



GRACE NOTES

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MARCH 2025

INTO THE DARKNESS: “TRANSFORMING CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER INTO ACTIONS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE”

How could it happen that the worst president in the history of the United States could be elected once again? He is a liar, a fraud and a champion of racism, hatred, and revenge with no sense of human decency. His first term was devastating as he sucked up to Russia and Putin, accepting love letters from dictators, mismanaging a worldwide pandemic, claiming to know better as millions of Americans died, even as they rejected his ideas to use bleach as a cure.

He placed conservative, right-wing judges on the Supreme Court and managed to use his predilection to attractive women, well known and laughed about, to lead to a distinctly devastating attitude about women in specific. With a plan, Project 2025, he selected a writer to produce a manifesto of what was to be and then denied the existence of such a document. That writer is now playing a role on his staff.

He selected a Yale graduate to be his VP. That person had been vocal about how terrible Trump was, and then with help of those who gave him millions, was elected to be a first term senator. He was then to switch his thoughts and decided to become Maga. He, JD Vance, has proven to be one of the strongest supporters of putting women in their place.

Yet sweeping all this aside, the worst that we have is totally incompetent people, doing everything they do wrong. His selection of staff is outrageous, they have little to no knowledge of anything they are doing, and the icing on the cake is that they do not want to do what they are assigned to do and couldn't do what they are assigned to do even if they wanted to do what they are to do. Let's not kid ourselves, our world is in a mess, the future is out of control, and the damage that he has done, already, is likely to impact the world for years to come.

He is a TV guy, his money was not earned, his competence is incompatible with anything we could imagine. And, then there is Musk. The joke is that Musk is the President and Trump does his bidding. Musk, also an anti-Maga, and now he is in love with him, and in the process of destroying our government, piece by piece. In fact, while he is doing that, Trump is playing golf, relaxing, and appearing at important places like stock car races, trips to places like France, California to look at the devastation due to fires. He drove a truck so he could enjoy the thrill of seeing floods, and made clear that these disasters must be addressed by the states, not the federal government. He offered little to no help.

He said, within the first day of his presidency, he would fix the Ukraine War, with Russia, and, in fact we would have that done before he took office. He has made a fool of himself and our country time and time again. And, while he's doing this, he has Elon Musk, the son of a South African who owned a diamond mine and was a man of wealth, who came to hate Mandela and believed in apartheid. He is the richest man in the world, for his foray into electric cars, which were the core of his wealth, however this has been short-lived as his cars are no longer

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performing as they once did, and, in fact, they are world-wide selling less than they once did.

His job now is really doing the work of the president in taking apart in a devastating fashion the jobs of those who do the work of the federal government. Thousands of employees have been removed from their jobs, even as Musk did not know or understand or care about the work that they did. Errors often had to be changed within hours of learning of the impact of what they were having. For example, people responsible for our nuclear weapons were impacted, and those who provided help during disasters. USAID is being shuttered impacting people all over the world who depend on our help. When Trump called his first cabinet meeting, Musk, in many ways, took it over. He has used Nazi salutes and a chainsaw as symbols of what he is doing.

Then there is Gaza and the West Bank, where Trump’s son-in-law sees a beautiful setting for people who have died, bled, and been tortured with no food, or place to stay safe, where children are routinely dying.

Peter W. Marty, in “A Dish Best Not Served” says that “The desire for revenge is sweeping our nation. How can Christians counter this?

“I am your justice,” Donald Trump promised during a 2024 campaign event. “For those who have been wronged and betrayed, I am your retribution.” Here was a candidate for the presidency promising revenge on behalf of his supporters, mostly for personal grievances he was harboring.

“Shalom Nagar was the prison guard chosen by lottery, against his will, to pull the lever that killed Nazi criminal Adolf Eichmann on the gallows. For decades, Nagar lived out the trauma and guilt of that event in secrecy. When his identity was eventually revealed, a German television crew wanted to interview him about his sense of vengeance. He asked them to come to his study, where he devoted his days to the Torah. “I want the German people to know,” he said, that not only did the Jewish people survive physically... but also that we are still studying Torah... for the Torah lives, too.

To turn more attentively to the kind of life scripture proposes for us is the best antidote I know to America’s growing addiction to revenge.

WEDNESDAY DARK

by Stella Nesanovich

The ashes don't lie. Rev. Whitney Miller

A friend in the Rothko chapel reflects
on the darkening mind of the artist
whose blocks of deep purple merge
with black, foreshadow the artist’s suicide.

In the Assumption Chapel at St. Charles Center,
across the Sabine in Louisiana, we hear
homilies on death this Ash Wednesday
while beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows

first shades of gray and charcoal
drape cypress, then deepen night.
Slow and steady as the tortoise
of Aesop’s fable, the dusk etches
Lenten ashes on our brows.



“THE U.S. IS THE WEALTHIEST AND MOST ECONOMICALLY ROBUST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD” - PASTOR’S MESSAGE

While that may be true, we don’t feel or act like it. In Asylum Hill we have people who are hungry, if not starving. Those who are homeless, depending on what day of what month, due to changing circumstances. We have people who are sick and dying, those with no place to go for help. We have those with no clothing, no place to seek a friend, and no friend to hold onto.

Hartford is a city with lots of people, but not enough jobs, segregated areas (black and white), (Spanish and Anglo), people of faith, people with none, those addicted, those afraid, those innocent, those who take advantage, and a government that cares and doesn’t, churches, synagogues, Mosques, buildings rotting, shortages of places to live. Skimpy entertainment.

We have refugees and immigrants, thousands of them, and a new federal plan to deport millions. We seek justice but often struggle to find it. And our country is undergoing the most difficult, ugly and irrational changes any of us have seen or imagined in our lifetimes.

So, what do we do. Are we overwhelmed with fear and anxiety? Because our congregation is aging, what do we say? Due to our ages, where we are, and how limited our resources, what do we do?

Do we give up? Do we lock our doors and keep the riffraff out? Do we open our doors with love and invite people to join us. Welcome them, give them a sense of hope and not be afraid ourselves, but show caution and care to all we can.

We are closing in on Lent. Yes, Lent. Ash Wednesday is around the corner, and we know how to give thanks for what we have and who we are. Let’s give as much as we can to the communities we serve and to the people on the streets. Encourage libraries, churches, and other public buildings to offer warmth in the cold. Give of ourselves through the organizations that we are a part of and make a difference. Give to help each other; value and visit those who can no longer come to church, and find ways to offer them solace and love. This is our world...

