Betsy DeRoma
4/13 Palm Sunday	1	Isaiah 50: 4-9a	Rebecca Lewis
	Psalm	Psalm 31: 9-16	Unison
	2	Philippians 2: 5-11	Nina Kretschmer
4/17 Maundy Thursday	1	Exodus 4: 1-14	Betsy DeRoma
	Psalm	Psalm 116: 1-2, 12-19	Unison
	2	1 Corinthians 11: 23-26	Judy Butterworth-Kremer
	Altar Stripping	Psalm 22	Rodney Carr
4/18 Good Friday	1	Isaiah 52: 13-53: 12	Dorothea Glatte
	Psalm	Psalm 22	Wayne Dixon
	2	Hebrews 10: 16-25	Barbara Ruhe
4/20 Easter Sunday	1	Acts 10: 34-42	Kasumi Campbell
	Psalm	Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24	Unison
	2	1 Corinthians 15: 19-26	Lou Oliver
4/27 2 nd Sunday of Easter	1	Acts 5: 27-32	Sonia Wellington
	Psalm	Psalm 150	Unison
	2	Revelation 1: 4-8	Ivy Thomas



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Lou Oliver, Vice President

Dale Eberhardt, Treasurer

Judy Butterworth-Kremer, Secretary

Janice Potter, Financial Assistant

Dale Eberhardt, Organist

Emma Coleman-Carr, Altar Guild

Toby Scott, Sexton

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