



GRACE NOTES

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

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BETHLEHEM IS A GHOST TOWN; IT WAS ONE THEN

"I think there's a movement that's happening in the world. It's happening across religions. It's happening with secular and religious people. It's bubbling up in the hearts of people in pain. When people who are motivated by revolutionary love in the prophetic path of Jesus come together, knowing the pain of our planet, and knowing the agony of the poor, to work for peace and against injustice and racism and hate, they can transform a broken world toward beloved community to the glory of God."
Brian McLaren (CAC)

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People walk by the Church of the Nativity, traditionally believed to be the birthplace of Jesus, on Christmas Eve, in the West Bank city of Bethlehem, Sunday, Dec. 24, 2023.

Bethlehem is having a subdued Christmas after officials in Jesus' traditional birthplace decided to forgo celebrations due to the Israel-Hamas war. (AP Photo/Mahmoud Illean)

This Christmas with the horror of war leading to more than 22,000 deaths in and around Jerusalem, Gaza, and what is recognized as Palestine, we may pause at the start of a New Year, with the truth that war only brings misery and death, nothing any human being could or would seek, promise, or promulgate. As we look forward to a frightening New Year, with all of religion, either trembling with fear or absent a direction as to how to deal with this. People taking charge with weapons, guns, and panic. We fall short, by joining in, using power and influence not as a means for peace, but rather as a weapon of dominance.

Interestingly, this Christmas, Bethlehem was described as a ghost town. No beautiful Christmas tree, no lights in the churches, all was dark, full of fear and sadness. You see, today, Bethlehem is a walled city, you must stop at checkpoints to get in and out. Jimmy Carter was to describe the plight of those Palestinians living there as people who were living in Apartheid. Our visits to the Holy Land were to verify his judgment. We experienced it. We touched it. We felt it.

That isn't to say that Hamas' attack and treatment of hostages is right. It is time for a cease fire in the Middle East, in Ukraine, in other parts of the world where war reigns and death travels with it.

Where are our churches? Where are all other faiths in stopping insane dictators from doing what they are doing, all over the planet. And we, the United States of America, have destabilized democracy throughout the world with our example of violence, our guns, our gun manufacturers and distributors, and our dependence on the NRA, as a non-profit that actually pays no taxes and is an arm of military contractors and consumer businesses arming communities throughout our country and the world, and encouraging political views that allow the free carry of weapons, no adjustments for deaths in schools (the largest cause of the death of children in the U.S.).



The deeper our faith, the more doubt we must endure; the deeper our hope, the more prone we are to despair; the deeper our love, the more pain its loss will bring; these are a few of the paradoxes we must hold as human beings. If we refuse to hold them in the hopes of living without doubt, despair, and pain, we also find ourselves living without faith, hope, and love."
—Parker Palmer

Artist unknown

Then, of course, there are our own churches. Lining up for or against guns, for or against care for immigrants, for or against the needs of the poor, those vulnerable, those sick, elderly, hungry, homeless, sleeping in cars, or places where they can hide or find some level of comfort. There is no place at our inns, either. Do we open our worship places for people to come out of the cold, sleep, and at least make it through the night. Do any of us do that?

And, then there are those who would question what and how we do things. They want control because they know better than we do. They are experts in everything, don't particularly care about our congregation or its status, it's needs, those ill, those suffering. No, we need to pay attention to what they want to do and how they want to do it. We've been doing this for years. We know what's best. We don't like this or that, but we've decided we want control, because we know better. Even though we have made major improvements, and new people have been coming and helping. It is time for us to come together, not come apart. If we can't get it together, let's at least part with a loving understanding.

Change is hard; it's hard for all of us. Yet, if we do it together, without trying in every way possible to disturb the progress that has been made and the progress yet to come. We have a Ministry Coordinator who has no biases save serving Grace, and the people coming here for help. She has a long list of people wanting to see her every day. What a gift. People see our church as a place to come for help. Not because we do this or that but that we care and we show it every way we possibly can. We've found people housing, found places for people to sleep, encouraged people to seek help; we're partners with the Wheeler Clinic, we are trying to work with other churches, establish programs for children, and address problems in the communities we serve.

