



GRACE NOTES

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September 2022

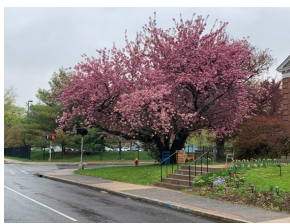
TAKING STOCK: "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD OUR GOD, IS UPON US, ALL OF US, AND WE HAVE BEEN ANOINTED... ALL OF US."

This has been a tough summer for most of us, our lives, our families, the communities we live in and those we serve, our state, the country and the world. Whether it be climate change, war, deceit, health, pandemics or violence, this has been a time of great upheaval and dissonance, pulling apart, not coming together. It has been difficult for each and every one of us. For some their lives have been disrupted like never before; so many remaining home for fear of going out - worrying about what will come next and fearful that the world may be coming to an end.

In the midst of all this, Grace started an outside upgrade project. It was meant to do many things. Make our external space more welcoming and comfortable, inviting people to come to a place where people are warm and receptive, hospitable and caring, wanting to help in so many ways. Most initiatives have existed for years, many years. In some sense, the leaders of our church have expanded them, making them of greater consequence to the lives of people we serve. Calling out to those afraid and shut-in, and as we worked our way through this life-threatening period of the pandemic, deeply caring Grace people, their partners and their friends made sure that our doors were still open. The food was still available, the clothing remained, the AA meetings continued, the relationships with others expanded, creative minds conceived new ideas and we lived through it all.



The idea of the outdoor project was to invite people to come, sit, talk, connect with others, feel safe, be in a beautifully maintained and welcoming outdoor space, with our spectacular cherry trees, and newly attended to bushes, beds, plants and flowers. It was a way to continue to support and value Fresh Start Pallet Products which, too, not only made it through the pandemic, with new leadership and continued dedication and lots of remarkable effort and credibility, it was able to grow astronomically. Going from a handful of lives impacted to dozens, and dozens. Turning an idea into a remarkable statement of value created by people committed to "building furniture as the means to build lives."



And Grace was not the only place pouring out its love and capacity to serve, so many others were doing it, too. As all of these efforts are spread throughout Asylum Hill and Hartford, it may seem that not much is happening. Well, we have seen what others are doing and we thank God for them. Christians of all flavors, Jewish brothers and sisters, Muslims and others of other faiths and many of no faith. All of these people not only care, but they also work together, cooperate, herald each other and seek to discover new ways to come together.

Lousy weather, complications of all sorts associated with supply chains and other frustrating issues were all in the way of our outdoor upgrade. Some wondered if we would ever be done.

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TAKING STOCK: “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD OUR GOD, IS UPON US, ALL OF US, AND WE HAVE BEEN ANOINTED... ALL OF US.” (continued from page 1)

It took months and months just to get our canopy in place. The furniture took longer to build, and in some sense, we were doing it on a shoestring, but we were upgrading Grace while supporting Fresh Start. People laughed at the Gazebo. What are we going to do with that? Why the new Fresh Start frames on the hydroponic gardens, why a "controlled" shed. Why the clean-up and the dealing with water issues, the planting of sod, the use of landscapers, the cost, the time it was taking and the cost?

Well, we are just, for all intents and purposes, done. We are trying to leverage our resources to invite more people to eat with us, worship with us, help us, help the community. Our own Sue Carey has written a wondrous book, sharing the stories of those



who come to Grace. We have new chefs, more chefs, help from other churches and we are now working on how we can do all of these things while strengthening the love we have for each other and those around us. We aspire to be an expanding oasis of love and trust.



At the same time, through GHIAA we are marching arm in arm with others to address the horrors of urban life, the injustice meted out to those poor and vulnerable, the darkness for so many who have lost hope.

To dedicate and celebrate what we are trying to become, along with so many others in our communities, we announce an event to be held on Monday, September 12, 2022 at mid-day. Invitations will go out shortly.

A beautiful work of art has been prepared and will be put in place on that day. The artist, Georges Annan Kingsley, will share it with all who come, and explain the meaning of his work which was commissioned to remind us of the injustices that we still must overcome. In our hearts and our souls. This beautiful bench will be presented formally and dedicated, with his words teaching and helping us understand what still must be done to make our world what we want it to be. Georges is returning to his home country, the Ivory Coast, on the 15th of September, the timing of this event is to be sure that Georges will be with us.

A world-renowned worker in the world of inclusion, truth, diversity and compassion, Frederick A. Miller, will offer words of encouragement and wisdom as we dedicate ourselves to a world of love and mutual support. His life has been all about these things, and he has worked literally all over the world and published a bookshelf of wisdom for those who look for ways to make this world a better place.

Wayne Dixon and the North End Senior Center Harmonizers will sing. Other like-minded organizations and partners will be invited to share their thoughts on what we are all doing in life and why. This is intentionally not be simply about us, that is, just Grace. Rather it will be about all of us. All of us caring about each other, learning to be the best that we can be.

With schools opened and people working, there will not be thousands of people joining us, yet we hope that enough will come and take some time to give thanks to a loving God who remains with us. And encourages us.

Our God reigns. “We heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send and who will go?” And thousands of good people from every walk of life, every place in the world, poor and rich, gay and straight, of all genders, races, countries and belief systems and they said, in unison. “HERE WE ARE, SEND US! “ Amen

PASTOR'S MESSAGE—TAKING TIME TO LEARN

This period of my life, like many of yours, has been about struggling, looking at my self and my life and trying to know why all these things are happening to us. My dear wife's illness, losing a treasured pet, our son facing multiple health issues, and the world around us seemingly crumbling. So many of our members suffering, the loss of friends and family members, the feeling of being overwhelmed.



How do we find ourselves and how do we know that God is still here, guiding us and speaking to us? If we only take the time to listen. If we remember the importance of prayer, being with friends and family, and reaching out to others. All is not lost, we are not alone.

We recently were saddened by the death of Mike McGarry's dear wife, and Vonda, a regular guest and sometimes volunteer at the Friday Gathering who had become a member of our church recently. We hope to provide support for her funeral.

