GRACE NOTES

DECEMBER 2026 VOLUME 78, ISSUE 12

Lead Pastor
Shane Koepke

Deacon
Jessie Camp

Financial Director
Marsha Smith

Music Director/IT
Aaron Bartz

Office Manager
Deb Attig

Building Supervisor
Darin LaFrance

Engagement Director
Jenny Campos

Office Hours
Monday - Thursday
9:00 am - 2 pm
507-373-6496

Worship Services
Sunday Morning
9:00 am

Sunday School
Sunday Morning
10:00 am
Sept. through May

www.gracealbertlea.org

www.facebook.com/GraceAlbertLea

Pastor Shane

Four important worship events are found in December. Besides Easter, it is the fullest season of the year.

- **Advent:** The anticipation of Jesus's birth on Christmas. It's a time for us to expect, hope and wonder what the world might be with Christ by our side. Yes, it's already happened and yes, we are people who know the story, but remembering and honoring that time in history invites us to wonder with our ancestors and with a renewed energy in our hearts. Advent is filled with preparation about how to celebrate Christmas, yes, but I would also urge us to think about ways we can prepare and wonder at ways to serve God in renewed ways!

- **Service of Hope and Healing (December 16, 6:30 p.m.):** This service isn't "officially" a church holiday but it has become a Grace tradition over the years. It was originally called "Blue Christmas" and whatever we call it, the worship is a space to place our hope and grief in the midst of the Christmas season of celebrations and family. This worship begins with a meal in the fellowship hall this year and is a service of community and belonging. It places our grief and hope side by side in a meaningful worship time.

- **Christmas!** This wonderful gift of God-with-us if found in this day! We have worship at 3, 5, and 11 pm. I hope you are able to participate!

- **Breakfast church!** On Dec. 27th we will gather in the fellowship hall for breakfast and worship around the tables. We will sing Christmas songs, hear a message, share in conversation and community with our fellow church goers. Please plan on being a part of the day. It'll be faithful, fun and filling.

Grace is busy and alive this December in worship and many other activities to anticipate, hope and celebrate Christ's birth among us!

Pastor Shane

Deacon Jessie

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. They lived in a land of shadows, but now light is shining on them…A child is born to us! A son is given to us! And he will be our ruler. He will be called, wonderful counselor, Mighty God, eternal father, prince of peace.”
Isaiah 9:2 & 6

It’s kind of funny that we’re talking about seeing a ‘great light’ when the sun sets at 4 pm. It’s the time of year when we are getting home in the dark. Where our internal clocks are just confused because it feels like it should be midnight, but in reality it is only 5 pm.

I’m always astounded by the ways our bodies are telling us to slow down in the winter. You might find that you’re tired more often, you are craving more time under the blankets on your couch, and you just want to move a bit slower. The world, though, it never stops. No matter how much you want to stay in bed, life continues to move at a breakneck pace. When Christmas and New Year’s come around, you’re running to family functions, making cookies, sending cards, and everything else the season demands of you.

I think it’s this disconnect—between what your body wants to do and what your mind is telling you to do—that heightens the holiday season stress.

And yet, amidst all the chaos, we come together and celebrate a savior who comes into the world to be the light. To bring peace. To rule over the world with justice, love, and mercy. When our lives may feel dark (both literally and figuratively), we have hope in the coming of the Messiah. One who will guide us when life gets tricky. Who will walk among us when we feel burnt out and stressed. One who will come into this world as a real, living human: who will know exactly what it feels like to be overwhelmed, busy, or just not in the mood.

Jesus is Immanuel: God with us. How beautiful is that? Jesus’s light shines on us because Jesus is always with us. He is by your side, no matter what. When life feels out of your control, we know that Jesus is always here.

Last year, after our 11 PM Christmas Eve service concluded, I got home some time around 1 AM on Christmas day. As I stood on my porch in front of my door, I looked out on my street and couldn’t help but notice the utter silence. No cars, animals, birds, or people. I sat there for a while, realizing, truly, what Silent Night was getting at. Jesus’s presence provides a peace that we truly cannot live without.