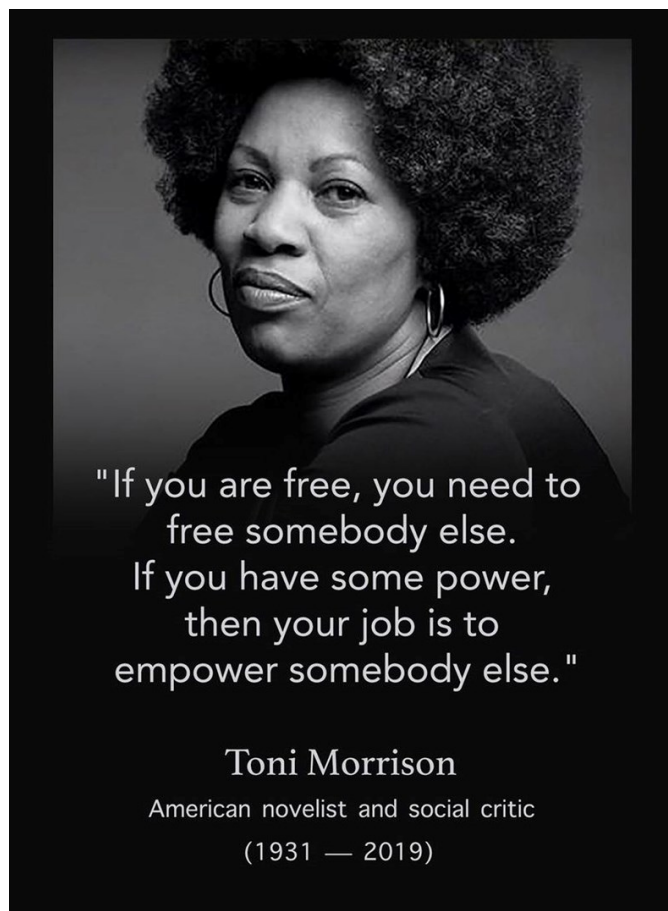
These are the things that we can do. We are not looking for credit or for this or for that. We are here to treat each other with love and with genuine desire to do more, give more and be more

together. Our worship services have been very special in recent weeks even as the pastor has faced physical challenges. All pulled together, and as you will see from pictures shown, our church has never been lovelier.

If we don't change our way of being church, how do we contribute differently and better to what is going on all around us. This is the time. This is our time. This year coming may determine the future of our communities, our state, our country and our world. Let's find ways to do what we can, without whispering and secret meetings. Let's come together and thank God for the gifts we have been given by a loving God, whose son, a person of color, born in a manger on that night, showed us how to live and is here to stay.

To get the full value of joy, you must have someone to divide it with.

Mark Twain



“IT’S NOT OVER TILL IT’S OVER” – Pastor’s Message

Heck of a way to start a new year, but Yogi Berra had a way with words. Sadly, most of that was really tough in 2023 follows us forward into 2024. All we can hope is that we have been strong to have made it through 2023 and may be stronger for it, moving into 2024.

My life has been fuller this past year, more so than other years deep in my memory. I’ve had health scares before, many times. 2023 was a bit more challenging. What is it? Why now?

Sure, we are all getting older, but somehow, I don’t feel finished. I love our church, the people in it, the people in and around our communities who are suffering and need us. Perhaps, more than ever before. And, we have been continuously supported by a dear friend who has supported our ministry for years, and still is. There must be a reason for us to continue here to learn how to do it with more love and joy than ever.

“What lies behind us and what lies
before us are tiny matters
compared to what lies within us.”

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

I thank all who have been with us this past year, for all they have done and given to our ministry. This is not my church; it is OUR church. It lasted long before I showed up and it will last long AFTER I’m gone. We have been gifted with so many who gave so much, give so much and love so much. Let’s share what is in us and give thanks. Let’s know the truth and let go of the lies. Let’s love like we have never loved before.

The Work of Christmas

By Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among the people,
To make music in the heart.

CHRISTMAS AT GRACE!



John 1:1-14 (NRSV)
Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas
Day

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.



I SHALL NOT LIVE IN VAIN

If I can stop one heart
from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;

If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,

Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,

I shall not live in vain.

—EMILY DICKINSON



A PROPHETIC VISION FOR JUSTICE TO PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN BY THE REVEREND DR. CANON NAIM STIFAN ATEEK

and Released by Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA)

I stand in utter shock and dismay as I look upon the crushed, broken, and burnt children of Gaza and southern Israel and as I observe the horrifying death toll, comprised primarily of women and children, climb ever higher as a result of a vengeful and relentless bombing campaign undertaken against the tiny parcel of land known as the Gaza Strip. Home to over two million Palestinians, half of them children, most residents of Gaza are refugees or the descendants of refugees, longing to breathe free as all human beings do. The appalling atrocities we are witnessing will never bring an end to this 75-year-plus conflict. Instead, they will lead inevitably to an increase in violence and loss of innocent life.



Mr. President, context matters. Hamas started the present war. But Hamas did not start the occupation and the subjugation of the Palestinian people. Nor was it they who desecrated the sanctity of the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, a major provocation undertaken by extremist Israeli settlers. The failure of the Israeli government to stop these extremists did not start with Hamas. The miserable, debilitating life of those in Gaza since 2007 is the result of Israel's merciless blockade, not Hamas. Although I stand morally and ethically opposed to the violent ideology and actions of Hamas, as an Anglican/Episcopal priest, I am dedicated to

the truth. As such, context matters.

What is needed now is not the killing of more innocent people. What we need is compassion and mercy for the other, built upon a foundation of justice as defined in international law.

President Biden, you have declared the outcome of this latest and most violent conflict must result in the implementation of the Two-State Solution. Let that be your mantra! People are seeking leadership that will help transform this largely empty slogan into concrete steps towards the realization of a peaceful solution. Without such practical steps, your words will be nothing more than an exercise in hypocrisy.

In the name of ending the suffering of the thousands of innocent men, women, and children in the Israel-Gaza war, I offer a Vision rooted in the spirit of United Nations Security Council resolution 242, from 1967, based on the formula of land for peace for the two peoples that must live together on the land. The United States, successive Israeli governments, and



A PROPHETIC VISION FOR JUSTICE TO PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN BY THE REVEREND DR. CANON NAIM STIFAN ATEEK

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the Palestinian Authority have each publicly supported this formula for many years, and now it is time to put it into action.