A Prayer for the Hungry

*Dear Lord,
Let us pray for those struggling
from hunger and neglect all
over the world. May we share
and extend our blessings to
empower those to flourish.
Lord, hear our prayer.
Amen.*

A Prayer for Helping the Poor

*Dear Lord,
Help us to be your voice
speaking out love and
acceptance. Help us to be your
feet walking beside those in
need. Help us to be your hands
to clothe, feed and shelter them.
Amen.*



FRIDAY GATHERING

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

THURSDAY GROCERY DISTRIBUTION

- 301 people were served in the month of January.

JANET'S CLOSET -

- Volunteers (escorts) are still needed for Wednesdays and Saturdays 11 to 1.
- We need gently used seasonal clothing, blankets and shoes. Clothing racks are needed, too.
- 50 people were served during the month of January.

SPECIAL UPCOMING DATES OF NOTE

March 2 - Congregational Annual Meeting after Service

March 2 - 2 to 4 p.m. GHIAA Core Group - Urban's

March 5 - Ash Wednesday

March 9 - Daylight Savings Time starts

March 21 - 1st day of Spring

April 13 - Palm Sunday, April 18 - Good Friday, April 20 - Easter Sunday

SPECIAL EVENTS

February 23rd - Black History Month Breakfast - Lou, Rebecca and Emma (and others) prepared a delicious breakfast for us all and important pieces of Black History. David and Nina took advantage of the music! See the pictures below.





The Resipiscence Lenten Devotional follows the 3-year lectionary schedule. We are in the third year (c) cycle and the ELCA is leading a similar series using the third year. We chose the second year (b) for the purpose of 1) having another option and 2) giving New England Synod Lutherans the opportunity to build relationships and community in our area. Each offering --- ELCA/ churchwide/using the current lectionary text (c) and NESynod/regional/using a companion but different set of text (b) --- has its advantages.

The program is open to all who are seeking ways to deepen their commitment to dismantling racism.

Kailina Mills and I (participants in the Antiracism Collaborative Board) are pleased to present a Lenten devotional focused on antiracism. Please share this announcement with your congregations and contacts. The program starts in two weeks and is focused on strengthening relationships within our synod.

Thank you. In solidarity, Kailina and Sue

Antiracism Lenten Study

Are you hearing it too? Do you hear the call to change and break rank with the status quo and invest in God's newness? During Lent we are asking you to join us in giving up white supremacy—its values, norms, myths, seductions, benefits, and rewards.

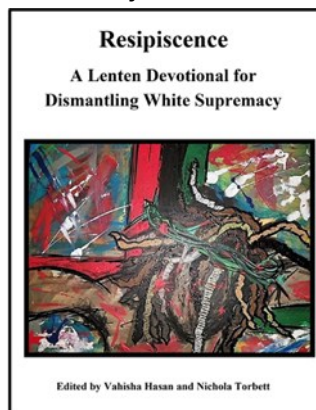
Join Kailina Mills and Sue Carey, from the New England Synod Antiracism Collaborative, for a 7-week journey.

Using *Resipiscence: A Lenten Devotional for Dismantling White Supremacy* we will hear from a diverse group of people—diverse racially and ethnically, in gender expression and sexual orientation, and diverse in theological perspective. We need to hear from everyone so we can make a way to move forward together. [Purchase Resipiscence here](#) for \$15, only available in e-book format (you are able to print it, if you prefer).

<https://www.transformnetwork.org/store/lentdevotional2018-download>

The study meets on Zoom, 6-7:30 pm on Thursdays March 6, 13, 20, 27 and April 3, 10, and 24 (no gathering on Maundy Thursday, April 17). [Use this path to register.](#)

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdZnZWWodOI66PVLJZ6FRI2BjXMY7N8SH3x6CA7IbPwsKfUBw/viewform>



GOD IS MY CO-PILOT?



Walking Thoughts **A Blog by H. Paul Santmire**

Long ago, and far away, when I was serving a congregation in Hartford, CT, on my way to work one morning, I was of course doing my daily devotions in Dunkin' Donuts. I heard a crash outside. There a car had run over the curb and smashed into another car that was parked right in front of DD's. I was able to read the motto on the front plate of the car that had run over the curb. It said: "God is my Co-Pilot."



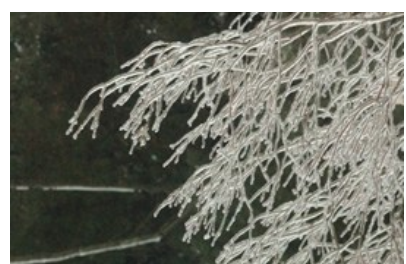
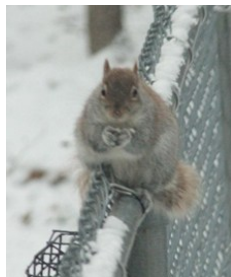
That license-plate announced a truth about what is sometimes called American Civil Religion. We hold this truth to be self-evident: God is on our side. I would wager a single lottery ticket on the veracity of that judgment. Certainly, many of the true-blue followers of Donald Trump do believe that. Although I, for one, who have come to think of Trump as a new Hitler, also believe that God is on my side (or, truth be known, I hold that belief Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays).

Okay, then, who's right? Your Trumpist uncle? Or the likes of me? Such questions take me back to the days when I was grading sophomore papers. I would sometimes write in a margin: "Is this the question you really want to ask?"

Well, no. Shift gears. When it comes to such questions, the first one, as has often been observed, ought to be this, biblically speaking: whose side is God on? Answer: neither yours nor mine, surely not on the side of the rich and the powerful who are running our government today. It's the poor, y'all, the poor! Forget about Trump. And, yes, forget about you and me. The biblical take is clearly this: first and foremost, God's on the side of the poor.

At least, this is what the one whom some of us think of as the Mother of God apparently thought when she sang her lullaby about the God of her newborn: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich empty away." (Luke 1:52f.)

WINTER PICTURES FROM DALE'S BACKYARD



OUR MUSLIM BOY WONDER



Who's really being removed by ICE tonight? The child who would've discovered the cure for cancer in 2046? The 9th grade nerd who would've stopped that Astroid that's gonna hit us in 2032? Do we care?