In this issue, prepared and edited by Judy, we will be sharing articles about serious matters in the world, our communities, and some wonderfully good news as we celebrate Sonya Wellington becoming a grandma!



Another of the very good and wonderful things happening is our dear Akeva Koulla is off to UConn to begin her studies as an exceptionally special young woman, with clear goals and a remarkable high school record, joining the other new students on campus. She's already there! She is and will be a gift to the world and to her deeply loving Mom who was collecting boxes to support her move to Storrs. The Grace Church Council has made a donation to her education and sends her off with love.

There will be lots of pictures and lots of hope in-between our lines this month. By the end of September, we had hoped to be all electric... switching to fully electric vehicles and letting go of as much gas and oil as we can. That hasn't worked out but we won't give up. This has been another of the distractions to the more serious matters in our lives.

So, we are back, I have committed myself to a different lifestyle and hope that the future will be more hopeful for all of us as we persist in loving and trusting and worshiping our loving Triune God.

Thanks be to God!





For many, the subject of “theology” evokes the image of old men with impressive beards and antiquated ideas sitting alone in ivory seminary towers writing really big books that nobody reads. Yet, within everything we think, say, or do can be found a variety of implicit theologies. For theology—alongside its secularized twin, ideology—encompasses our core beliefs as to how the universe functions and how we function within it. It gives shape to our identity and drives our sense of purpose, providing us with the interpretive

lens through which we find meaning in our daily lives. And, some theologies are good. Others are bad. In an era of “alternative facts,” how is it possible to make such a claim, to distinguish the good from the bad? For the follower of Jesus, the answer is surprisingly simple: fruit.

Jesus cautions,

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them . . . every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. (Matthew 7:15-17).

To distinguish between true and false prophets, or anyone claiming to represent the will of God, Jesus does not implement a doctrinal litmus test. Instead, he tells us this: “By their fruit you will recognize them.” Likewise, to distinguish between a true and false theo-ethical, ideological, or political-economic system, one must examine the fruit of that system and ask:

- Does the historical fruit of this system lead us to love God, neighbor, and enemy as ourselves? Or, does it result in self-aggrandizement, or separationist and supremacist attitudes?
- Does it seek God's kingdom come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven? Or, does it promote the idolatrous dominion of some other lord, pharaoh, flag, or financial system? Does it stand with the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the refugee? Or, does it cause them harm?

Too often we find walking the halls of power those false prophets who provide ideological cover for authority and its abuses, destructive wars, and the neglect, exploitation, and sacrifice of those most vulnerable upon the altars of profit and politics. But, distinguishing good theology from bad theology comes down to this: Good theology brings life. Bad theology kills.

I wish therefore to highlight three interrelated theologies which have been particularly destructive in the Arab context:

♦ **First, “Imperial Paternalism”**

The tragic history of western imperial intervention in the Middle East is rife with examples of theological and ideological systems which have sought to promote, justify, downplay, and excuse that which in reality has been little more than violent conquest, theft, and exploitation. From the “civilizing missions” of the 19th century, through the post-war Mandates of the 20th, to the modern American desire to export freedom by force of arms in the early 21st century, such justifications have a deep history. Often with absolute sincerity, yet degrading paternalism, we colonialists have justified our aggression by convincing ourselves that we have been acting for the betterment of the colonized peoples. Likewise, even well-meaning missionaries, development practitioners, human rights activists, and non-native feminist movements have been too often incapable of disentangling themselves from their own cultural presumptions or the imperial interests of their countries of origin. While many have undertaken great work,

others have been responsible for great harm. Not only does bad theology kill, but it has justified the subjugation and death of countless others.

♦ **Second, “Henotheistic Crusaderism”**

Henotheism, most basically, declares: “My God can beat up your God!” It is the “warrior tribe” theology which pits one’s own god against those of its neighbors. This, Joseph Cumming tells us, “takes us to the belief that we must fight to defend the survival of Christian civilization. If necessary, we must kill the enemies of our civilization before they kill us. We must pray that our God gives us victory over their Allah-God.” In this way of thinking, one’s own tribe, clan, or nation becomes the chosen of God fighting an epic struggle against “the forces of darkness and their sub-human minions.”

We see this in the Crusades. We see this in the language of Zionism. We see this in the veneration of “Judeo-Christian civilization” and in the religiously tinged language of the “War on Terror.”

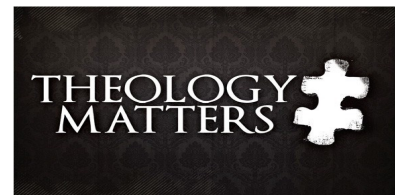
This is the theology of “God and country” whereby the God of the universe is reduced to a territorial idol, transforming the refugee into an infiltrator, the immigrant into an invader, and the indigenous into an outcast. And, it represents a wholesale rejection of our call to costly discipleship and self-sacrificial love of others.

♦ **Third, “Manifest Destiny”**

Referencing the origins of the term manifest destiny, Jim Wallis writes, “The United States of America was established as a white society, founded upon the near genocide of another race and then the enslavement of yet another.” Beyond North America, such theologies held sway in settler-colonial societies from Australia to Argentina. Likewise, the Afrikaner Calvinists of South Africa understood their settler-colonial project as a direct calling from God. ***In its most basic form, manifest destiny seeks to conquer, cleanse and colonize.***

In the Arab context, French colonization of Algeria was overwhelmingly destructive to the native Algerians, subjecting them to a level of colonial violence that would permanently alter the region’s social make-up. Finally, the colonial Zionist project has been absolutely catastrophic to the lives, property, and psyche of the native Palestinians, a crisis born of and sustained by bad theology. “Christian Zionism,” from Balfour to Biden, has provided theological justification, financial capital, and political cover for decades of land confiscation, ethnic cleansing, settlement activity, and apartheid. Speaking as a western Christian, there is far too much blood on our hands—precisely because bad theology kills.

“Good theology” is another conversation entirely, but at FOSNA we recognize it as a practical force for real-world liberation, justice, and peace. For now, let us repent of our complicity in the suffering of others, of those times we find ourselves held captive to the false allure of destructive theo-ethical systems and their apologists. Let us spend ourselves in self-sacrificial love and everlasting service, confident that although “the arc of the moral universe is long [it] bends toward justice”—that peace ultimately prevails and liberation has the last word.