What does this vision entail? How is it to be implemented?

Mr. President, let us imagine together the future and let us take bold steps and concrete actions that will actually transform our words into a just peace for all.

Therefore:



The day after a permanent ceasefire is declared, the US needs to introduce a resolution in the UN Security Council recognizing Palestine as a member state within the 1967 borders. After 56 years, and in light of the current war, the Israeli occupation must be brought to a conclusive end. Then, the UN can assume temporary responsibility for the Gaza Strip.

Led by the United Kingdom, the USA, and Israel, these countries and others must pay for the rebuilding of the Gaza Strip. Ever since the Balfour Declaration was proclaimed by Britain in 1917, these countries have caused immense pain and suffering for our Palestinian people. Justice requires that they be found liable and held accountable.

The Palestinians bear no responsibility for the horrors of the Holocaust. But the Palestinian people must now be prepared to live in peace with their Israeli Jewish neighbors. Both peoples may help one another heal from the wounds of the Holocaust, the pain and suffering of the Nakba, and the horrors of the current catastrophe.

In order to help facilitate the rebuilding of Gaza, I humbly suggest that the UN invite the governments and people of South Africa and Ireland, who carry no colonial baggage in the region and would be acceptable to the Palestinians, to temporarily take charge of peacekeeping and peacemaking responsibilities. They would oversee, manage, and coordinate with the UN and the Palestinians the rebuilding of Gaza, with the goal being a free, globally recognized territory possessing a seaport and airport open to the world. Meanwhile, they would guarantee that no security threat to Israel arises.



After a period of no more than six months from the end of the war, the United Nations must take over administrative responsibilities for the West Bank. Under a temporary UN mandate, the Israel Defense Forces must withdraw entirely from the occupied territories while the Palestinian Authority steps aside.

A PROPHETIC VISION FOR JUSTICE TO PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN BY THE REVEREND DR. CANON NAIM STIFAN ATEEK

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During this period of UN administered stability, elections must be prepared for Palestinians and Israelis to choose their next leaders. Both must preserve the dignity of one person, one vote under democratic rule and guarantee civil rights and protections for all minority communities. Palestinians and Israelis must demonstrate, through the election of responsible leadership, that they are committed to a peaceful, nonviolent resolution of the conflict. Israelis can be confident that this process will result in long-term security while Palestinians will enjoy the freedom to build their new democratic sovereign state. Support from the international community should be conditioned upon each elected government's acceptance of a peaceful two-state solution. This applies both to Israelis and the Palestinian people.

Negotiations must then proceed unceasingly, with Israeli and Palestinian leadership supported by the United Nations, USA, Britain, the EU, and the Arab League, until all borders of a sovereign Palestinian state have been established and ensure the sovereignty and security of both peoples in Israel and Palestine.

The following confidence building measures must be undertaken before negotiations conclude, in order to ensure the establishment of a viable Palestinian state:

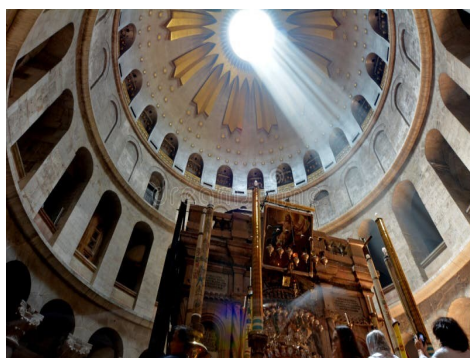
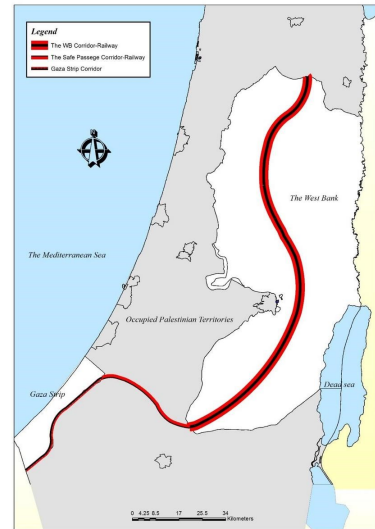
1- Urgently, an elevated highway and rail system needs to be built between Gaza and the West Bank, under the control of the UN, so that the Palestinian people can enjoy unimpeded freedom to travel back and forth freely and directly. All this must be financed by Israel, the US, Britain, and their friends;

2 - Israel must start building appropriate infrastructure within the green line to accommodate the return of settlers now living on occupied Palestinian land of the West Bank. (Some provision can be made for those Israeli Jews who want to stay and become Palestinian citizens living under Palestinian rule);

3 - The right of return of refugees must be resolved within UN guidelines and in accordance with international law. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon must be given the priority to return to Palestine, replacing the Israeli settlers in the West Bank;

4 - Jerusalem must become a city shared by both Palestine and Israel and governed equitably by a special UN commission that includes Palestinians, Israelis, and representatives of the UN and the international community;

5 - All holy places must be protected and their integrity secured, especially the Aqsa Mosque for Muslims, the Church of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulchre) for Christians, and the Western Wall for Jews;



A PROPHETIC VISION FOR JUSTICE TO PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN BY THE REVEREND DR. CANON NAIM STIFAN ATEEK

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6 - After a set number of years and a period of economic prosperity, peace education, and healing, Palestine and Israel can decide, if they wish, to join together as a single state, the one-state solution, or as a confederation/federation of states whereby Jerusalem would become the federal capital of the states.