Friends,

70 years ago today in San Francisco, California, a son was born to Abdulfattah Jandali, a Syrian Muslim who had entered the United States and enrolled at the University of Wisconsin. I don't have the evidence of his citizenship, or how or why he was allowed to enter our country. The records do show that he impregnated a young woman from Green Bay and, apparently, this baby (anchor baby?) is the result of that union. On the birth certificate, apparently, is the baby's name, or his father's, written in Arabic: عبدالفتاح جندلي. So one more unintended, unannounced, unapproved Arab-Muslim made his way into this great country and became a US citizen simply because on this day in 1955 he left his mother's womb head first and landed in a birthing room at some random hospital in San Francisco — and, naturally, because of a reckless mistake our Founding Fathers made in granting automatic free-to-be-you-and-me unvetted but highly-valued American citizenship for doing... *what?* Just showing up after a few contractions and "Presto! Yes, you, too, are now an American — just like me!" Except my name on my birth certificate is written in American-English, not Arabic. You can see why Donald Trump and MAGA-nation are so rightfully upset at how randomly **any baby** can just become an American — *even before they've had their first meal!*

How many millions upon millions over the years have snuck into this nation without permission, without invitation, just wham-bam-thank-you-Uncle-Sam-you're-an-American-man now — in this case because of the perhaps questionable morals of a Wisconsin farmer's daughter. Unbelievable. And disgusting. People, *please*, let's get the order correct. Write this down: "First comes **love**. Then comes **marriage**. Then comes **استيف جوبز** in the **baby carriage — complete with immigration papers, references, a current passport and a landlord's signed approval, including first and last month's rent and security deposit.**"

So here we are now, in 2025, with at least 11 million "illegal" migrants roaming about this hallowed land, driving on our roads, getting God-knows how much free welfare, free blankets, free Federal surplus cheese, free use of 9-1-1 *and* our public libraries while the rest of us have to work and pay taxes for all of this. And what, pray tell, can you tell me we have received in return for Abdulfattah's "little mistake" that was deposited in that hellhole we call San Francisco, once a great place to leave your heart in that "city by the bay"? Nothing. We get *nothing* from that Syrian Muslim who sired a Jr. Abdulfattah. A nothing-migrant with a nothing-out-of-wedlock-baby.

Except... that "nothing-baby" was soon adopted and given an American name — Steve Jobs. Yes, *that* Steve Jobs. Who, along with Steve Wozniak, is responsible for this laptop I'm writing on, the phone that's in my pocket, the iPod shuffle that I've had for a decade and holds 1,000 of my favorite songs on a device that isn't even an inch wide, my AppleTV+ on my tv across the room is easily one of our top two streamers when it comes to exceptional content. I also just started wearing an Apple Watch that counts my steps, the beats of my heart, the number of teeth I have left and informs me that today my blood pressure is 106/60 (it is also predicting that INCIDENT will win the Oscar this Sunday for Best Documentary Short). I am grateful for that Muslim migrant baby

being born here 70 years ago today. Because if he hadn't, it's possible we would have none of his inventions. We would also have no TED LASSO.

This little story, I hope, will give pause to any bigot who constantly rails against the danger we are all in because of these "filthy, lowlife aliens." Those of us who count ourselves as part of the "non-hater" demographic of Americans cannot even begin to add up or ascertain the innumerable ways our lives have been made better by our beloved immigrant neighbors. Or how many lives have been saved because of their discoveries, or simply, their care for us in an emergency situation. If all of those strangers who have had some impact on our lives could suddenly appear on this screen, it would be an overwhelming cacophony of human love. For every time I have heard a negative word or blatant hatred spewed toward those who came from afar, I have felt that I should pause, get down on one knee, and thank all of those who gave up their lives elsewhere to come here and be with us.

If you have amongst your family and friends a few uninformed Trumpsters who still scream about building a wall or deporting anyone who can't prove they belong here, maybe you could show them the following list of immigrants who somehow got here, and then contributed amazing things for the rest of us to benefit from. Perhaps they will see that the reason this is a great country is because these great people made it what it is today.

Check this out:

Mona Hanna uncovered the Flint Water Crisis and led the fight to protect the children of Flint. She was born in England. Her scientist parents fled Iraq during the Ba'ath years in the 1970s. They then moved to Michigan. Without her, it is possible we never would have known the full truth of how Flint's children were poisoned by the State.

Harry Belafonte, one of the greatest singers, political activists and humanitarians in American history. He was born in Manhattan to a Jamaican immigrant mother working as a housekeeper. She sent him back to Jamaica to live with grandparents from age 5 to 13.

Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib represents the cities of Detroit and Dearborn. Her parents were Palestinian immigrants. She is serving her fourth term in Congress as the first Palestinian-American woman to be elected to the House of Representatives.

Albert Einstein, born in Germany, in addition to developing the theory of relativity among other things, he also called for the creation of the IRC — the International Rescue Committee — that today helps refugees and displaced people around the world.

Pierre Omidyar, founder of Ebay. His parents left Iran to go to school in France, and when he was 6 they moved to the US where his dad got a residency at Johns Hopkins.

Joan Baez's grandfather moved to the US from Mexico when her father was 2. Her father was instrumental in the development of X-Ray microscopes and related technologies, and Joan, well, is Joan.

Sergey Brin, co-founder of Google. His parents left the USSR when Sergey was a toddler.

Irving Berlin, the most famous composer of the Great American Songbook. He wrote "White Christmas." His parents left Russia when he was 5, escaping the pogroms and the poverty. He

brought joy into millions of American homes with such songs as “Cheek to Cheek,” “Count Your Blessings,” “Easter Parade,” “Puttin’ on the Ritz,” and “God Bless America.”

Gene Simmons, rock legend from the band KISS. His mother was a Holocaust survivor, spending seven months in the Mauthausen camp. After liberation, she made her way to Haifa, where Gene was born in 1949. At age 8, his parents divorced and his mom took Gene and moved to Queens.

Billy Wilder. He made SOME LIKE IT HOT, THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH, SUNSET BOULEVARD, STALAG 17, THE APARTMENT and SABRINA. He was born in Austria-Hungary.

Linda Sarsour, born in Brooklyn, daughter of Palestinian immigrants, and co-chair of the Women’s March.

Two of the three founders of YouTube are immigrants. **Steve Chen** was born in Taiwan. His parents moved the family to Illinois when he was 7. **Jawed Karim** was born in East Germany to a Bangladeshi father and a German mother, and then moved to Minnesota when Jawed was 13.

Jan Koum, creator of WhatsApp. He was born in Ukraine in the mid 1970s. His mother moved him when he was 16 to a tiny apartment in Mountain View, CA.

Cesar Chavez, American labor leader and civil rights activist, was born in Arizona to Mexican immigrant parents.

Katalin Karikó, the famed biochemist, was born in Hungary before moving to the United States where she went on to lead development of mRNA vaccine science — key to the Covid 19 Vaccine — for which she won a Nobel prize and saved millions of lives.

This list of immigrants who made America great can literally go on for miles. And I’m going to guess that every single one of you works with, lives next door to, or has your groceries bagged by a kind young man from Honduras, or has been told the stories of those in your family who came to these shores many decades ago, and due to their perseverance, or perhaps even a hole in a fence, led you to be here today, reading these words.