**Today’s reflection is an abridgement of the chapter, “Bad Theology Kills: How We Justify Killing Arabs,” in [Keeping the Faith: Reflections on Politics & Christianity in the Era of Trump & Beyond](#),” itself an adaptation of a post for Arab Baptist Theological Seminary ([ABTS](#)), Lebanon.*

WHY OUR FAITH DELEGATION WENT TO UKRAINE

by Rose Marie Berger

SOJOURNERS



Our public message was simple: “We have come to Kyiv in solidarity to pray for a just peace.”

WHEN THE FRONT DESK clerk at the Ibis hotel in downtown Kyiv heard a large travel party entering the lobby, she glanced up in surprise. It was 20 minutes before the 11 p.m. military curfew. Our delegation of 17 international religious leaders had made hotel reservations in the war zone a few days in advance, but few—including the hotel clerk—thought we would make it over the border from Warsaw, Poland, to Kyiv,

Ukraine, a city that six weeks earlier was surrounded by Russian military forces.

I smiled at the clerk. American soul singer Sam Cooke’s sweet tenor filled the lobby while we sorted bags and room keys.

*I was born by the river in a little tent
Oh and just like the river I’ve been running ever since*

After a 14-hour bus ride on a recently demined highway, here we were.

The streets of Ukraine’s bustling capital city of 4 million, divided east to west by the Dnieper River, were relatively quiet. More than 2 million of Kyiv’s inhabitants fled to border countries in February 2022 when Russia’s President Vladimir Putin launched missile attacks on more than half a dozen Ukrainian cities, including the capital.

Within hours of the air strikes, Russian tanks rolled across Ukraine’s borders, amphibious forces landed on the southern coast from the Black Sea, and Ukrainian government internet infrastructure, including the defense ministry, came under a severe cyberattack. The second-largest country in Europe was under a full-scale invasion.

In the five months following the attack, more than 10,000 (a vast undercount) Ukrainian civilians have been reportedly killed or injured, including more than 800 children. The war has displaced nearly half the country’s population, internally or externally.

Kyiv: A capital of spirituality and peace

NINE DAYS AFTER the invasion began, Kyiv’s mayor, Vitali Klitschko, with his brother, Wladimir, dropped a short video on social media inviting religious leaders to come to Kyiv to show their solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

“I express an appeal to the world’s spiritual leaders to take a stand and assume the moral function that is incumbent upon them, and to proudly assume the responsibility of their religions for peace ... Let us make Kyiv the capital of humanity, spirituality, and peace,” said Wladimir Klitschko, who often speaks in English for his brother. “Unity is our key for freedom,” concluded the mayor.

When our delegation arrived in May, we were the first to answer the mayor’s invitation. Our group of peace pilgrims from Italy, the U.K., Poland, and the United States included high-ranking clerics from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions as well as leaders from faith-based civil society organizations such as Operazione Colomba, the nonviolent peace corps of the Pope John XXIII Community in Italy.

WHY OUR FAITH DELEGATION WENT TO UKRAINE

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The appeal to make Kyiv “the capital of humanity, spirituality, and peace” is rooted in Kyiv’s history. Situated on ancient maritime trade routes, the city prides itself on a rich cultural diversity. Most Ukrainians hold fiercely to the vision of a multicultural Ukraine rooted in freedom secured by democratic principles. Western politicians undercut this vision when they assume Ukrainians want to be like Americans. Russian politicians use Western politicians’ remarks to inflame culture wars within Russia against the “deceitful and decadent West led by the United States,” as Reuters framed it. Mayor Klitschko’s appeal was not so much to “make” Kyiv a capital of peace, but to defend and preserve its hard-won history of unity in diversity.



Our delegation had two goals. First, prove that an international multireligious delegation to Kyiv was possible and replicable. Second, to pray publicly for a just peace. Our first outdoor prayer service was held on May 24 at the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, our Ukrainian host, and the next day another service was held at St. Sophia Cathedral, which was built in the 11th century as the heart of Slavic Orthodox Christianity.

Earlier in the spring, we had asked Maksym Rabinovych, director of Babyn Yar, whether it was useful for us to come to Kyiv or if it was better to organize aid from outside. “Come. Just come and see,” Rabinovych said.

Babyn Yar hosts the first modern Holocaust museum in Eastern Europe and a center for “tragedy studies.” On March 1, a TV tower near Babyn Yar was shelled by Russian forces; the attack killed five people.

Beneath a canopy of blue sky and poplar trees, our delegation gathered at the great bronze menorah while violinist Pavlo Kaurov played a haunting solo of Albinoni’s Adagio in G Minor. Rabbi Dawid Szychowski, Orthodox rabbi of Lodz, Poland, and two other Jewish delegation members opened our prayers: “Out of the depths I call You, O Lord, listen to my cry ... If You keep account of our sins, O Lord, who will survive?” (Psalm 130:1,3). Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas, the Vatican’s ambassador to Ukraine, led the Lord’s Prayer in Ukrainian.

“For five years our Memorial Center has been studying the history of the Holocaust to prevent genocides and promote human dignity,” Rabinovych said. “We are committed to this aim today in particular, when peaceful Ukrainian cities are suffering from shelling, a lot of houses of civilians are destroyed, and so many people are tortured and killed in a barbaric manner. We truly believe that bringing together the leaders from different fields—religious, politics, science, culture—can show the way how to stop Putin’s aggression, save lives, and restore peace.”

Our public message was simple: “We have come to Kyiv in solidarity to pray for a just peace. God demands that cities are not bombed; the Russian blockade of Ukrainian ports must stop and grain must flow again from Ukraine if we are to avoid hunger and humanitarian disaster; humanitarian aid should increase and humanitarian corridors be provided. We are here to say that we are also open to praying in Moscow for just peace, with the faith communities in Russia.”