Mr. President, we ask you to lead us as one who embraces those who have visions of justice and peace. Let the engineers, the architects, the lawyers, the social workers, the psychologists, the politicians, the Imams, the Rabbis, and the Christian Clergy start imagining, working, and praying for the fulfillment of this vision. Failure to take such concrete steps transforms the language of “two states” into little more than a hypocritical alibi for the continuation of a status quo long proven unsustainable.

I believe that the One loving, compassionate, and merciful God of the three Abrahamic faiths would be praised, worshiped, and honored by such a vision of peace that can move us all into the work of reconciliation and forgiveness.

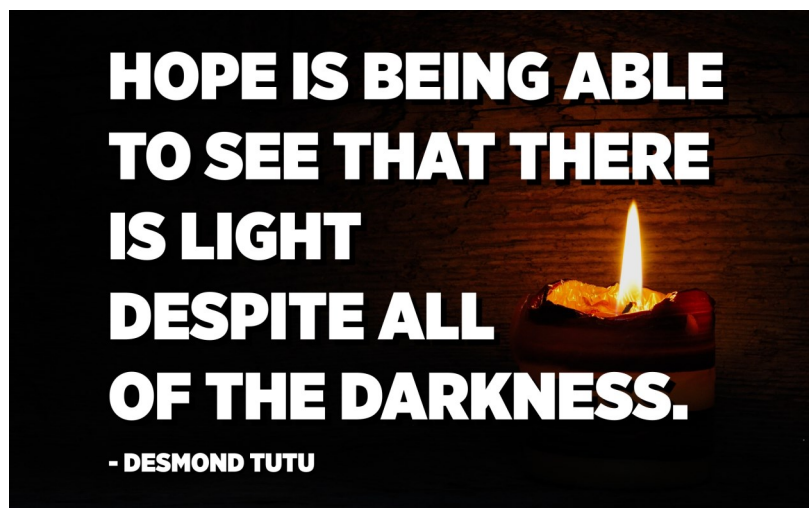
Mr. President, this vision includes my heartfelt belief that you, as a fellow Christian, is capable of empathizing as much with my beleaguered Palestinian people as you have done so publicly for the Jewish people these many decades.



It was our beloved Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the International Patron of Sabeel, who said, “We are prisoners of Hope.” And so, it is with much hope and anticipation that you will join me in seeing this vision become a reality, one that requires bold actions and a passion for justice, and only justice!

Christmastide 2023

Assis Naim Ateek is a Palestinian Episcopal priest who has lived through decades of dispossession of the Palestinians from their ancestral land. His recent memoir chronicles his life as a young boy exiled from his hometown at the age of 11 to his seminal work on a theology of liberation for his people.



WHERE LIFE NEVER ENDS



Neverending dream where life never ends –
where people live in perfect harmony
where color is not wrong
where we can walk and sing without
laughter of putdowns
where someone greets you with words of joy
where loneliness and inequality become a
speck of dirt
in the winds of the past–
But reality must come first.

WHERE LIFE NEVER ENDS

Red Cloud Graduate 2006

Mahpíya Lúta | Red Cloud is the largest privately funded indian school in the United States, educating 500 students on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in a remote part of South Dakota since 1888.

POPE FRANCIS TAKES ON UNPRECEDENTED ATTACKS FROM AMERICAN OPPONENTS

By Christopher Lamb (Excerpts)



From left, Cardinal Raymond Burke, Pope Francis and Bishop Joseph Strickland

Pope Francis: Worship of money helps terrorism to grow

Those who oppose Francis say they are deeply concerned about his openness to giving communion to divorced and remarried Catholics, along with his pastoral welcome to LGBTQ people. They don't like his focus on migrants and the climate crisis, and they want a pope instead who lays down the law and presents doctrine in black-and-white terms.



This Pope preaches for a humbler church, one focused on service and which seeks to bring the Christian message into the world.

While the attacks on him are likely to have stung, Francis has frequently turned the other cheek, going so far as to say he does not seek to crack down on opponents; he's also appointed to Vatican departments leaders who held different views than his own.



Now, though, in the 11th year of his papacy, the Pope is taking more assertive measures to tackle some of the opposition he's been facing, which is centered in the US – where American politics also may be in play – and in certain Roman circles.

With his 87th birthday Sunday and as he battles health issues, he doesn't have time to waste.

Pope blasts arms trade as 'industry of death'

Francis has decided Burke will lose some of his privileges, including a subsidy for his 4,488-square-foot apartment and monthly stipend. It follows the Pope's move last month to remove Texan Bishop Joseph Strickland, who had accused Francis of undermining the central teachings of the church, including on politically charged issues

like abortion and same sex marriage.