My prayers are with you all throughout this holiday season.
Deacon Jessie

Church Council Minutes: November 10, 2026

Present at meeting

Pastor Shane Koepke, Deacon Jessie Camp, Doreen Pontow, Jerry Dahl, JD Carlson, Robert Jacobson, Philip Lonneman, Cleo Moller, Adele Rosnow, Erica Samp, Gerry Vogt, Jennifer Zoller; Dave Drommerhausen

Opening Devotions: Jen Zoller

Devotion centered around Isaiah 41:10, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." This verse was marked in her grandmother's Bible as a reminder of the assurance of the presence of our God. Also shared were a handful of faith-related sayings and saved mementos.

Open Forum

None

Approval of November Council Agenda

Motion made by: Jerry Dahl
Seconded by: Robert Jacobson
Approved

Approval of October Council Minutes

Motion made by: Gerry Vogt
Seconded by: Jerry Dahl
Approved

Financial Report: Dave Drommerhausen

- Current bottom line year-to-date (through October, ten months): short approx. $35,000
- November has five Sundays, which provides an opportunity for an additional week of giving; December giving is typically strong as well
- Potential interest income from CDs may also help the year-end financial position
- Detailed budget information was distributed to staff members responsible for individual budget lines; staff were asked to review their areas and return their proposed budgets

Motion made by: JD Carlson
Seconded by: Philip Lonneman
Approved

Food for Backpacks: Dave Drommerhausen

- Food boxes will arrive on Nov. 19; volunteers lined up to assist with re-palletizing
- A $10,000 grant was received; three other grant applications are in progress
- Discussions are underway with Southwest Middle School Principal, Tyler Johnson, regarding continuation of the program as 7th grade moves to the high school next year.
- Noted the Food for Backpacks program has been operating for approximately 9 years

Old Business: Pastor Shane

Kitchen remodel & Fundraiser Update

- There is $3,500 left to raise for the Kitchen Campaign.
- The accounting goal is to have the balance paid to zero by December 31st.
- Thank-you postcards will be mailed to everyone who has contributed to the campaign, noting Grace received contributions from a wide range of donors, including large and small gifts. Various fundraisers brought in support from many different people.

New Business: Pastor Shane

Church Staff Wages & Insurance

- Personnel Team met recently and discussed staff compensation for the upcoming budget year.
- Recommendation is a 3% overall staff wage increase, following the Synod's recommendation for clergy. The same percentage is being applied across staff positions.
- Health insurance costs are increasing approximately 15%. Darin LaFrance and Deacon Jessie are the two staff members whose health insurance is paid by Grace. The increase is significant but can be accommodated in the budget.
- Combined impact of wages, payroll taxes, benefits, and other related expenses is estimated to be less than a 5% overall increase. Total increase estimated at approx. $18,000.

Continued on page 4

Church Council Minutes: November 10, 2026

Report: Pastor Shane

- New wall decal/artwork was installed along the curved staircase, and feedback has been positive. The artwork brightens the space and provides an easier landmark when directing people through the building.
- The Grace Foundation met recently and discussed the farmland owned by Grace. Discussion generated some concern among congregation members, with several expressing strong feelings about keeping the land. Considerations included:
  - Income currently received from renting the farmland, future income from the windmill, potential interest income if land proceeds were invested, and the relative stability of farmland and windmill income compared with fluctuations in the stock market.
  - The general impression was that continuing to own the land may be financially comparable to selling and investing the proceeds.
- Windmill construction is reportedly expected to begin in 2028, with operation anticipated in 2029.
- Area pastors are meeting at Grace on Tuesday, Nov. 17
- Thanksgiving Eve worship will be on Wed., Nov. 25 at First Lutheran Church at 6:30pm. Pie will be served afterward. Pastor Shane will be preaching.
- Christmas Eve worship services will be Thurs., Dec. 24 at 3:00, 5:00, and 11:00pm.
- "Breakfast Church" will be held on Sunday, Dec. 27.
  - The congregation will gather in the fellowship hall for worship around tables and breakfast together.
  - Service will still include music and the usual worship elements, but in a more casual setting.
  - This is intended as a special post-Christmas gathering and a trial of a different worship format.
  - Similar dinner church gatherings were held before COVID and were well attended.