The Ukrainian press at this first prayer service soon spread the word that our delegation had arrived. Bishop Jo Bailey Wells, a delegation member representing the Church of England,

reflected on the press engagement. “I was amazed how interested, eager the local press was to follow what we were doing,” Wells said. “One of the people who interviewed me ... with tears in his eyes, he said, ‘I am determined to tell the truth. ... My parents have been taken prisoner of war in eastern Ukraine. The Russian troops came looking for me. My parents disowned me and said they did not know where I was.’”



Invitations to meet with us began pouring in. Staff at the office of the president of Ukraine (at that time President Volodymyr Zelensky was at the World Economic Forum in Davos) encouraged future delegations. We prayed with members of the Crimean refugee community in their mosque and viewed the classrooms where little shoes, stuffed animals, and backpacks remained strewn about after the children and teachers fled during the early missile strikes.

This war is intensely personal

IN IRPIN, about 15 miles north of Kyiv, we met Fathers Vitaliy and Myroslav at the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church of the Nativity of Mary. The priests and 30 members of their community lived in a hastily constructed church basement for two weeks during the vicious “battle for Irpin” (Feb. 27-Mar. 28) while the region was held by the Russian military. In Bucha and Irpin, an estimated 1,000 people were killed, including 31 children. At least 280 bodies of civilians were discovered in mass graves, and an investigation into war crimes is under way.

The priests held shell fragments in their hands and pointed out the bullet holes in the walls of the church and the shattered windows. Each night during the battle, a priest would steal into the church above to retrieve hosts from the tabernacle. Each day, the hidden group would celebrate Mass, as if it were their last.

Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, had prayed over the bodies as the mass graves were opened in Bucha, which he described as “an open wound on the body of Ukraine.”

“Now the mass graves in Irpin and Bucha have been exhumed and reburied,” Shevchuk said, “but to see a whole family killed—mother, father, little children, even their parrot killed! Why do this?” He added, “I too was on the death list. I stared at that family and knew it might be me. Now that place is one of pilgrimage for people of all faiths. Those who were killing us came here to enact the ‘final solution’ to the ‘Ukrainian question.’”

Russia’s military offensive is not a battle between armies. It’s intensely personal. Individual homes in neighborhoods are locked in as missile targets. Names are on kill lists—much like the counterterrorism strategy the U.S. used in Afghanistan for more than 20 years.

Shevchuk told us what this policy looks like in the places he had visited in eastern Ukraine. It was deeply disturbing and traumatic.

“Sexual violence has become a weapon of this war,” the archbishop said. “I met with those victims and the counselors trying to help them. There are common elements in what they told me: The rape was always public with the intention to publicly humiliate women, men, and children. The rape was to create terror and humiliate civilians who were forced to watch. Now we have learned that the Russian soldiers were not only given permission to rape but were ordered under threat of death to commit these acts of war crimes.”

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A wider array of tools

“HUMANS CAN INITIATE war, but then we become slaves to war,” Archbishop Shevchuk told us. “Only God can stop this war, and we must cooperate with [God].”

At the Central House of Artists, a cultural center in the city center, we met with a handful of Ukrainian peacebuilders struggling to enact the “cooperation” Shevchuk referenced.

“We need a wider range of responses to organized violence than ‘do nothing’ or ‘kill to the end.’ Turning a criminal into an enemy helps nothing.” —Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

Russian American Andre Kamenshikov is Ukraine director for Nonviolence International and regional coordinator of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict. For 22 years, he was based in Russia and worked on peacebuilding in conflict areas of the former Soviet Union. In 2015, he moved to Kyiv because of an increasingly hostile political climate in Russia.

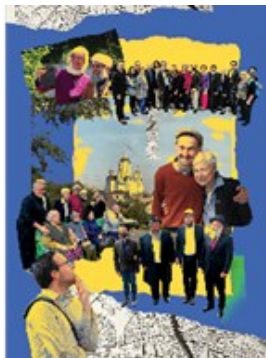
“Ukraine has given very strong examples of nonviolent action,” Kamenshikov told us, “especially in the occupied territories. There have been large protests even under military occupation. We need training in a wide spectrum of nonviolent responses to the very repressive actions Ukrainians are facing. People need a wider array of tools. Where people are resisting, they can be provided some increased safety by connection with international allies.”

Civilians replaced road signs to confuse Russian military vehicles. They blocked roads with cement blocks and built “Czech hedgehogs” out of iron I-beams to deter tanks. They have set up complex humanitarian aid systems with border countries to distribute food and medicine to the forgotten pockets of the country.

“During the first weeks of the invasion, it was likely that Belarus would join their military with Russia. But there was such popular resistance that the Belarus military did not invade and actually resisted being used by Russia against Ukraine,” Kamenshikov said. “We need a wider range of responses to organized violence than ‘do nothing’ or ‘kill to the end.’ Turning a criminal into an enemy helps nothing.”

Tatyana Bilyk, co-founder of League of Mediators of Ukraine, has dedicated her whole life to peacemaking. Now, she told us, “It is our family’s honor and my greatest pain that my son is fighting to defend our country.”

Before the war, Bilyk’s work focused on addressing conflict mediation within families. She brought her training as a psychologist to the field of social services in Ukraine. “My work now is trauma counseling, particularly among widows,” Bilyk said. “It’s not marriage counseling now. It’s bereavement. How will these women survive? It’s compounded grief and recovery from horrible sexual trauma. Our training has not prepared us for this.”



A tale of three rabbis

ON OUR FINAL evening in Kyiv, we had an extraordinary experience. At perhaps the only kosher restaurant still operating in the city, Rabbi Moshe Azman, chief rabbi of Ukraine, and Rabbi Jonathan Markovitz, chief rabbi of Kyiv, joined us for dinner. With delegation member Dawid Szychowski, we now had three Orthodox rabbis together at a table.

In the tradition of Jewish teaching, every genuine question is the start of a journey toward God, which is why Jewish parents teach their children to ask good questions and thus prompt a

never-ending conversation with God. With this in mind, delegation member Maurice Glasman brought this question to the rabbis: “Is Putin Pharaoh?”