Supporters of Burke and Strickland have said Francis is a “dictator” pope, clamping down on dissent, while others suggest the Pope is punishing his critics. While the attacks have no obvious precedent in recent history, Francis has allowed them to continue, often ignoring them. He’s also aware sometimes silence is the best response and reform often meets resistance.

“Francis told me that he was taking away the apartment and salary of Cardinal Burke because he was using these privileges ‘against the church,’” Austen Ivereigh, a papal biographer, told CNN. Ivereigh met the Pope on November 27.

Francis is happy to be criticized but pointed out cardinals make a specific oath of obedience to the pope and his successors, Ivereigh said.

A Pope’s tolerance for dissent

In 2018, Burke told a group of Catholics in Rome there are circumstances when it would be acceptable to disobey the pope. The crowd reportedly clapped and cheered. This would have been unthinkable under previous pontificates, in which loyalty to the papacy was placed at a premium by conservative Catholics. The traditionalist cardinal from Wisconsin has said the signature reform effort initiated by Francis — the synod — “forgets the divine nature of the church.” It’s likely to have been the final straw for the Pope.



“A pope of Cardinal Burke’s temperament would not have tolerated such dissent for one day, let alone 10 years,” said Dawn Eden Goldstein, a theologian and canon lawyer based in Washington, DC.

Pope Francis lambasts climate change skeptics and ‘irresponsible’ Western lifestyles

The Strickland case, meanwhile, is distinct from Burke’s. A bishop in the Catholic Church is not a “branch manager” for the Pope and has a degree of autonomy. He was removed after a Vatican inquiry into his leadership found it was not “feasible” for him to continue at the helm of the Diocese of Tyler, east of Dallas. Strickland also took the extraordinary step of calling Francis’ legitimacy into question, something that goes against the communion bishops must keep with popes.

American politics in play

Opposition to Francis is also tied to secular politics. Burke described himself as “very happy” with the election of President Donald Trump and has joined other US bishops in calling for President Joe Biden, a Catholic, to be refused communion for his support for abortion laws. In 2004, Burke, then a bishop, announced he would not give communion to presidential candidate John Kerry for similar reasons. Strickland has described the US president as “evil” and sent a video message to a rally seeking to overturn the 2020 election result. The politicized church rhetoric is likely to heat up as the US heads into an election year.

“MAGA (Make America Great Again) politics and MAGA Catholics overlap in many ways, especially in their culture war approach to everything,” David Gibson, director of the Center on Religion and Culture at Fordham University, told CNN. “It is all about generating anger and defining yourself as what you are against as much as what you are for.”

Both supporters of Trump and Burke fear they are losing their once-privileged place in the church and society, so they portray the past as a “golden age,” Gibson said. The Pope has described some of his opponents in the US as “backwardists,” saying they have replaced faith with ideology.

Tactics that could backfire

Goldstein, the DC theologian and canon lawyer, has met the cardinal on a number of occasions and says there “are people and organizations that would like to see Burke’s vision of the church become the dominant one because it would make the church more useful to political interests.”

The cardinal wrote the foreword to a book criticizing the synod, which was supported by a group opposed to Catholic teaching on questions such as care for the poor, the environment, indigenous populations and migrants, she pointed out. The cardinal seeks to create an aura around himself that gives the “illusion of a return to a former era” and Francis has been tolerant of attacks, Goldstein said.

Central to the Pope’s vision is pivoting the church to what is essential to the Christian faith. The Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff recently tweeted a photo of Burke wearing the “cappa magna” ceremonial cape, a train of watered red silk.

Boff said in a 2016 interview with German newspaper Kölner Stadt-Anzeigr.

“My brothers and sisters, conservative Christians, tell me,” he wrote when he posted the photo: “what does this cardinal with all his pomp have to do with the Jesus who was born in a manger and died on a cross?”

EXCERPTS FROM BETSY DeROMA’S (PRESIDENT OF THE CONGREGATION) CHRISTMAS EVE SERMON



“Since the dawn of creation, God has given us guidelines for living a life of praise to Him but has stepped back to let us follow them...or not. We who are created in the image of the one true God, have, as He does, free will, because while God wants – and deserves -- to be worshipped and praised for all He has done for us and all He has given us, without the opportunity for us to choose freely whether or not to praise our God, that worship would be hollow, and without alternative. It is only when we choose of our own free will to worship and praise Him above and ahead of all else that our worship is meaningful, both to Him and to us.

While He seemingly has left us on our own, He has by no means abandoned us. He walks beside us every minute of our lives, offering strength, love and healing to each

EXCERPTS FROM BETSY DeROMA'S (PRESIDENT OF THE CONGREGATION) CHRISTMAS EVE SERMON

(continued from page 14)

of us. He gives us gifts. He even sent us His Son as an example of a life centered on worshipping Him, all to help us choose to worship Him above all earthly things...and people. God reaches down to help us constantly, touching our hearts in silence:

"No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,

Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in."

Are we open to that touch? Are we open to Christ in our hearts?

By the grace of God, we are free to choose. I pray that, as we celebrate the miracle of the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we will all choose to give our hearts to God in worship and praise, and ask, no maybe even beg:

"Oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel."

Amen."