Report: Pastor Shane continued

- The Luther College Choir will perform at Grace on Sunday, Jan. 24 at 4:00pm.
  - The event fulfills one of Aaron Bartz's goals of bringing outside musical group performances into the church.
  - Ava Cunningham, a Grace member, is participating in the group.
  - Grace will provide a meal (for approx 72 people) following the performance.
- The sound system continues to be a work in progress. In-ear monitors are reportedly working better, although there are still occasional issues.
- Staff reviews have been completed for all employees. Reviews were reported to have gone well, noting positive working relationships among staff.

Report: Deacon Jessie

- Lefse Day is Saturday, Dec. 5. Sign up in the narthex - all are welcome!
- Confirmation activities went very well overall. Students did a good job with their faith projects.
  - Confirmation pictures have arrived. Families can pick them up at church.
- Grace recently assembled homeless care kits for SEMCAC. The Mission Team coordinated funding through a special offering and donations. Supplies were purchased and organized ahead of the event.
  - Approximately 55 kits were assembled, exceeding the original goal of 50.
  - This was a wonderful way for congregation members of all ages to work together.
- It was recently discovered that Grace owns six cemetery plots at Hillcrest Cemetery. The plots were donated to the church around 1995.
- Mission Team discussed selling the plots back to the cemetery and using the proceeds to support grief-related ministry. The cemetery's initial offer of buying back the plots was considered low, so further discussions are underway.
- Council members noted the possibility of offering the plots to congregation members if someone is interested.

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Church Council Minutes: November 10, 2026

Atlar Guild

None

Building, Equipment & Grounds

None

Library

Melody Munden has been reorganizing the church library. Children's books have moved to the Sunday School room for easier access and checkout. Teen books have moved to the youth room. Melody has been reviewing the collection and spending time with Sunday School children once a month.

Mission

- November food drive is focused on collecting food for the New Richland Food Shelf.
- First Lutheran is doing the same, and a Food Blessing is planned as part of the Thanksgiving Eve service.
- The team is continuing to brainstorm ways to distribute the $50,000 designated for mission work.

Music

None

Personnel

- Staff reviews have been completed, including the review of the pastor by the Personnel Team.
- The Employee Handbook will be updated.

Scholarship

None

Sunday School

- Christmas Program rehearsals will begin on Sunday, Nov. 22.
- Aaron Bartz wrote the script, which will focus primarily on the shepherds.
- The Christmas program is scheduled for Sunday, Dec. 20.
- Light refreshments will be served afterward.

Ushers

None

Visitation

- Team members were invited to attend an upcoming training session at Wedgwood Cove, sponsored by the Naeve Health Care Foundation.
- Training will focus on empathy and having meaningful conversations with the people they visit.

Youth Ministry

- Youth Bible Study meets weekly in the Youth Room, from 10:15-11am.
- The most recent activity focused on spiritual practices and how art can be a spiritual practice. Youth considered the question, “Who is God?” and created small tile collages, which are on display outside Marsha’s office.
- Friendsgiving, our annual Youth potluck, was Sunday, Nov. 15. Approx 18 kids attended.
- Youth Takeover Sunday will be during worship on Sunday, Dec. 6
- The National Youth Gathering will be in Minneapolis, summer 2027. Grace has 9 youth and 2 chaperones slated to attend.

Prayers:

Healing prayers and prayers of peace for congregation members’ family and friends, one who is in hospice care and one with an upcoming surgery. Prayers of thankfulness for our Grace Youth and continual work on programming and opportunities for them. Prayers of thanks to all veterans, and appreciation for their service and sacrifice.