We have to stop this current madness of rounding up people of color for committing the crime of not being born here — or as Trump would now like to change the Constitution, whether you were born here or not, if you aren’t white, you are suspect. Like, if you’re not white, there’s no way you got that job as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a Black man. There’s no way you got that job as the Chief of the US Coast Guard on your own merit because, after all, you’re a “lady.” Tonight, ICE agents all across America are banging down doors to remove the dangerous “illegals.” But one of them might’ve been the guy who tomorrow was going to help rebuild a children’s playground across town — but he is now in shackles on a military cargo plane on its way to Guatemala.

Then there’s the young woman in Boston from earlier today. If you hadn’t smashed her guitar and thrown her in the back of your government van, she was the one who might’ve gone on to write the sequel to the beautiful and haunting song, “Hallelujah.” Now our souls will never hear it.

Or there goes the little girl who would’ve one day grown up to be the scientist who discovered the cure for cancer, snatched from her mother’s arms, taking her to a military base in Oklahoma, now forever “lost in the system” and never to be seen by her mother again.

When I go to bed tonight, as I lay my head down to fall asleep, I will try not to think about the potential millions suffering from cancer some 30 years from now who might've lived had this little girl not been seen as a threat to our national security.

God help us.

And God bless America — and Steve Jobs.

HOW CHRISTIANS CAN SUBVERT THE AIMS OF A TYRANT

SOJOURNERS

We must be countercultural in an authoritarian regime.

by Rose Marie Berger

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025

FOR THE FIRST time, Americans have elected a wannabe dictator as president. Donald Trump is committed to and now capable of ending democracy as we know it. Trump is the one the “new authoritarians” have been waiting for. What now?



First, as of January 2025, the United States is on track to become an electoral autocracy. Electoral autocracies have multiparty systems and independent institutions that over time lose sufficient power to hold the executive branch accountable for its corruption or restrict its lawlessness. The Republican trifecta in November was not the presidency, Senate, and House. It was the White House, Congress, and Supreme Court. This win enables what political scientists call “state capture” by anti-democratic forces.

Whatever else we do, we must reorient our political map. The range of ideas the public is willing to consider and accept now mirrors policies of past and current fascist governments. We must guard against all attempts to fix future elections or introduce the idea that presidents don't need to be elected at all. There's no such thing as only being a dictator on “day one.”

Second, tyrants have only one tool for governing: fear. As Unitarian minister John Basil Barnhill said in 1914, “Where the people fear the government you have tyranny. Where the government fears the people you have liberty.” We are afraid for good reasons. We are afraid that our neighbors — empowered by law enforcement — will turn on us because we are gay or transgender, immigrants, Muslim or Jewish, Black or brown, disabled, or women. During the campaign, political violence skyrocketed. A Pennsylvania man was shot to death during an assassination attempt. Bomb threats disrupted election offices. Hate groups terrorized Springfield, Ohio. The day after the election, hateful racist text messages were sent to the phones of Black adults and children in 30 states. Our fear is real. We must face and conquer it.

Third, we will *all* pay the price for Trump. As the president-elect implements his anti-democratic agenda, his repression will wallop increasingly wider swaths of Americans. Many MAGA voters dismissed Trump's attacks on “minorities” and women as part of his act while trusting him to put more money in their pockets. In the short term, they might be right. But their families will not be shielded when “efficiency expert” Elon Musk defunds Medicaid and disability insurance or Title I financial aid vanishes with the Department of Education. The new authoritarians use

nativist and economic populism to gain access to the constitutional shredder, remove checks and balances, and weaken self-sustaining democratic institutions. In the end, we are all in this together.

Fourth, we must follow Jesus. Because it's what we believe, and because it may be an effective way forward. Too many Americans believe Christianity requires nothing more of them than wearing a necklace or being born in a Christian nation. Christendom, as Søren Kierkegaard critiqued it, is a "species of baptized paganism in which every respectable citizen can pass for a disciple."

In *No Rusty Swords*, anti-Nazi theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer outlined three ways a free church can act toward the state: as conscience, as a field hospital for its victims, or as a "spoke in the wheel itself." The church must speak out boldly and unequivocally when the state fails to uphold the law, protect human rights, secure the commonwealth, and provide for the common defense. The church has an "unconditional obligation to the victims of any ordering society," wrote Bonhoeffer. Even when laws change, the church may not withdraw from these responsibilities. Finally, when citizens are no longer able to curb state violence, the church must become an effective deterrent through "direct political action." I would add that this strategic action must be nonviolent and bring a spiritual and moral reserve proportional to the state's acts of inhumanity.

The new authoritarians amassing around Trump see themselves as Nietzsche's "supermen." But, as Nietzsche acknowledged, this ruling elite has an Achilles' heel and there is a weapon that can target it: militant, unrelenting, overt, creative, and courageous Christian love and compassion. Jesus' love ethic upends so-called "natural hierarchies," inverting the values of wealth, health, beauty, greatness, power, violent masculinity, and individualism. It undermines what Nietzsche called "the will to power." Christians must become a poison in the new authoritarian body politic.

As a country, we are better prepared than in 2017 to push back on an autocratic regime. Many civic institutions have been "Trump-proofing" their systems to maintain order and rule of law. Even our national security agencies have been preparing for an executive branch that refuses to uphold the Constitution. Our social movements are savvier about how to defend against modern autocracies and bring down their pillars of support. As political scientist Maria J. Stephan says, "Autocrats are always weaker than they appear, and we are often stronger than we might think."

In his 1946 essay "The Fascist Masquerade," theologian Howard Thurman issued a challenge: "The Church is irrevocably committed to a revolutionary ethic, but it tends to implement the ethic by means that are short of that which is revolutionary." This is our new altar call. Now is the time to enact the revolutionary love ethic of Jesus. It undermines tyrants and drives out fear. And it always has.



Rose Marie Berger

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

REPUBLICANS WANT YOU TO EMBRACE THE PAIN

Hi Folks,

This is Kirk Bangstad, owner of the Minocqua Brewing Company.

I enlisted Pat Mulvaney, retired editor of the Monroe County Herald, to write our "Friday Funnies" for today. Monroe County, WI, is very rural and very red. Pat's brilliant writing, shaped by this environment, is exactly the type of voice that I want to share with my audience during these dark and uncertain times.



Republicans Want You to Embrace the Pain

by Pat Mulvaney

I think it's time we quit pretending and lean into what President Musk and his useful idiot Donald Trump have now told us is in store for the vast majority of Americans – pain.

The Trump administration and its Republican lap dogs in Congress and on the Supreme Court have abandoned any pretense of helping the working class in favor of servicing their billionaire donors.

Afterall, billionaires are people, too. Well, maybe not Musk. It's quite possible the mothership abandoned him on Earth years ago and the goal of his SpaceX company is to build a rocket that can propel him back to his home planet. I hope his little Nazi delinquents from DOGE join him on the voyage. Getting them out of the gene pool might help mankind. Although, their likely inability to get dates might have already solved that conundrum.