War propels existential questions to the forefront: Where is God in this? Who are we to be now? These rabbis had already been thinking and praying deeply on questions like this one. Rabbi Markovitz answered, “When we know ourselves and know what we should do and for whom we do it, then we have no pharaoh. If we are feeding our neighbor, then there is no pharaoh, and we live liberated. But I also turn the question around and ask, ‘Is pharaoh an individual or a system?’”

Rabbi Azman then spoke. “Our situation is not a situation like Egypt and Pharaoh,” Azman said. “It is the battle of Gog and Magog, an apocalyptic battle against the enemies of God, between good and evil,” referencing scriptures in Ezekiel that point to a messianic age. Rabbi Szychowski turned the question yet again. “I am less interested in who pharaoh is than I am in who the people are who are preparing for liberation.”

An ‘ethnically pure’ church is heresy



PUTIN'S WAR AGAINST Ukrainians should make American Christians very uncomfortable. Not only because of the immense human suffering, the threatened use of nuclear weapons, and the potential downstream impact of famine in Africa and the Middle East from stalled grain exports, but because our own Christian nationalism takes a page directly from *Russkii Mir* (“Russian World”) teaching.

Orthodox Christian theologians have labeled *Russkii Mir*, which has been developing for the 20 years that Putin has been in political leadership, as a false religious teaching rooted in a form of Orthodox religious fundamentalism with a goal toward building the church around a particular “race or tribe.” It’s what happens when religion cloaks ethno-nationalism with a veneer of moral rectitude.

Putin wants an ethnically pure state and Patriarch Kirill, the first head of the Russian Orthodox Church to be elected after the fall of the Soviet Union, appears to promote an ethnically pure church. These narratives are carefully crafted to destabilize neighboring countries and influence specific ethnic and religious groups within their populations. Putin intends to annihilate Ukrainians in all their historic cultural diversity and move ethnic Rus settlers into Ukrainian territory as swiftly as possible. This is brutal ethnic cleansing—but it is also an attack on the very heart of the Christian gospel.

Putin and Patriarch Kirill have used Russian World ideology as a principal justification for the invasion of Ukraine, according to Orthodox theologians in their statement “A Declaration on the ‘Russian World’ Teaching,” released in March and signed by nearly 1,500 theologians. The authors explain, “Just as Russia has invaded Ukraine, so too the Moscow Patriarchate of Patriarch Kirill has invaded the Orthodox Church ... with untold casualties not just to the body but to the soul, endangering the salvation of the faithful.” This false teaching, the authors warn, “is attracting many in the Orthodox Church and has even been taken up by the Far Right and Catholic and Protestant fundamentalists.”

In public statements Archbishop Shevchuk warned against the “pandemic of ideology” that sometimes even justifies war crimes for religious reasons. “The *Russkii Mir* ideology fights Christian ecumenism because it supposedly jeopardizes true Orthodox faith,” he told us. “It

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says it is correct to use violence in defense of faith. They even speak of 'Orthodox nuclear weapons.' God save us from such a [Christian] culture!"

'I know a change gonna come'

ARISTOTLE WROTE THAT the virtue of courage lies between recklessness and cowardice.

Ukrainians are living their courage.

The bus back to Warsaw took us through the neighborhoods in Bucha where tattered billboards proclaim, "Life will overcome death." We detoured around a bombed highway bridge and passed elder Ukrainians tending kitchen gardens.

At a truck stop near the Polish border, we stopped to refuel. The travel center had been transformed into a site for refugee services with a medical tent, a clothing tent, and an International Red Cross station for recharging phones and using computers to trace relatives. Chef José Andrés' World Central Kitchen was giving out free french fries.

Sam Cooke wrote "A Change Is Gonna Come" in 1963 after his band was turned away from a "whites-only" motel in Shreveport, La. It was his ode to a people preparing for liberation.

*There been times that I thought I couldn't last for long
But now I think I'm able to carry on
It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will.*



We crossed the Boh River back into Poland.

Rose Marie Berger, author of *Bending the Arch: Poems*, is a senior editor of *Sojourners* magazine.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

2022 ELCA CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

from the ELCA News

8/19/2022 8:35:00 AM

Chicago —The 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly met Aug. 8-12 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio. Gathering under the theme "Embody the Word," the assembly worshiped together in services of eucharist and lament, experienced a liturgy rooted in Indigenous traditions, and heard a public apology in a nonlegislative session to Iglesia Luterana Santa María Peregrina for harm experienced from actions taken by the Sierra Pacific Synod and this church.

The following key actions were taken by the assembly:

- ◆ Elected Imran Siddiqui of the Southeastern Synod as vice president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).
- ◆ Directed the ELCA Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church to reconsider the statements of purpose for each expression of this church, the

2022 ELCA CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

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principles of organizational structure and our shared commitment to dismantle racism, with findings to be reported to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a possible reconstituting convention. Directed an external audit of the governing documents of the ELCA to consider diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, with findings resulting in recommended changes to the governing documents.

- ◆ Authorized revisions to the social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*; approved exploration of reconsideration of the four stated positions of "bound conscience."
- ◆ Encouraged members, congregations and synods of this church to educate themselves about Indigenous peoples, calling on the churchwide organization to work with synods and Indigenous partners to identify sources of funding for ministries for Indigenous peoples, and encouraging restorative justice that could include the return of land to the appropriate Native nations.
- ◆ Referred a proposed study of pay gaps for rostered ministers to the Church Council.
- ◆ Mandated a review process of the roster manual and policies related to specialized ministries, on leave from call status, and protocols for removal from the rosters; encouraged bishops and synod councils to use sparingly the process of removal from the roster for nondisciplinary reasons.
- ◆ Approved the budget proposal for the triennium, including a spending authorization of \$68,814,000 for 2023 for the current fund, along with a spending authorization of \$22,869,000 for ELCA World Hunger.
- ◆ Affirmed limits on the use of nondisclosure agreements by the churchwide organization; urged synods, congregations and other ministries to apply the same limits.
- ◆ Reaffirmed the commitment of this church to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, directing the churchwide organization to set a goal of a 50% reduction of net greenhouse gas pollution by 2030, with a long-range goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.
- ◆ Called for a review of the nomination and elections processes used by synods and the churchwide organization.
- ◆ Responded to memorials on diversity; nuclear weapons; voting rights and Washington, D.C., statehood; strategies for fortifying urban ministries; a Black migrant strategy; the right to boycott; gun violence; LGBTQIA+ welcome; substance abuse; Roe v. Wade; remembrance of Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide; parental and medical family leave; a process for pre-identification of nominees for the Office of the Presiding Bishop; revisions to the mission development process; consideration of communion practices related to remote worship; affirmation of the task force created by the Church Council to review the discipline process; and a social message on child abuse and protection.
- ◆ Approved or ratified amendments to the Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA, most of which were related to general clarifications and updates; inclusive language; synod-authorized ministry; designation of advisory members by the Church Council; boards of the separately incorporated ministries; and election procedures for officers and the Churchwide Assembly.
- ◆ Elected members of the Church Council, Committee on Appeals, Committee on Discipline, Nominating Committee and boards of the separately incorporated ministries.