Roundtable:

- Positive feedback continues to be heard regarding improved accessibility with the new ramps, both in the sanctuary and fellowship hall.
- Positive comments were shared regarding kids participating in the children's message during worship.

Next Meeting

December 8, 2026 | 6:30 pm in the Fireside Room

Adjournment

7:18 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Jennifer Zoller, Grace Lutheran Council Secretary

Grace Prays

Prayers of Healing

For those with new or ongoing health diagnoses

For Pat Arends and for Bev Evans

Prayers for Peace, Joy & Safe Travels

As we celebrate this Christmas season, fill our hearts with peace, joy, and gratitude.

Watch over those traveling near and far, bringing them safely to their destinations.

Comfort those who find the holidays difficult or lonely, and help us share your love and kindness with others.

May the hope and light of Christ guide us throughout this season and into the new year.

The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.
Psalm 121:8

Grace Prays

We are honored to pray with and for you. To keep our list current, names (shared with permission) remain for two weeks and may be renewed. Please contact the office to add or remove a name. Thank you.

Pastoral Care

To assist the pastor in providing pastoral care for those hospitalized or homebound, please notify the pastor of pending surgeries, overnight hospital stays, or individuals who would like a home visit.
Please call: 507-373-6496

DECEMBER

(Remember to pray for our Grace family on these dates.)

1. **Travis & Norena Brekke**
   - **Pacey & Charley**
2. **Aron & Melanie Attig**
   - **Michaela, Mason & Mavrick**
3. **Doreen Pontow & Danielle Wertman**
4. **Tim & Becky Freden, Riley**
5. **Virgil & Mardelle Loge**
6. **Michael & Jason Hoiseth**
7. **Dexter & Janet Henschel**
8. **Faye Madson**
9. **Sandra Jimenez**
   - **Jalen, Riley & Quincy**
10. **Jeffrey & Angela Carson**
    - **Chelsey & Cayley**
11. **Alan & Patricia Arends**
12. **Craig & Lori Hanson**
    - **Katherine & Alison**
13. **Brody & Nikki Schumaker**
14. **Michelle Ehrich**
15. **Donald & Melody Munden**
16. **Bruce & Patricia Palmer**
17. **John & Kris Amarosa**
18. **Keith & Angela Flatness**
    - **Joshua & Dalton**
19. **William & Rita Olson, Brian**
20. **Kent Jasperson**
21. **Judy Hall**
22. **Philip & Stacie Neal, Ashlyn**
23. **Jimmy & Debra Akemann**
    - **Tucker & Triniti**
24. **Bob Ball & Laura McKibbin**
25. **Robert & Regis Olson**
26. **Roger & LaJean Bjorklund**
27. **Ruthie Marselle & Eli Anderson**
28. **Patrick & Kim Doss-Smith**
29. **Richard Kvenvold**
30. **James & Treasa Love**
31. **Bobby & Krystle Hutchinson**

December

Caring and Sharing

Chairperson needed

Denise & Paul Andersen
Debbie & Tom Baas
Gerri & Kenn Breamer
Charlotte & Dale Elvebak
Patricia Holtan
Nicole & Matthew Johnson
Teresa & Joel Matheson
Betty & Ron Mathews
Tonia & Darin Palmer
Keli & Andy Petersen
Barbara & Lowell Peterson
Lynn & Blake Stadheim
Kimberly Stevens
Tiffany & Robert Syverson
Lanae & Larry Thorstad
Carlyn Tufte

Pastoral Act for November

None

Thank you to everyone who helped in November! We're grateful for all who volunteered.

If you're looking for a way to get involved, there's still time to sign up as a co-chair, your support makes a real difference.

Study Opportunities for Adults at Grace

We invite you to join any of our regular Bible study groups at Grace Lutheran.

Tuesday Morning Women's Bible Study

10:00-11:00 am
This study for women offers fellowship and great discussion.

Thursday Morning Bible Study

7:30-8:30 am
Consider joining this group for an opportunity for great discussion & fellowship.

Grace WELCA Women's Circles

Mary Circle meets every 1st Monday of the month at 4:30 pm in the Fireside Room.