I digress. The Republicans put the short-term suffering thing out there themselves after Trump, who has entered his get-the-hell-off-my-lawn stage, pivoted from prosperity to pain following his election win. He campaigned on beating inflation, lowering food costs, replacing Obamacare with concepts, bringing back manufacturing bigly and guaranteeing anything under the sun that would arouse his base.

However, after being elected, Musk and Trump, I guess, thought their base had more of an appetite for masochism. They're going all in on the pain thing.

I mean it's evident isn't it? Why else would they destroy the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau that guards Americans against financial predators and has returned \$21 billion to consumers who were ripped off. Musk's DOGE team revealed no evidence of mismanagement or fraud to justify shuttering the agency. That gives billionaires, including Musk (or especially Musk), free reign to scam consumers once again. Bend over and buy some of Trump's crypto bitcoins. Thank you sir, may I have another.

How about Musk taking a sledgehammer to USAID, an agency that spread American goodwill around the world by delivering food, medicine and other aid to the poorest people on the planet. Not only did it help our image in the world, USAID purchased around \$2 billion of commodities a year from American farmers. Goodbye farm subsidy and hello pain. Once again, there was no proof

of fraud or mismanagement in the agency other than a few debunked claims he and Trump are still peddling.

That's not all the Dominatrix in Chief and his cuckold have in store for farmers. They're attacks on SNAP, WIC, Food Stamps and grant programs will also deprive farmers of income and needy people of food. And if that's not enough, Canada is threatening to target Wisconsin's dairy industry in retaliation for Trump's ridiculous 25% tariffs on Canadian aluminum and steel.

Well Canada, let me tell you. Donald is way ahead of you in inflicting pain on the ag industry. His deportation program is already depriving farmers of their main source of cheap labor. Who's going to harvest the crops or milk the cows? Not Buba. He's holding out for one of those high-paying tech positions.

I could go on with his cuts to education, Medicaid, Social Security, Medicare, etc., but you get the point. It's all good pain. Oh, and how do I know he's coming after Social Security and Medicare? He emphatically denied he would on the campaign trail, just like he denied knowing anything about Project 2025. That's strange since he just appointed one of the architects of Project 2025, Russell Vought, to be director of the Office of Management and Budget. If you like pain, he's here to bring it to you.

Excuse me waitress. I think I'll have what he's having.

It's plain to see that Trump and Musk are the fraudsters and that DOGE has as much to do with rooting out waste and abuse as Aqua Velva has to do with making you smell young.

And while it's a little off topic, I do have to bring up the whole Gulf of America nonsense. It seems a little Orwellian. I can just hear Trump outlawing any mention of the **Gulf of Mexico**, "It's always been the Gulf of America and Oceania has always been at war with Eastasia,"

When the polar ice caps fully melt due to manmade global warming and the sea swallows Florida, then, maybe, we can revisit the whole Gulf of America thing.

It's just another Trump fever dream. For some reason, he thinks rising oceans are good for the real estate business because they create more beachfront property. I heard him say it on the news once, unless that accounting has already been sucked down the Memory Hole. (I promise that's my last Orwellian reference). Actually, rising ocean levels would lead to shrinking coastlines and less beachfront property.

For a guy who displaces so much water himself, you'd think he'd know better. But who am I to second guess a graduate of the Wharton School of Economics, who seems to have a third-grader's understanding of physics, and, for that matter, economics.

I'm just surprised the former beauty pageant owner and dressing room ogler didn't want the latitude lines removed from globes because they make the Earth's ass look big. Who knows? Maybe that's coming.

Pat Mulvaney is a retired journalist from Wisconsin who served as editor of the Monroe County Herald for over two decades. He began his career with Monroe County Publishers in 1999 and became editor in 2005. Now retired, he contributes as a guest writer for our daily newsletter while pursuing personal interests like travel and home improvement.

by Adam Russell Taylor

FEB 6, 2025



USAID supplied blankets, water containers, and other materials needed by Save The Children in Kyrgyzstan on June 26, 2010. IMAGO/piemags via Reuters Connect

A rebuke from the prophet Isaiah has been ringing in my ears the past few weeks: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter” (5:20).

This verse has come to mind as I’ve watched the chaotic — and arguably illegal— efforts of President Donald Trump and his administration to shrink and in some cases dismantle the federal government, especially at the U.S. Agency for International Development. With Trump’s blessing, Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency has created an unprecedented crisis at an agency that oversees lifesaving assistance to some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world. Despite issuing limited humanitarian waivers, the administration has **frozen nearly all new foreign assistance** funding for the next 90 days, **fired many senior leaders**, and put the entire agency’s staff of more than **10,000 people on leave**, two-thirds of whom work in field locations around the world.

The impact of these actions is staggering. According to the **Associated Press**, freezing foreign aid and targeting USAID “has forced U.S. and international companies to shut down tens of thousands of programs globally, leading to furloughs, layoffs, and financial crises.” These cuts have immediate and dire consequences. USAID officials **report** these include stalling programs to control malaria in 24 of the hardest-hit African nations, stopping backup heating systems to schools and hospitals in Ukraine, and freezing life-saving programs for 145,000 vulnerable women in Afghanistan in need of safe houses, mental health counseling, health care, and vocational training. And those are just a few examples.

Through it all, Musk has demonstrated his contempt for USAID’s mission, promising to shut down an agency he’s decried as “**evil**” and a “**criminal organization**” that “**needs to die**.”

Elon Musk walks on Capitol Hill on Dec. 5, 2024. REUTERS/Benoit Tessier/File Photo



It is impossible for me to comprehend how USAID’s work around the world can be construed as “evil.” Every year, the agency helps feed many of the world’s hungriest people; saves **millions of lives** through its health, nutrition, and vaccination programs; and supports efforts to foster peacemaking and strengthen democracy around the world. As someone who has dedicated large portions of my career to combatting extreme poverty and advancing sustainable development, I’ve seen firsthand how USAID — often in partnership with U.S.-based nonprofits, including faith-based organizations such as **World**

Vision and **Catholic Relief Services** — operates these critical programs in many of the most challenging places in the world. Ending USAID's work around the world is both foreign policy malpractice and a deeply short-sighted economic move — not to mention a direct assault on the many commands from the Christian faith to love and protect the most vulnerable.

One argument the Trump administration has leveled against USAID is that it's a waste of taxpayer money — an argument that no doubt appeals to the 60 to 70 percent of U.S. adults who think the government spends too much on assistance to other countries. But behind that argument are some longstanding misperceptions about foreign aid: Though many Americans believe foreign assistance makes up **more than a quarter** of the federal budget, in truth, the United States spends **less than one percent** of its budget on foreign assistance, or **roughly \$60 billion** per year; that figure includes military support and about **\$40 billion** in aid managed by USAID. Yet when Americans are asked how much they think the U.S. should spend on aid, on average, they say it should be **about 10 percent**.