Sad News from Minnesota

The Pillsbury Doughboy died yesterday of a yeast infection and trauma complications from repeated pokes in the belly. He was 75.

Doughboy was buried in a lightly greased coffin.

Dozens of celebrities turned out to pay their respects, including Mrs. Butterworth, Hungry Jack, the California Raisins, Betty Crocker, the Hostess Twinkies, and Captain Crunch. The grave site was piled high with many flours.

Aunt Jemima delivered the eulogy and lovingly described Doughboy as a man who never knew how much he was kneaded.

Born and bread in Minnesota, Doughboy rose quickly in show business, but his later life was filled with turnovers. He was not considered a very smart cookie, wasting much of his dough on half-baked schemes.

Despite being a little flaky at times, he still was a crusty old man and was considered a positive roll model for millions.

Doughboy is survived by his wife Play Dough, three children: John Dough, Jane Dough and Dosey Dough, plus they had one in the oven. He is also survived by his elderly father, Pop Tart.

The funeral was held at 3:50 for about 20 minutes.

If you smiled while reading this, please rise to the occasion and pass it on to someone having a crummy day and kneading a lift.

RECAP OF VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION EVENT - DECEMBER 17TH

About 60 people attended this event held at Butterfly's Restaurant in West Hartford on December 17th. David Eberly entertained us with his glorious piano playing. Good food and fellowship was enjoyed by all! Thank you to all!



Thank
you



EATING OUR WAY TO CONSERVATION

As the Green Gettysburg Book Club completes our study of *The Climate Book*, edited by Greta Thunberg, we just read a straightforward essay about the connection between our diet and protecting the environment. By changing our food consumption to line up more closely with standard health guidelines, we can reduce humanity's food-related environmental damage by 50 to 70 percent. In the Western World this change can really help, because our current diet relies so heavily on red meat. And producing red meat increases greenhouse gases enormously, as compared to producing food from poultry, fish, and plants, which are also healthier for us to eat.

Nearly everyone can improve our diet, as part of our conservation effort. You may have already been eating two vegetarian dinners a week, as we have. We started this change after learning that if all Americans ate two vegetarian dinners a week, there would be enough food produced to feed the world. Now, we find that eating a few more vegetarian meals a week also reduces the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that it takes to produce our food. So, we can help the climate by doing a little better with our diet, even if we do not plan to become vegetarian. In my case, the fact that I have lunchmeat in my sandwiches daily is a type of meat consumption I had not previously considered, when counting my carbon footprint. Even just by switching that lunchmeat to chicken or turkey instead of red meat, I can help. Having ratatouille or a tasty meatless chili two or three nights a week, and shifting to fish for another meal, helps too.

Michael Clark explains how in his essay, "The Calorie Question," chapter 4.12 of *The Climate Book*. Surprisingly, 30% of the greenhouse gas emissions that are damaging our planet come from our food systems. Food systems use 70% of the fresh water consumed yearly on Earth. And agriculture occupies 40% of the land surface of the planet, and is a leading driver of biodiversity loss. There is tragic deforestation in the Amazon, where the lungs of planet Earth are being damaged, because more and more trees are cut down to make room for the soybean crops that are used by cattle ranchers, to produce more and more red meat.

The lowest impact on the environment comes from eating a plant-based diet. Next best are dairy, poultry, pork, and fish, though these foods have five to twenty times the environmental impact of food from plants. Worst are cattle, goats, and sheep. Food from these animals has between twenty and one hundred times the negative impact on the environment of plant-based foods.



It's true that even plant-based foods require resources to produce. And some, such as the almonds that are grown in huge quantities in water-stressed California, create environmental damage unheard of for humble vegetables and rice, by draining scarce water resources. But a diet heavily relying on red meats comes at the highest cost, both for the earth and for our health. So reducing our daily consumption of red meat, and relying more on those healthy fruits and

vegetables in that food pyramid, is a way to help the planet, as well as our health. Enjoy a lovely Adams County apple, as we eat our way to conservation.

By Judy Young - a retired United Methodist pastor and a member of the Green Gettysburg Book Club.

The Committee to Protect Journalists reports 68 journalists have been killed in Gaza from October 7 – December 19.[1] Horrifyingly, the toll, just like the number of civilian deaths overall, ticked up repeatedly in the few days it took our team to finalize the text of this message.

The Israeli military has a deeply troubling history of targeting journalists, from the bombing of a building housing *Al Jazeera* and *Associated Press* offices in 2021 to the killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in the West Bank last year to a missile attack in southern Lebanon that killed Issam Abdallah, a cameraman working for Reuters, earlier this month. *No one has ever been charged or held to account.*



Journalists are a crucial voice in moments of crisis. We need verifiable information now more than ever — and that won't happen if people in power fail to ensure the safety of the press, particularly in combat areas. **Unfortunately, the White House hasn't done enough in the face of this rising death toll, but activists like you can change that.**

[While the U.S. government continues to provide critical financial and military support to the Israeli government, President Biden has incredible influence. Tell President Biden to do all he can to protect and secure the safety of journalists in Gaza and other conflict zones.](#)

Journalists are often the only source of verified information in conflict zones. Their reports help shape international understanding and crisis response. They provide the world with insights into the realities on the ground, often at incredible personal risk.

