



SEPTEMBER 2021

A Memorable and Beautiful Wedding

Weddings are among the very most important times a couple has to publicly “vow”, and “allow” all to hear how they feel about each other, and to display the joy of being together. They commit to remain with each other for their lives, to love, honor, respect and care for each other all those days and nights. Some joyful, some sorrowful... but all expressed and lived with abiding love.

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Planning for a wedding is a big deal, too. Planning for one after knowing and caring for one another for nine years, is even bigger. It's time. We are ready. God is with us. Our families are with us. We've taken all the steps... and we've planned during and through a worldwide pandemic. One that has demanded special time and attention and caused delays that would have not happened had it not been for this dreadful healthcare crisis. It had nothing to do with the two young people; they waited patiently. Yet it was to cost them, and it was a test of their ability to deal with such a major challenge.



They did the right thing, every step of the way. No regrets as all know and see just how wonderfully they lived through this time of unexpected hardships. They scheduled their wedding for a distant time, when it might be safe for everyone. They hoped that this waiting would lead to a very special wedding, and it did. But not exactly as hoped, and clearly not as deserved.

Amanda and Kyle waited until it was safe, to spend some time with a pastor, talking about themselves, their lives, their hopes and dreams. They also addressed the challenges, and the realities of being together, finding ways to adapt, to find boundaries, to love and to respect, to live with conflicting priorities and to address the issue of balance, or perhaps, “blending” in their lives.

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A Memorable and Beautiful Wedding

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They were faithful. They opened themselves up and spoke of the issues of importance to them in their lives together, and explored ways to be good to each other.

It was special to be with them. They are and were a special couple. They truly were in love, and had already displayed a level of patience that sadly confronts many people in similar circumstance during this time of fear and sickness. They persisted. And, they made sure that the date for their wedding would be at a time that it appeared that the pandemic would be subsiding.

In the meantime, the church wanted this family to experience the most beautiful and memorable wedding of the three generations that were to be married here. As we entered 2021 we conceptualized a major “External Improvement project”, to address the overgrown nature of its trees and bushes, to make the church a suitable place for such an important wedding. By doing this, we would also be able to showcase the wonderful products that Fresh Start is now building, and we had lots of ideas about how we could make Grace shine. (By the way, Grace always does shine. It shines by what it does, not by how it looks. But that is a discussion for a different article). We hoped that the newlyweds might experience their time at the church as beyond their expectations. The church did other planning, too. We offered to make custom bulletins that were to meet or exceed their expectations. Color pictures were requested and a design matching their invitations was prepared. We printed 125 color bulletins. We ordered a considerable amount of furniture from Fresh Start that would improve the outdoors, and hired a landscaper to put the finishing touches on the front look the day before the wedding.

We ordered a canopy to provide cover so that it would allow people to stand in waiting during rain or snow. It was promised to be installed by the time of the wedding. We also made contact with CATV to offer alternative parking for wedding goers, and we set-up Zoom so that people from the family located in Europe, or unable to come, could witness the wedding. Bernie Michel volunteered to help and joined us for a meeting with the bride and her parents, and the rehearsal on the Friday before the wedding.

The Thursday before the rehearsal and the wedding, we had a flood that filled the



Community Room, the Kitchen, the All-Purpose Room and the hallways between. It was a mess. A team of four people worked tirelessly to clean up and dry the place out. We brought ServePro in to give us help with the cleanup (they didn't arrive until after the wedding).

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A Memorable and Beautiful Wedding

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As word about Sunday's weather grew to a frenzy threatening to surpass a 35 year-old record hurricane, including potential tornadoes, it was clear that the family badly wanted to have the wedding. We wanted to do for them. And, we did it.

In reflecting on that day, I am thankful to have provided our church for the third generation of the bride's family. I am thankful to all who worked so hard in taking care of so many things. We are a small church, with an elderly membership. We accomplished some amazing things even as we faced disappointment after disappointment. Rather than detailing all that went wrong, what I want to share is all that went right. It was a lovely wedding, the bride was the most beautiful person in the church, bar none. The groom was deeply moved and showed his love for his bride in ways that cannot be completely enumerated. He was the handsomest man in the Church.

Each wrote their vows. After a whimsical parody of deciding who should speak first, the groom and his bride spoke deeply about their love and commitment to each other. In all of the weddings I have been involved with or presided at in my rather long life, those vows were simply the most wonderful I have had the privilege of hearing. There is no question that God was present as Kyle and Amanda spoke to each other and the assembly.