But regardless of the amount, it's true that any new administration has the prerogative to scrutinize the effectiveness of its programs, so let's take the argument that foreign assistance is wasteful at face value. To sustain that argument, you'd have to do a cost-benefit analysis and find that the expense of the program isn't worth what the program provides. And the fraction of the U.S. budget that we spend on foreign aid provides a lot: A few notable examples include an HIV/AIDS program that has been estimated to have **saved 25 million lives**; the President's Malaria Initiative, that has helped **prevent millions of malaria deaths**; and vaccination programs that save an **estimated 3 million** lives each year. Do we really think these outcomes aren't worth the fraction of our budget it takes to support them?

Yet in his "America First" agenda, Trump has repeatedly shown disdain for the impact of U.S. actions — consequences to the rest of the world notwithstanding. Instead, he promised voters he'd prioritize American self-interest. But even from this perspective, the argument against these programs falls apart: If safety is the goal, we should listen to **more than 120** retired generals and admirals, who in 2017 called on Congress not to slash funding for diplomacy and foreign aid after the first Trump administration sought to make drastic cuts to these programs. In their **letter** they expressed a "strong conviction that elevating and strengthening diplomacy and development alongside defense are critical to keeping America safe."

And if protecting American foreign policy interests is the goal, then eliminating foreign aid, including poverty-focused development assistance, eliminates a key tool the U.S. has used to project its soft power around the world. In fact, USAID was **originally created** during the Cold War as a way to counter the influence of communism, which has evolved into programs that promote democracy and freedom around the world.

I see strong economic and national security arguments for why aid is a critical investment. Yet, as a Christian, I find the moral and humanitarian argument most compelling. Our faith teaches us that God was willing to give far more than 1 percent of his resources to save the world — or as one oft-quoted verse puts it: "for God so loved the world that he gave us his only begotten son" (John 3:16). It is theological malpractice to act as though this love is only confined only to the United States, or to suggest that our love is purely sentimental versus showing up in tangible acts of compassion and justice.

While there no doubt could be ways to see if U.S. foreign aid programs could be made more effective, what Trump is doing with USAID is altogether different— **and quite possibly illegal**. Rather than try to make these programs more effective, he has **moved to end** USAID's status as an independent agency despite the fact it was established as such by Congress in 1961.

This is a clear breach of executive authority, rooted in unconstitutional ideas that the president has the authority to unilaterally defy Congress and both restructure agencies and control legislatively approved spending. While the assault on USAID is heartbreaking, there is also a much greater precedent at stake in this fight that will determine whether Congress retains its core powers as a check against executive overreach and power grabbing. Musk and his DOGE team already have their sights set on dismantling the Department of Education with many more agencies at risk.

As the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world, the United States has a moral imperative to protect human dignity and make things better for as many people as possible based on Jesus' principle that "to whom much has been given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). For those of us who are motivated by our Christian faith, foreign assistance is also an important way we can encourage our society to act according to the moral priorities Jesus taught us in Matthew 25, when he explained that the way we treat people in the most vulnerable situations is how we treat Jesus himself. Just as Jesus never confined the boundaries of that commitment to Judea or Israel, neither should we confine our moral commitment to only 50 states.

People hold placards outside the USAID building in Washington, D.C., after billionaire Elon Musk, who is heading U.S. President Donald Trump's drive to shrink the federal government, said work is underway to shut down the U.S. foreign aid agency on Feb. 3, 2025. REUTERS/Kent Nishimura



I'm glad to see some Christians start to speak out against what's happening at USAID: The U.S.

Conference of Catholic Bishops has urged Catholics across the country to contact their members of Congress to ask them to oppose the freeze. You can join Bread for the World in contacting your members of Congress calling on them to end the federal freeze on foreign aid.



We are not powerless. We can reject Trump's immoral vision of "America First," ensuring more lives are not lost and halting Trump's abuse of power. But to do that, Christians of all stripes and ideological perspectives must join me in speaking out and taking action.

Adam Russell Taylor

Rev. Adam Russell Taylor is president of Sojourners and author of *A More Perfect Union: A New Vision for Building the Beloved Community*. Follow him on X [@revadamtaylor](https://twitter.com/revadamtaylor).

WHITE HOUSE FAITH OFFICE

Donald Trump has signed an executive order establishing a White House Faith Office that goes beyond the typical religious outreach by presidential administrations.



He isn't merely courting the evangelical vote — he's taking a calculated step toward institutionalizing Christian Nationalism at the highest levels.

Mother Jones

POLITICS ENVIRONMENT CRIMINAL JUSTICE GUNS RACE GENDER FOOD PODCAST

POLITICS FEBRUARY 6, 2025

Trump Just Outlined His Plan to Hand Power to Christian Nationalists

"We want to bring religion back—stronger, bigger, better than ever before."



JULIANNE MCSHANE
News & Engagement Writer
[Bio | Follow](#)



Trump outlined plans for instituting Christian nationalism throughout the federal government on Thursday. Evan Vucci/AP

Trump has put Paula White, a controversial televangelist known for promoting prosperity gospel theology, at the helm of this new office. White, who is Trump's spiritual advisor, is a proponent of the New Apostolic Reformation, a movement seeking to wage a "spiritual battle" for control of the U.S. Government.

Now they have it.

This move directly attempts to codify a specific religious ideology into government policy.

Trump's "faith office" will coordinate with Attorney General Pam Bondi to address perceived failures in protecting Christian interests through a Task Force to

Eradicate Anti-Christian Bias.

This is a *direct* play from Project 2025's call to combat "woke" policies and enforce a Christian-centric view of America.

The implications are deeply concerning, providing official cover to further discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals, religious minorities, and secular Americans.

Healthcare decisions, particularly around reproductive rights, might be dictated by religious doctrine rather than medical science.

Even environmental and climate policies (*note: the very word "climate" has now been forcibly erased from many federal documents — on Trump's command*) could be shaped by end-times theology rather than scientific consensus.

This isn't speculation — it's the stated goal of the Christian Nationalist movement that Trump is now explicitly putting into effect.

We've seen how this ideology has infiltrated school boards, state legislatures, and now the White House.

And we know that calling out these threats will put a target on our backs.

The Christian nationalist movement has deep pockets and a vast media ecosystem to amplify its message and attack its critics. Bondi's task force is set to identify anyone standing in the way of the administration's very narrow, very strict, Christian-faith-only policies.

That means us.