The protection of the press is not merely a moral responsibility; it is a cornerstone of a free and informed society. When the fog of war obscures the truth, on the ground reporting serves as a vital light. They are the narrators of our time, providing us with unfiltered views of unfolding conflicts and global events.

**REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS**
FOR PRESS FREEDOM

Clayton Weimers, executive director of Reporters Without

Borders (RSF), recently laid the stakes bare: *“The world needs to know what is going on, but in the absence of objective reporting, propaganda thrives.”*

The attacks by Hamas on October 7th were horrendous and horrific. The Israeli government’s bombing campaign is continuing a cycle of violence that won’t make people in Israel safe or bring about justice. Now that the temporary ceasefire has expired, we need to redouble our work to save lives and get hostages home to their families before the violence escalates even further. A lasting ceasefire must be put in place as quickly as possible to end the bloodshed and open a path to a lasting, sustainable peace.

As we push toward that life saving goal — and with journalists experiencing the deadliest month in decades — we must also safeguard the press.

[Tell President Biden to take immediate and concrete steps to ensure the safety of journalists in this war today.](#)

As one of the Israeli government’s closest supporters, the Biden administration can play a key role in ensuring journalists are adequately protected, and that independently verified information remains accessible. Pressure from activists like you can help get this the attention it deserves.

Thank you for working for peace,
The Win Without War team

1. The Committee to Protect Journalists, [“Journalist casualties in the Israel-Gaza war”](#)



THE BRIEFING: WRAPPING UP 2023

In 2023, American democracy faced great and growing pressure. During these times, we draw strength by remembering and recommitting to first principles.

The health of American democracy is again a central public issue. That's the good news. We see a growing democracy movement continuing to gather strength. 2024 will see an urgent drive to protect free and fair elections for all citizens. Unprecedented legal accountability for a former president accused of 91 felony counts. A continued push to reform the courts. New efforts to grapple with the risks posed by artificial intelligence and disinformation. And more. The fight is on.

At the Brennan Center, we aim to fight fear with facts. And we seek solutions that can win wide support from the broad American public tired of extremism and division.

We're catching our breath before the year-long sprint to come, grateful for our friends and community and for the chance to be part of the great crusade to save American democracy.

Here are some highlights of our work this past year.

**Legal Victory over Election Deniers**

In June the U.S. Supreme Court rejected a radical claim that would have upended American elections. The notion was that the Constitution gave state legislatures the power to set federal election rules with no checks and balances from state constitutions, courts, governors, or even voters. In *Moore v. Harper*, the justices resoundingly rejected that idea in a 6-3 majority. This followed years of preparation and work by the Brennan Center, including amicus briefs, scholarship, and public education.

A Tough Decade for Voting Rights

The Voting Rights Act was the nation's most effective civil rights law. This year marked the 10th anniversary of *Shelby County v. Holder*, the decision that gutted the law's key provision. Without full protection against racially discriminatory voting laws, the decade saw a surge in voter suppression measures, with at least 29 states passing 94 laws that make it harder to vote. Communities of color have borne the brunt of these restrictions, and the racial voter turnout gap has widened significantly in states such as Alabama and Georgia. We need federal legislation to safeguard the right to vote for all Americans.

Crime Trends: Facts Versus Fear

For decades, crime has dropped. Then the pandemic produced surges of violence and disorder, causing a crime rate spike, which was seized on by political opportunists. In the past year, new data suggests a more complex picture, as analyzed by the Brennan Center. The FBI's annual report on crime in 2022 offered encouraging signs of a reversal. Murder rates fell by more than 6 percent, as did other types of violent crime. However, rates of nonviolent crimes, such as motor vehicle theft and larceny, jumped sharply. As we begin analyzing 2023 crime trends, last year's data further undermines politicized explanations for rising crime, such as blaming criminal justice reform.

Reforming the Supreme Court

Public trust in the high court has plunged to the lowest level ever recorded in polls. A "code of conduct" unveiled in November is a woefully inadequate response, with no way to enforce its provisions and major loopholes in place. A deeper answer: introducing an 18-year term limit for justices. The broadly popular idea would keep the Court's power in check and bring the Court back into step with public values. It rests on the basic insight that no one should hold so much public power for too long (something George Washington knew when he stepped down from the presidency after two terms). A pathbreaking Brennan Center report explained how this popular idea could be implemented by statute, along with regular appointments by presidents every two years.

Five Steps to Prevent Election Subversion

The attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election failed thanks to heroic interventions by officials and citizens. What can we do to strengthen the election process? States must act quickly to shore up their systems. Five key measures can protect the integrity of the vote, such as stronger protections against voter intimidation and protocols for preempting election disinformation. Read our plan and encourage your legislators to act.