The storm picked up as the service started and thoroughly soaked everyone, coming in and out, including this pastor. Yet it was a wonder and a deeply moving event that survived a pandemic, a tropical storm, CATV's failure to unlock their gate, the awkward and unforeseen difficulties beginning the procession. Friends and family all came in spite of the pouring rain. All were ready to celebrate afterwards, and I bet they truly did.

God Almighty, send your light and truth to Amanda and Kyle Merry, to keep them all the days of their lives. The hand of God protect them; the holy angels accompany them; and the blessing of almighty God, the Father, the + Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with them now and forever. Amen.



Pastor's Message: The Signs and What They Mean

It's been a couple of months since we have reached out to you with words of hope and concern. As we reflect on these months, it is certain that we have witnessed many signs. Some of us take them in and move on, others accumulate them and seek to find meaning. I must admit to being in both camps, swaying back and forth. Perhaps you are there, too.

There have been incidents of destruction, wild-fires, earthquakes, storms and the like. Things that we have witnessed or known about for all our lives. Not really all that rare, but things we have come to endure, hoping that the remnants may fast disappear. But I must say, that the signs are so much more troubling today. We can't simply wipe them from our minds and hearts. Why is that so? Is that true for you, too? What are you making of the frequency, the intensity, and the devastation?



I can't look at it and look away. I'm remembering the collapse of the building in Florida, the fires burning in the western part of the United States, and still burning. Myanmar faced with a horrific coups by the military, even as COVID-19 is having its way, killing vulnerable people without access to remedies. Haiti, the assassination of its president, two earthquakes and a hurricane. Death, destruction, and hopelessness conspiring to make for a fearful and seemingly endless series of setbacks.

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Afghanistan, people trying to escape, betrayal by those we kept in power with our money and blood, disappear in eleven days leaving hundreds of thousands vulnerable to the Taliban, and perhaps worse, ISIS. The Delta Variant dashing our hope for an end to the pandemic, and so-called “anti-vaccers” having their way primarily in southern states, threatening the entire country with spreading the disease faster and blocking our achievement of herd immunity we thought was in sight. Droughts, species dying or being killed throughout the world, as a result of avarice and hunting; greed and lack of concern. There is hardly a place on earth that has not been impacted. Climate Change is real. Voter fraud is not. My God, what is happening here?



These are not all of the signs that we see. But they are the ones that are put in front of us by the media every waking hour of the day and night, over and over again. Bad news travels fast and furious. It is all that we seem to talk about, it is all that we fear and it seems to be growing. We even are now barraged with ridiculous lies, dangerous misinformation that threatens the lives of people and the very infrastructure that supports our democracy. When will this end and where are the signs that we may be able to change? Will God rescue us, showing us the way to address what seems to be totally out of control, and way beyond our ability to stop.

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Pastor's Message: The Signs and What They Mean

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We may be approaching the end of this world as we have known it. But, still, I trust in our loving, merciful and ever-present God. Prayers are listened to, miracles continue to happen, and I can feel the presence of the Holy Spirit at Grace, in our city, state and country, too. Time seems to be such that our potential for saving our planet and our species are growing slimmer, but we haven't run out of it, yet. I often wonder what God thinks about us to whom he provided life, and responsibility. Is it possible that we may save ourselves or be saved?

At Grace, we believe that "yes" we can do something. Each one of us can. Whether it be by feeding the hungry, nurturing relationships among all people, the building of community, the wrestling with the issues of the day, the providing of vaccinations, paying attention to our footprint, use of solar panels and hydroponic gardens, planting pollinator gardens, advocating for the poor and vulnerable, helping provide jobs for the jobless, worshiping God in-person and virtually gathering with faith leaders in forming a very real means to impact on the things that need attention in our communities, our helping hands and our caring hearts. These are things that we can do! And we continue to do them.

Perhaps the horrors all around us are God's way of getting our attention. We must love and care for one another. Climate change, pandemics, natural disasters, and wealth disparity all point to how we are:

First, **all in the same boat.**
Second, **all of us, no matter how wealthy or poor, are experiencing the very same risks.**
Third, **we need to come together and put our "others" first.**
And, **we must care for ourselves, at the very same time.**



May we remember the new commandment that Jesus provided his disciples the night before he was tortured and died on that cross:

"Little children, I am with you only a little longer...
I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.
Just as I have loved you, you should love one another.
By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."