Simply reporting on LGBTQ+ rights violations by faith-based groups or highlighting discriminatory practices might be labeled as "anti-Christian" and face pushback.

But with our focus last year on the Council for National Policy, the secret coalition of

billionaires and extremists behind the Heritage Foundation and Project 2025, our work is at higher risk than most.

We can't stay silent — we will continue to shine a light on the GOP's dark money puppeteers and help partners like Trump File document what's happening to our country. Thank you for making our work possible.

Americans deserve to understand the true nature of Christian Nationalism and its threat to religious freedom for all, as well as ongoing threats to the First Amendment.

If you haven't already, please read and share our overview of the Council for National Policy at DeprogramAmerica.com/CNP.

In this together,
Deprogram America

MY BLACK CHURCH NOW OWNS A RACIST LOGO

by Moya Harris

FEB 13, 2025

Members of the Proud Boys, an extremist group rallied in front of the Ohio state capitol building on Jan. 6, 2024 in remembrance of Ashli Babbitt, one of the people killed during the Jan. 6, 2021 riot at the U.S. Capitol. Photo by Zach D Roberts/Nurphoto via Reuters.



In December 2020, white supremacists marched through Washington, D.C., defacing our church's Black Lives Matter sign. This wasn't just vandalism; it was an act of terror, a deliberate attempt to silence a Black church — **Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church** — that has long stood for justice. But fear has never had the final word in our tradition.

I won't lie though; we were unsettled. I will never forget when my pastor, Rev. William H. Lamar IV, shared the news with our waiting congregation. We were at the height of the pandemic, before vaccines, navigating an online worship reality with no clear end in sight. My mind flashed to cross burnings in the rural South. I wasn't surprised, but **I was angry — and tired.**

My pastor stood firm, reminding us that God is still with us. He didn't flinch when he said, "We will not be silenced." And we weren't. We did not cower. We did not retreat. Instead, we kept doing what we have always done: worshiping, liberating, and serving — trusting in a God who bends the arc of the universe toward justice. We remained steadfast in our calling as the Cathedral of African Methodism, refusing to lose heart in the face of white supremacy.

In June 2023, Metropolitan AME successfully sued the Proud Boys, **winning** a \$2.8 million judgment through default judgement for trespassing and vandalizing our property. But because they have yet to pay, our church creatively sought to ensure payment by stripping the hate group of its trademark, meaning they can no longer sell merchandise to fund their hate — unless our church allows it. Any profits the Proud Boys earn from using the trademark must be paid to Metropolitan to help fulfill the multi-million-dollar default judgment.

A Black church now holds the legal rights to the identity of those who sought to intimidate it.

This is more than a court decision; it is a reversal of power in the tradition of Jesus.

Rejecting fear as a weapon

Fear has always been a tool of oppression: from the KKK's **reign of terror during Reconstruction** to today's threats of mass deportation. As Howard Thurman reminds us in ***Jesus and the Disinherited***, fear convinces people to surrender their own freedom. Fear was used to build this country on stolen labor, and it still drives people to trade their rights for proximity to whiteness. White supremacy thrives on division, turning race and class into a caste system designed to keep some at the bottom.

The Black Church was born in the face of fear. From hush harbors where captured Africans reclaimed their faith to the churches that fueled the Civil Rights Movement, it has often been a sanctuary of resistance. Early Black Christians took the "**Talking Book**" meant to enslave them and turned it into a gospel of liberation. The church became the heart of Black life, meeting both physical and spiritual needs, organizing, and speaking truth to power.

That prophetic tradition is vital today. White Christian nationalism has distorted the gospel, promoting policies and rhetoric designed to oppress. However, the Jesus they claim to follow is not the Jesus we know. As Howard Thurman described, the real Jesus was a poor, marginalized Jew under Roman rule. He recognized how empires use fear to control the oppressed. The **Pax Romana** wasn't peace: it was enforced submission, maintained by the brutal spectacle of crucifixion.

What happened in December 2020 was an attempt to use fear to silence a church that has stood for 186 years. Our sanctuary has held the voices of **Frederick Douglass**, **Ida B. Wells**, and **Mary McLeod Bethune**. It welcomes all who seek freedom. And because of that, white supremacy has repeatedly showed up on our doorstep.



But the theology that has sustained Black people is one of liberation — one that gives life and joy, even in the face of fear. It has carried us this far. It will carry us forward.

People participate in an MLK Day rally on the day of the 2025 presidential inauguration at Metropolitan AME Church in Washington, D.C. on Jan. 20, 2025. Photo: USA TODAY NETWORK via Reuters Connect

A theology that acts

The reversal of power that recently granted my church the rights to the Proud Boys logo echoes a biblical tradition of reclaiming what was meant for harm and using it for good. Genesis 50:20 tells of Joseph, sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, later using his position to save them from famine. Today, I see a parallel in the wealth of a hate group now being used by a church committed to the thriving and liberation of all people, especially those with their backs against the wall. This decision also hits them where it hurts most — their pockets— and limits their ability to fund and spread hate.

Metropolitan has long been on the frontlines of justice: fighting food insecurity through its **food bank**, advocating for **affordable housing** in D.C., addressing **climate change** in Black neighborhoods, and teaching and preaching a liberating theology that speaks truth to power.

As Pastor Lamar often says, Metropolitan is “deeply spiritual and deeply engaged with the world.”

At Metropolitan, we believe faith demands action. We stand proudly in our African religious heritage, knowing who we are and whose we are. Ours is a communal faith, shaped by African sensibilities and rooted in the liberating gospel of Jesus.

As Ella Baker said, “We who believe in freedom cannot rest.” This is not meant to be taken literally. We must practice self-care. However, as a collective, we must remain vigilant. History has shown us that every step forward for marginalized people is met with backlash. Frederick Douglass reminds us that “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.” Victory is never the end of the fight; oppressive forces always wait for a more opportune time.

This is why we must remember the cloud of witnesses who came before us — those who did the work with joy in their periphery, just as Jesus did when he was lynched on the cross. Jesus, in his ministry, death, and resurrection, refused to be held captive by fear. Instead, he looked toward the future, enduring what others would not so that generations to come could run their race. Our work is ongoing until God’s promises are fulfilled.

Not everyone is called to take down hate groups in court, but everyone is called to resist injustice and hate. The church today has many ways to take a stand. It can be as simple as speaking up when someone’s needs are being threatened, teaching sound theology in the face of white Christian nationalism, or calling lawmakers to remind them that people’s needs are holy.

What happened last week was not just a victory for Metropolitan AME or even the Black Church. This was a victory for all who love God and love their neighbor. This flipping and reversing of power gives us hope: hope that what we see now will not always be if we do our part in pushing back the chaos of empire.