About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with more than 3.3 million members in more than 8,900 congregations across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of "God's work. Our hands," the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA's roots are in the writings of the German church reformer Martin Luther.

16 YEAR-OLD DESIGNED SPECIAL DEVICE TO HELP SOLVE ONE OF EARTH'S BIGGEST PROBLEMS by Wyatt Loy (MSN Accuweather) courtesy of Lee Whittemore

When Varun Saikia, a young high school student from Gujarat, India, was 11 years old, he learned about a whale in Thailand that choked to death from eating plastic that had been discarded in the ocean.

"I had read that article and it disturbed me a lot, and that basically triggered me to look and explore into this problem that was a whole new world for me," Saikia told AccuWeather National Reporter Jillian Angeline. "I did not know that this problem existed in my life."

Saikia then got to work researching pollution around the world, paying special attention to where he grew up. The Ganges River, the largest river in India, carries about 3 billion micro-plastic particles into the Indian Ocean every day, according to a study led by National Geographic. Saikia also learned about the garbage patches -- concentrations of marine debris -- across the Pacific Ocean that are created by ocean currents.

"Then I looked around and I was like, 'Wow, isn't this obvious? I see plastic everywhere,'" Saikia said. "So I made a prototype out of plastic bottles and plastic boxes and I tested it in a mini pool, and then I iterated the model and got to a 5-foot-long device that could collect about 2.5-3 kg of plastic waste."

He called this first prototype Makara, Sanskrit for *crocodile*, due to it having a "mouth" and "tail" similar to a real croc. It took years of Saikia improving on Makara to create his newest design, Flipper, which can operate on its own or attach to a ship. He estimates it can hold anywhere from about 1,000 pounds to several hundred tons of plastic waste, depending on how it's deployed.



Varun Saikia, far right, shows off his design to state government officials. (Courtesy of Varun Saikia)

The design is still in the prototyping phase, but Saikia's website claims that 100 ships equipped with Flipper technology can clean up the Pacific garbage patches in about a year. In addition, Saikia said this new design will do more than just take out the trash.

"I am currently working towards making Flipper not only a plastic waste collection device, but also a device that can collect data simultaneously," he said. The type of plastic it collects and the location where it was collected will be logged and analyzed to help make future collections more efficient, he added. To keep fish and ocean mammals from getting caught in the net, it will be outfitted with ultrasonic emitters that make critters avoid the area.

Saikia said he funded his first prototypes out of pocket but has now received government grants from his home state of Gujarat, located on the coast of western India, and expanded his one-man operation to a handful of engineers. Once he finishes high school, the innovative student said he dreams of attending a prestigious program in the United States to take his project worldwide.

"There are a few schools on my mind," he said. "MIT is definitely my dream school. I'm going to apply to MIT, then Stanford. [The] University of Texas at Austin has an amazing environmental engineering program. So I'm keen on applying to these universities."

With reporting by Jillian Angeline

THE DISTORTED GOSPEL OF THE CHARLOTTESVILLE RALLY KEEPS SPREADING by Amanda Tyler

SOJOURNERS



Five years later, I am still haunted by the unforgettable footage of marchers in Charlottesville, Va., at the Unite the Right rally in August 2017.

I had been in my new position leading BJC (Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty) for just eight months. In that short time, we had already seen so many concerning events, such as the targeting of religious minorities with then-President Donald Trump's Muslim travel ban, a misguided effort to demolish protections against partisan politicking for houses of worship, and the shooting of a member of Congress at a baseball practice. Then came Unite the Right.

I experienced a full range of emotions that weekend: shock, disgust, grief, disorientation, despair, and resolve, to name a few. I wrote about what I saw happening, but at the time I didn't have the clarity to squarely label the ideology underpinning the rally. Five years later, I do: It's called white Christian nationalism.

The tiki-torch-wielding marchers who shouted, "Jews will not replace us!" were an extreme manifestation of white Christian nationalism, a political ideology that implies one must be a Christian to be a "true" American and that the growing presences of non-whites and non-Christians are a threat to "traditional" values. People who espouse this ideology believe "real" Americans are Christians who have a specific policy perspective; they feel the need to "take back" their country from those who they believe threaten it.

White Christian nationalism creates insiders and outsiders; an "us-versus-them" feeling. If you don't share these views, you are the enemy.

The white nationalists were in Charlottesville to protest the removal of Confederate statues, so it's important to note that the Confederacy itself was a white Christian nationalist cause. The push to defend Confederate symbols is one, too.

Religious studies professor Anthea Butler has pointed out that the Confederate constitution invoked "the favor and guidance of Almighty God," a key clause and foundation for later appeals to Christian nationalism. The defeat became a "noble cause," sanctifying those who died. "Using monuments to support their cause, they created physical monuments that would later be rallying points for modern day conflicts, such as the Charlottesville rally in August 2017," Butler wrote in a report on Christian nationalism and its connection to January 6, which was co-published by BJC and the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

We've repeatedly seen how white Christian nationalism inspires violence: One of the white nationalists at the Unite the Right Rally plowed his car into a group of counter-protesters, killing one woman and injuring dozens of others. In 2015, a white supremacist shot nine people during a Bible study at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C. In 2018, a man who later told officers he wanted all Jews to die, killed 11 worshippers at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. Earlier this year, a white supremacist killed 10 people at grocery store in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Buffalo. There are many other examples, but the pattern is clear: Individuals fueled by the distorted ideology of white Christian nationalism use violence to eradicate people they see as not like them.