Join faith leaders in contacting Congress to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R.4). Send a customized message today through the ELCA Action Center.

According to The Brennan Center for Justice, a nonpartisan law and policy institute, “Between January 1 and July 14, 2021, at least 18 states enacted 30 laws that restrict access to the vote. These laws make mail voting and early voting more difficult, impose harsher voter ID requirements, and make faulty voter purges more likely, among other things. More than 400 bills with provisions that restrict voting access have been introduced in 49 states in the 2021 legislative sessions.”

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s (ELCA) social message on “Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy” points us to the need to examine this trend: “ELCA social teaching holds that all residents of the United States have a responsibility to make government function well—not to abandon our democracy but to engage it in a spirit of robust civic duty. For Lutherans, this responsibility is lived out as a calling from God, expressed in the discipleship described in our baptismal promises. It is based on our understanding of how God governs human society.”

The ELCA understands that justice is done when we live out our mutual responsibility for one another by guaranteeing our neighbor’s right to vote and participate freely and fully in society (see message in the “ELCA Civic Engagement Guide” from ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton). In 2013, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, our denomination’s highest legislative authority, adopted a social policy resolution titled “Voting Rights to All Citizens.” This resolution calls us to express concern for our nation’s history of voter suppression from the Jim Crow era to the current climate of restrictive voter laws that create barriers to many people of color in their right to vote. This resolution calls on all part of this church to “promote public life worthy of the name” by speaking out as advocates and engaging in local efforts such as voter registration and supporting legislation to guarantee the right to vote to all citizens.

Passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R.4) would be a key step in ensuring the voices of all citizens will be safeguarded and heard. Its provisions would help reinstate guidelines that ensure protection through oversight and combat voter suppression.



HOW VOTING RIGHTS BECAME A PRIVILEGE FOR SOME, NOT A RIGHT FOR ALL BY ADAM RUSSELL TAYLOR

AUG 26, 2021

On Tuesday, as the House passed the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, I was filled with hope for our democracy. But overshadowing that hope was moral indignation, as I realized that not a single Republican member voted in favor of the act — further proof that voting rights has metastasized into a hyper-partisan issue in 2021, despite its long history of bipartisan support.



After it was signed into law by Democratic President Lyndon Johnson in 1965, the Voting Rights Act has been reauthorized five times; each time the reauthorization was signed by a Republican president. When it was reauthorized most recently in 2006, it passed the Senate with unanimous support: 98 to 0. Guaranteeing the sacred right to vote for all citizens has been — and should continue to be — a nonpartisan cause and bipartisan priority. For democracy to work for all of us, it must include us all.

As people of faith, we are called to close the gap between the brokenness of what is and what ought to be. We are called to a higher standard of truth-telling, even if that truth is uncomfortable, inconvenient, and costly. And here is the truth: Restricting voting under the pretense of election security is based on a mountain of lies. The truth is that these efforts are often rooted in the spiritual lie that the full benefits of U.S. citizenship are a privilege for some rather than a fundamental right for all. The truth is that one party is trying to expand the electorate while the other is trying to shrink it to maintain power and blunt the impact of the changing demographics that do not work in its favor. The truth is that one party largely continues to either embrace or capitulate to the Big Lie that the last election was stolen due to widespread voter fraud.

We need the federal government to strengthen the Voting Rights Act because of the GOP's efforts to pass more restrictive state voting bills — bills that often have the explicit goal of deterring the votes of communities of color, young people, and more. Many GOP politicians and operatives have even acknowledged that this is their **explicit motivation and goal**. As we have **argued** over the past few election cycles, these efforts are not only anti-democratic, they are an assault on *imago dei*, the very image of God.

The struggle that is unfolding around voting rights feels eerily familiar: We are hearing the same arguments that were used by Southern politicians during the height of the civil rights struggle to block the original 1965 Voting Rights Act. Central to this argument is an emphasis on states' rights, stoking fears of federal takeover. In a letter sent on Monday to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, 15 Republican members argued that the John Lewis Voting Rights Act "would federalize our election system, give more power to unelected career bureaucrats in Washington, and unconstitutionally erode the ability of states to oversee elections." Once again states' rights are being used to avoid addressing the anti-voter impact of legislation that has been passed by Republican-controlled legislatures.