Beloved, fear did not win in 2020. Fear stepped onto hallowed ground, trying to silence the voice of liberation, but oppression never has the final say. And fear won’t win today. In his wisdom, Thurman says we must recognize fear for what it is so we can destroy it — knowing that God’s Spirit lives within us. The Spirit will help us to do the work ahead to preserve humanity and creation.

The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice. I ask you: How will you help bend it?

Because in the end, a theology that stands against fear is a theology that refuses to lose.



Moya Harris

Moya Harris, an itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, is director of racial justice at Sojourners.

POPE'S MESSAGE



Monday, February 17, 2025

"Jesus proclaims the poor, the hungry, the suffering and the persecuted blessed, and he admonishes those who are rich, satisfied, who laugh and are praised by the people. The reason behind this paradoxical beatitude lies in the fact that God is close to those who suffer, and intercedes to free them from their bondage. Jesus sees this; he already sees the beatitude beyond its negative reality. And likewise, the "woe to you" addressed to those who are doing well today, has the purpose of "waking" them from the dangerous deceit of egotism, and opening them up to the logic of love, while they still have the time to do so."

Pope Francis

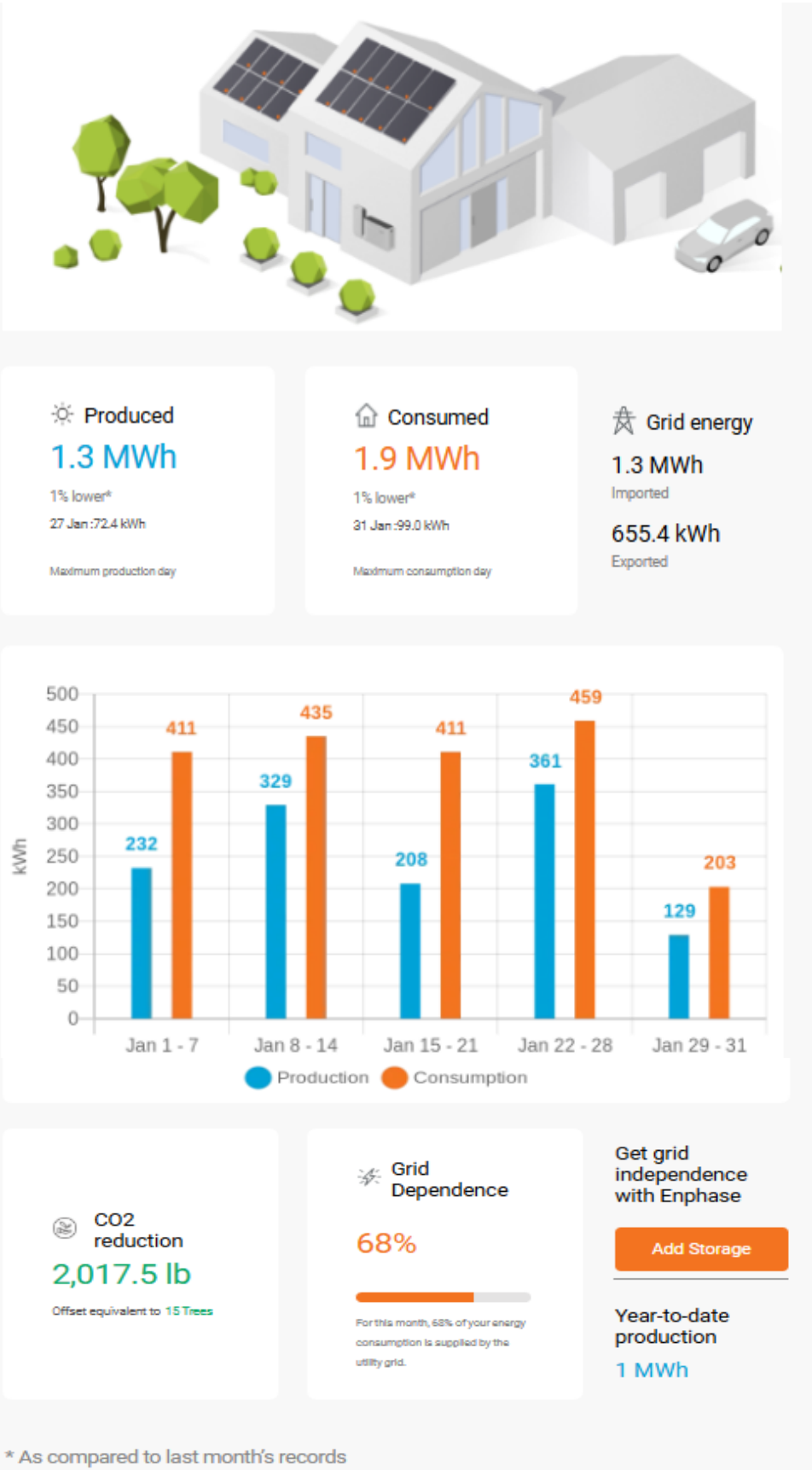
**The
Christian
Century** Thoughtful,
Independent,
Progressive

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"those who are baptized no longer belong
to the world....
they belong to Christ alone."



SOLAR REPORT - JANUARY 2025



MARCH 2025 BIRTHDAYS!



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

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

Grace Lutheran Church – Readers for March 2025

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

Date	Reading #	Reading	Reader
3/2	1	Exodus 34: 29-35	Dorothea Glatte
	2	2 Corinthians 3: 12 to 4: 2	Betsy DeRoma
	Psalm	Psalm 99	Unison
3/5 – Ash Wednesday	Psalm	Psalm 51: 1-17	Pastor
	1	Isaiah 58: 1-12	Betsy DeRoma
	2	2 Corinthians 5: 20b-6:10	Judy Butterworth-Kremer
3/9	1	Deuteronomy 26: 1-11	Kasumi Campbell
	2	Romans 10: 8b - 13	Ivy Thomas
	Psalm	Sing On Eagles Wing - ELW 787	All
3/16	1	Genesis 15: 1-12, 17-18	Barbara Calogero
	2	Philippians 3: 17-4:1	David Eberly
	Psalm	Psalm 27	Unison
3/23	1	Isaiah 55: 1-9	Marty Homeen
	2	1 Corinthians 10: 1-13	Rodney Carr
	Psalm	Psalm 63: 1-8	Rodney Carr
3/30	1	Joshua 5: 9-12	Dale Eberhardt
	2	2 Corinthians 5:16-21	Lou Oliver
	Psalm	Psalm 32	alternating Pastor then Congregation
4/6	1	Isaiah 43: 16-21	Barbara Ruhe
	2	Philippians 3: 4b – 14	Betsy DeRoma
	Psalm	Psalm 126	Unison



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Lloyd Smith, Lay Minister

Betsy DeRoma, President

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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