Hateful rhetoric and violence targeting people of differing religious beliefs are serious threats to religious liberty; actions like these demand responses. The measure of our commitment to

THE DISTORTED GOSPEL OF THE CHARLOTTESVILLE RALLY KEEPS SPREADING

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religious liberty for all is not how horrified we were after Charlottesville, but what we've done since to take on white Christian nationalism.

Three years ago, I joined a group of ecumenical leaders in launching the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign, seeking to define and call out this threat to our faith and to our country. I'm proud to say that more than 27,000 Christians have joined us in naming this danger and condemning it as a distortion of the gospel.

Christians have a special responsibility to confront Christian nationalism in its many manifestations. Christian nationalism is about a false idol of power, not Christ's gospel of love. All of us can recognize hateful rhetoric when it specifically targets another religious group, such as the antisemitic chants in Charlottesville. But Christian nationalism is an insidious ideology that affects so many of us in ways we have yet to realize. We must interrogate ourselves, examining how this poisonous ideology of Christian nationalism is infecting our churches and our belief systems.

Christian nationalism often overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation. This racism is painfully obvious when a shooter targets non-white worshippers and openly espouses hate rhetoric, but what about when the myth is repeated that America was founded as a so-called "Christian nation"? That false statement implies that the founders wanted the government to advance Christianity, especially in a way that limits the rights of others. The idea of a "Christian nation" also suggests that this country is supposed to be a "promised land" for Christians, a myth that downplays the contributions of non-Christians, as well as Native Americans and Black Americans, to our country's success.

We can all see obvious co-opting of religion as a political tool, such as when politicians use religious symbols in photo ops. Outrage poured out when former President Trump held up a Bible after violently dispersing Black Lives Matter protesters. But there are more subtle manifestations of Christian nationalism, too. Do we find ourselves trusting politicians who claim our same faith over politicians who do not, despite their track records?

We can reject Christian nationalism and move toward Christianity with intentional actions, admitting where we've missed the mark and working to do better. I see hope as that happens more and more, and we can be honest about our shortcomings.

One year after Charlottesville, I joined a community from my church — a mostly white congregation — and a historic Black Baptist church in Washington, D.C., as we gathered for public communion. Our churches began as one congregation in the early 19th century, but we split on the issue of slavery — a shameful history that we share with many other congregations. Our churches have come together in recent years to write a shared history, build relationships, and work for social justice. We held one such gathering on the first anniversary of the Charlottesville rally — one of several events held in the District to counter the message of a planned "Unite the Right 2" event that same day. Those of us calling for unity far outnumbered those who sought to divide.

"Here's the thing: Trying to outshout white supremacists heals nothing," said my pastor, Rev. Julie Pennington-Russell.

"We have come on this day to write a new story, a new narrative," said Rev. Darryl Roberts, senior pastor of Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, "one that says what will make America a great nation is not how many walls we build but how many bridges of understanding and love

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THE DISTORTED GOSPEL OF THE CHARLOTTESVILLE RALLY KEEPS SPREADING

(continued from page 15)

that we can create that unite all of God's people."

We must all write a new story, pushing back against the hateful rhetoric that cloaks itself in Christianity while "othering" people not like us, creating lines of division, and even manifesting in murderous actions. The images of Charlottesville rightly haunt us, and we must work to have tough conversations and bridge gaps to ensure that ideology doesn't manifest itself in such violent actions again.

Five years after Charlottesville, the attitude that most captures my emotional state is focused. The grief, the pain, and the horror of that day are still present. But right now, I'm not sitting in somber reflection. I'm focused on actions and how we can together uproot and dismantle white Christian nationalism.



Amanda Tyler is executive director of BJC (Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty), lead organizer of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign, and co-host of the *Respecting Religion* podcast. Follow her on Twitter @AmandaTylerBJC

CREATION CARE: THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

by Nancy Urban



I thought of this phrase as we were driving along the roadways of Newfoundland this summer. Brilliant purples of the lupines, yellow buttercups, white daisies, and some other flowers that added their color all along the way—wonderful habitat for the bees and other wild life and a pleasure for our eyes as we drove the countryside.

I wondered, how much time is spent? How much gasoline burned? How much air pollution? How many tax dollars spent on mowing the vegetation along our roads here in Connecticut? I don't know why we insist on mowing along our road ways, but maybe there is a better way. Just as I was writing this article, an item came up on Facebook that showed the city of Rotherham where 8 miles of wild flowers have been planted creating a beautiful roadside and saving the city \$25,000 a year in mowing costs.

What would happen if we took just one item such as mowing the roadsides and changed to planting wild flowers? What would be the impact on Creation Care? What would happen to our energy use if we had stores turn up their air conditioning by just 1 or 2 degrees? (I know I would no longer have to carry a sweater around with me all summer long.) Turn down the heat by 1 or 2 degrees? What if every yard on a street became a Creation Care Victory Garden growing organic vegetables and beautiful flowers rather than pristine green lawns that pollute the waters? What if it spread to a whole town? What if every church turned their yards into community gardens to help feed the food insecure? What if every house of faith declared itself to be a plastic free zone? What if??? What if???

Some of this seems as if it would take a lot of organizing and a lot of time and energy just to get something started. Maybe that is more than any of us wants to take on at this point in our lives. BUT WHAT IF EVERY PERSON OF FAITH WHO ACCEPTS THE DIRECTIVE TO CARE FOR THIS WONDERFUL GIFT OF CREATION TOOK JUST ONE ITEM IN THEIR LIVES AND made a change from doing it the usual way to finding a different way that would have an impact on this climate crisis that we are in? Shower less often; buy less items that come in plastic containers; do a neighborhood litter pick up; eat less meat; support a group that works for climate justice; etc. etc. One person acting alone can seem very minimal, but a whole group of God's People working for Creation Care can be highly effective and could break the box wide open!