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HOW VOTING RIGHTS BECAME A PRIVILEGE FOR SOME, NOT A RIGHT FOR ALL

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During the debate over the bill this week, we also heard many GOP politicians and conservative pundits argue that record turnout in 2020 makes voting rights legislation unnecessary. But record turnout, particularly within communities of color, was fueled by unprecedented organizing efforts because of how much was at stake in the last election; while we can't predict how many voters will be deterred from voting in the future due to new state laws, there is already **evidence** that these restrictions may be keeping people of color from voting. For example, in the 2016 election in Wisconsin, **strict voter ID laws** prevented 8 percent of whites and 27 percent of African Americans from voting. That alone is enough to impact an election and yet does not account for other suppressive efforts, like voter roll purges, polling place relocations and closures, disinformation campaigns, and voter intimidation.

In many places across the country today, the promise of democracy is still at risk. States **have introduced** more than 400 state bills and enacted 30 laws that erect barriers to the ballot box for millions of Americans. And last month's Supreme Court *Brnovich v. DNC* decision — which upheld Arizona's ban on third-party ballot collection and invalidating of ballots cast in the wrong precincts — will make it even more difficult for voters to challenge voting restrictions in the future. That is why we must come together to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and restore the federal government's ability to block state and local governments from passing racially discriminatory bills.

READ: The Moral Case for Suspending the Filibuster

The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would restore the original Voting Rights Act in several important ways. In addition to updating the formula for deciding which states and localities require approval to change voting laws, it would also require that certain types of changes to voting laws be pre-approved if proposed in a diverse area. States and localities would also need to give public notice to all voters of some types of voting changes. And it would address the recent *Brnovich v. DNC* decision by clarifying which factors voters of color can use to prove the impact of their vote had been diluted or their right to vote denied under section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. The bill contains many other similarly important provisions — passing it would restore the ability of the Voting Rights Act to block discriminatory voting practices *before they go into effect*.

The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act is the last test whether there are enough Republican senators of conscience who will be willing to place safeguarding our democracy and protecting the right to vote over party loyalty and short-term interests. I pray that there are, but reality and experience have shown the opposite. That's why, if necessary, it is imperative that Democrats find the moral courage to **temporarily suspend the filibuster** to pass voting rights legislation.



Because protecting the right to vote is so critically important to the health of our democracy, I hope and pray that you joined us in the **March On For Voting Rights** events this past weekend in Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Miami, Houston, Phoenix, and other cities around the country. These critical marches will commemorate the 58th anniversary of the March on Washington when Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech; King's son, Martin Luther King III, **will headline** the Washington march this year. As the organizers **state**:

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HOW VOTING RIGHTS BECAME A PRIVILEGE FOR SOME, NOT A RIGHT FOR ALL

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Marching is a form of nonviolent protest, and protest is a form of democratic expression older than America itself. We march to shine the light of truth on what is happening in state legislatures, ensure that Americans understand what's at stake, and give people a mechanism to demand action on this most urgent issue of our generation.

If you are at all able to do so and live in the D.C. area, I urge you to connect to the event organizers and offer to **volunteer** this Saturday. If you live in or near any of the other cities, I hope you will also put on your marching shoes and raise your voices to protect the sacred right to vote. I can't think of a better way to honor the inspiring legacy of Rep. John Lewis. "Nobody's free until everybody's free." These are the iconic words of freedom fighter Fannie Lou Hamer. Yes, our freedom is truly interdependent and intertwined, and nothing protects our freedom more in our democracy than people freely exercising their right to vote.



Adam Russell Taylor



COVID-19 Update-Regarding the Pfizer Vaccine

Special Update

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted permanent approval of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for people ages 16 and older on August 23, 2021. The vaccine also continues to be available under emergency use authorization (EUA), including for individuals 12 through 15 years of age and for the administration of a third dose in certain immunocompromised individuals.

Americans started safely receiving the Pfizer vaccine since it was granted EUA from the FDA last December. This new announcement of a permanent approval means the vaccine passed numerous, required safety checks and study of reported side effects or adverse events. Several months of data have shown us the vaccine is safe and effective.

We hope people who've been waiting for this announcement will get vaccinated as soon as possible. Vaccination is the most effective way to end the COVID-19 pandemic and stop additional variants.