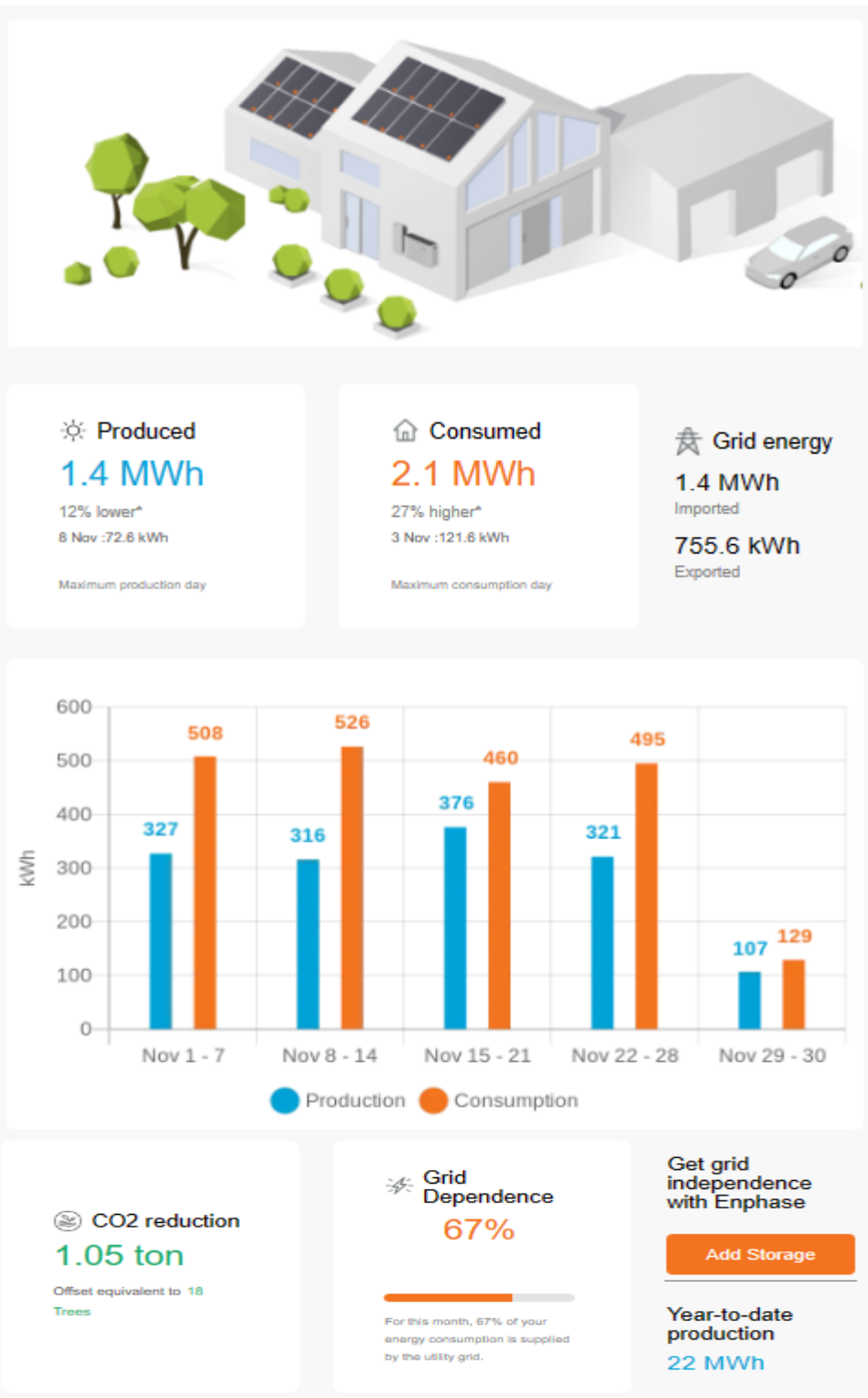
Grappling with AI

Artificial intelligence will reshape American life, for good or ill. How can we ensure that privacy, democracy, and human dignity are enhanced? Our research explores the many facets of this burgeoning and sometimes baffling phenomenon. Already, flawed systems used by governments and private companies are plagued by errors and biases that especially harm minority communities. And 2024 will bring the first presidential election of the generative AI era, with new risks to supercharge disinformation by conspiracy theorists and foreign powers.

Small Donor Public Financing Explained

As more and more money floods our elections every year, small donor public financing has emerged as a powerful solution to counter the outsize influence of wealthy donors and special interests in politics. At least 14 states and 25 local governments across the country have embraced these programs, with more jurisdictions working to implement their own programs for upcoming elections. A Brennan Center explainer walks through the benefits, popularity, and key features of successful public financing.

SOLAR PANEL REPORT— November 2023



* As compared to last month's records

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JANUARY 2024 BIRTHDAYS !

Happy Birthday to all born in
January!



Birthdays
of the Month

*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 January, 2024

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

Date	Reading #	Reading	Reader
1/7	1	Genesis 1: 1-5	Betsy DeRoma
	2	Acts 19: 1-7	Mildred Unfried
	Psalm	Psalm 29	In Unison
1/14	1	1 Samuel 3: 1-20	Marty Holmeen
	2	1 Corinthians 6: 12-20	Gladys Jackson
	Psalm	Psalm 139: 1-6,13-18	Alternating Men/Women
1/21	1	Jonah 3: 1-5, 10	Dale Eberhardt
	2	1 Corinthians 7: 29-31	Nina Kretschmer
	Psalm	Psalm 62: 5-12	Rodney Carr
1/28	1	TBD	
	2	TBD	
	Psalm	TBD	



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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

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