SOLAR PANEL REPORT—JUNE, 2022



Produced



2.6 MWh

1% lower *

20 June : 123.3 kWh



Consumed

1.1 MWh

10% lower *

10 June : 72.0 kWh

Maximum consumption day



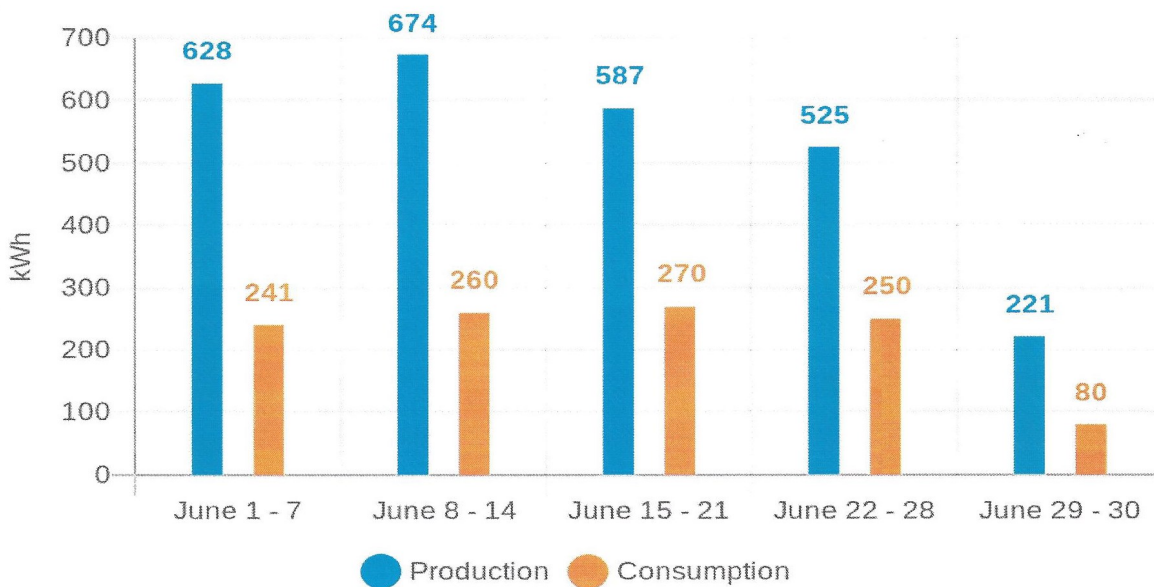
Grid energy

429.4 kWh

Imported

2.0 MWh

Exported



Carbon offset

1.82 ton

Offset equivalent to 47
Trees



Energy
Independence

61%

For this month, 39% of your energy
consumption is supplied by the
utility grid.

Get grid independence
with Enphase

Add Storage

Year-to-date production

13 MWh

* As compared to last month's records

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SOLAR PANEL REPORT—JULY, 2022



Produced

3.0 MWh

12% higher*

10 Jul : 122.2 kWh

Maximum production day

Consumed

1.6 MWh

45% higher*

22 Jul : 111.5 kWh

Maximum consumption day

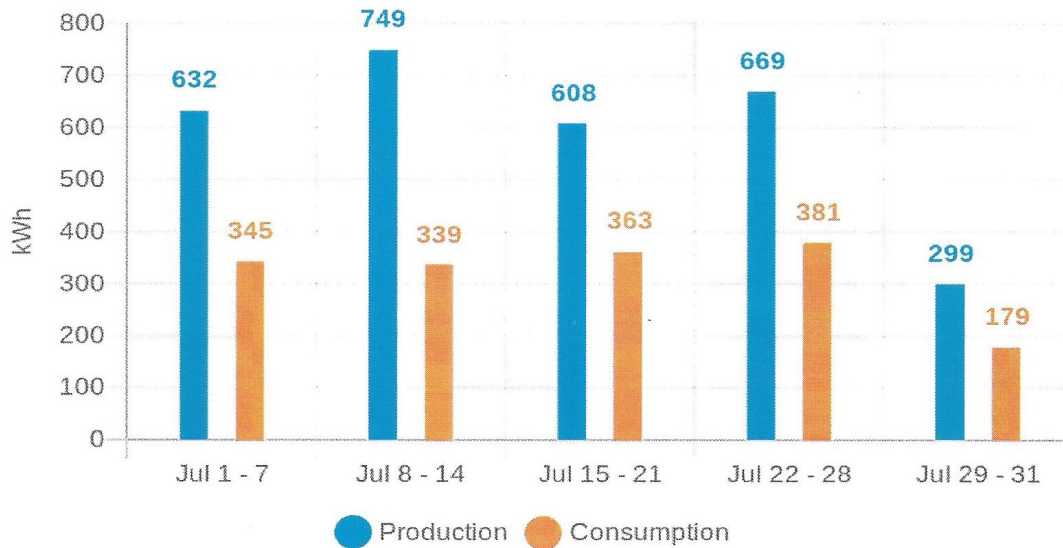
Grid energy

604.3 kWh

Imported

2.0 MWh

Exported



Carbon offset

2.10 tons

Offset equivalent to 36

Trees

Energy Independence

62%

For this month, 38% of your energy consumption is supplied by the utility grid.

Get grid independence with Enphase

Add Storage

Year-to-date production

16 MWh

* As compared to last month's records

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Happy Birthdays and Happy Anniversaries!
To all those who Birthday and Anniversaries
are in the month of September!



***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.



thankfulness
TO God
WE joyfully
INTRODUCE

Joe Camille Wellington

***Born: 6/22/2022 at 4:01 p.m.
Weight: 5 lbs. 14 oz
To: Diana Zapata and
Tyrell Wellington (Sonia's son)***





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Barbara Ruhe, President

Lou Oliver, Vice President

Mildred Unfried, Assistant Vice President

Barbara Calogero, Secretary

Dale Eberhardt, Treasurer

Janice Potter, Financial Assistant

Dale Eberhardt, Organist

Walter Scott, Sexton

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