Martin Luther, writing during the Bubonic plague of the 1500's:

"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I will fumigate, purify the air, administer medicine, and take medicine. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order to not become contaminated, and thus perchance inflict and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me. But, I have done what he has expected of me, and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person, but will go freely. This is a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy, and does not tempt God." - Martin Luther

CREATION CORNER: Nancy Urban

Here we are supposedly coming out of this pandemic only to be faced with unprecedented heat domes, continued wild fires, huge flooding from torrential rains, long term droughts. I could go on about the earth warming, the many species disappearing, the Arctic not only melting but burning, the many upsets of the balance of nature and I don't even want to mention all the political upheavals! I have been concerned about using less plastic, while others are dying in 116 degree heat, running from their burning homes, watching their entire crop dry up and blow away.

In all of this, I believe God is calling us to **CHANGE THE WAY WE DO THINGS**. Our continued clinging to the ways we have been living is leading us down a very destructive and unjust path. Yes, we have been recycling, we have added solar and wind energy, we use less plastic bags etc. These steps are good and do make a difference, but they are little steps and we are now called to **BIGGER DRAMATIC CHANGES**.

Real change can be scary; it can be very uncomfortable stepping into the unknown. Getting rid of fossil fuels? No more oil, natural gas, coal? How will we cook our food, heat our homes, get around from one place to another?—who will lose their jobs?—what if our economy plunders? The list could go on and on.

God's people, people of faith have many Biblical examples of stepping into the unknown, of making major changes with no guarantees of what would happen. Mary, unmarried and pregnant—Abraham and Sarah heading out to a new land—the exodus from the slavery in Egypt—the disciples leaving their nets to follow Jesus. God was with them, God provided a way.

In our present situation, I believe we are called to more than individual acts of creation care. Big, effective changes call for action on a larger scale. This takes supporting those people, groups and policies that are concerned with changes that will stop our contributions to global warming, turn us in another direction to work with nature and each other to heal this land.

We have been blessed with many hymns that remind us of God's call to change, to seek the common good, to have faith in and hope for the future. One song that is not a hymn, but has been on my playlist lately is "I am Willing" by Holly Near. I share these words with you here, and blessing to all as we work together, wherever we have been planted, to be caretakers of all of creation.

I am open and I am willing
To be hopeless would seem so strange
It dishonors those who go before us
So lift me up to the light of change
There is hurting in my family
There is sorrow in my town
There is panic in the nation
There is wailing the whole world round
May the children see more clearly
May the elders be more wise
May the winds of change caress us
Even though it burns our eyes
Give me a mighty oak to hold my confusion
Give a desert to hold my fears
Give me a sunset to hold my wonder
Give me an ocean to hold my tears
But I am open and I am willing
So lift me up to the light of change



global warming

I **S**cream
not enough

Foodshare Walk Against Hunger

Saturday, September 18 | 10:00 am | Dunkin' Donuts Park

For over 10 years, our Foodshare partnership has supported the Friday Gathering and our neighborhood. Sign up—online or with a paper registration form—for team Grace! Be a walker or make a financial donation and support a walker.

Donate online at www.foodshare.org. Click “Donate” and search for Grace in the Team section. When you support team Grace, half of the donation is directed to Grace to cover program fees.



CONNECTICUT FOOD BANK | FOODSHARE

WALK
Against Hunger

Help Us Knock Hunger Out of the Park!

SATURDAY
SEPT 18th

Walk steps off:
10:00 AM
Registration: 8:00 AM

DUNKIN' DONUTS PARK
HARTFORD, CT

Register Online → WWW.FOODSHAREWALK.ORG

Complimentary parking courtesy of the the Hartford Parking Authority.
Connecticut Food Bank, Inc. is a beneficiary of contributions to United Way through workplace giving campaigns.

Thank you to our
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GLOBAL ATLANTIC
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KEY BANK
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PEOPLES BANK
SUBWAY
THE MIALE TEAM
(KELLER WILLIAMS)

Produced


2.2 MWh

25% lower *

31 Jul : 119.5 kWh
Maximum production day

Consumed


1.5 MWh

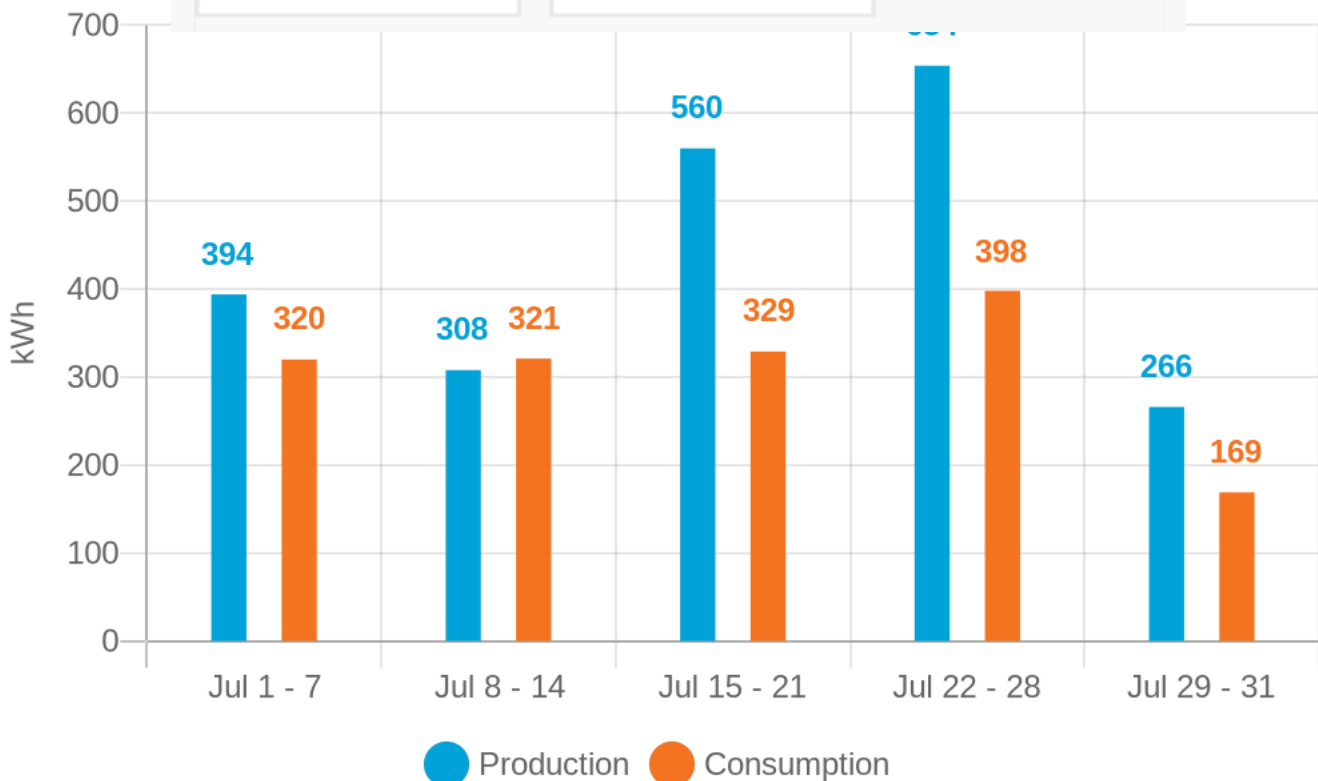
33% higher *

23 Jul : 106.2 kWh
Maximum consumption day

 Grid **energy**

724.8 kWh
Imported


1.4 MWh
Exported



 Carbon offset

1.51 tons

Offset equivalent to 39
Trees

 **Energy**
Independence

52%

For this month, 48% of your **energy**
consumption is supplied by the
utility grid.

Get grid independence
with Enphase

[Add Storage](#)

Year-to-date production
14.7 MWh

KIDS IN CHURCH

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, 5 and Ryan 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait.'" Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus!"

A father was at the beach with his children when the four-year-old son ran up to him, grabbed his hand, and led him to the shore where a seagull lay dead in the sand.

"Daddy, what happened to him?" the son asked. "He died and went to Heaven," the Dad replied. The boy thought a moment and then said, "Did God throw him back down?"

A wife invited some people to dinner. At the table, she turned to their six-year-old daughter and said, "Would you like to say the blessing?" "I wouldn't know what to say," the girl replied. "Just say what you hear Mommy say," the wife answered. The daughter bowed her head and said, "Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?"

After the christening of his baby brother in church, Jason sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, the boy replied, "That preacher said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I wanted to stay with you guys."

I had been teaching my three-year old daughter, Caitlin, the Lord's Prayer for several evenings at bedtime, she would repeat after me the lines from the prayer. Finally, she decided to go solo. I listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word right up to the end of the prayer: "Lead us not into temptation," she prayed, "but deliver us some E-mail."

One particular four-year-old prayed, "And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets."

A little boy was overheard praying: "Lord, if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it. I'm having a real good time like I am."

September 2021 Birthdays & Anniversaries!

**Happy Birthday
To all those who birthday is
this month.!**

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



**Happy Anniversary to all those
who have an anniversary
this month.**



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