New members are always welcome!

Call the church office for more information at 507-373-6496.



Gifts of Love

Altar Guild

Bread & WIne Given In Memory Of:
Julie Jasperson given by Kent Jasperson
Mary Lou Jacobson given by Bob Jacobson

Ball Scholarship

In Memory Of:
Carl Grandstand given by Bob Ball & Laura McKibbin

Building Fund

In Memory Of:
Scott Rasmussen given by Ross & Shelly Peterson
Mom & Dad given by Debbie Christensen

Gift Given By:
Kent Jasperson

Food for Backpacks Program

In Memory Of:
Brady A. Hanson given by Kenneth & Kristine and Adam & Nicole Hanson
Carole Nelson on our 60th Anniversary given by Rodger D. Nelson

Gift Given By:
Kent Jasperson
Robert & Marilyn Blong
Dennis & Roxanne Wadding

Grant Given By:
Golden K #1
Central Freeborn Lutheran Church

Food Shelf

Gift Given By:
Mary Harriman

Kitchen Remodeling Fund

Gift Given By:
Greg & Marsha Smith
Kenn & Gerri Breamer
Larry & Lanae Thorstad
Rick & Ginny Loberg

General

In Honor of:
Scarlett Samp's confirmation given by Linda Cook

Love

Gift Given By:
Rick & Ginny Loberg
Richard & Darlene Jordahl

Martin Luther

In Memory Of:
Mark Henschel given by James & Judy Munyer

Memorial

In Memory Of:
Janey Roell, sister, & Lee Folie, uncle, given by Ross & Shelly Peterson

Music Ministry

Gift Given By:
Mary Harriman

Prayer Garden

In Memory Of:
Mark Henschel, son of Dex & Jan**,** given by David & Jeanne Lundak
Julie Jasperson given by Kent Jasperson
Mom & Dad given by Debbie Christensen

Gift Given By:
Mary Harriman

Prayer Shawl

Gift Given By:
Kathy Peterson
Mary Harriman

Gifts of Love

Quilting

In Memory Of:

Jerry Johnson given by Karen & Darrel Wolff & family

World Hunger

Gift Given By:

Richard & Darlene Jordahl
Jerry & Gerry Vogt

Youth Ministry

In Memory Of:

Diane Skelley given by Hazel Hansen

Gift Given By:

Mary Harriman
Richard & Darlene Jordahl
Robert Hoeg

Please Note

Any additional "Gifts of Love" recorded by the church office after **November 16, 2026** will appear in the next issue.
If you have given a gift and your name has not been recorded, please call 507-373-6496.

Fair Trade Coffee

We will be selling coffee before and immediately following worship service on Sunday, **December 6, 2026**.

Noisy Offering



Remember your coins each Sunday!

Generosity at Grace

October 2026	Average **Attendance** in person was: **168 per worship**	**Giving** $36,505.15	**Expenses** -$47,106.99	**Year to Date Giving vs Expenses:** $474,818.82 – $510,329.77 **-$35,510.95**



Confirmation Class of 2026

(left to right)

Row 1: Brennan Robeck, Scarlett Samp, Tenley Tufte

Row 2: Deacon Jessie Camp, Travis Ness, Adler Larson, Connor Groeneweg

Not pictured: Pastor Shane Koepke

May your faith continue to grow as you follow Christ in the years ahead.

Announcements

ADULT FORUM

Fireside Room | 10:00 AM

December 6	Christmas Themed	Including a "Name that Tune" round
December 13	Wells in Malawi	Presented by Grant Arends
December 20	The Real St. Nicholas	Presented by Bill Barber
December 27	Breakfast Church	

LET'S MAKE LEFSE!

All are welcome!

December 5

9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Fellowship Hall

- No experience
- NO PROBLEM

Questions? Contact Erica Samp
507-383-9812

Scan to register

www.gracelutheranchurch2.flocknote.com/signup/278538

2nd Wind

December 10 • 5 pm

Plaza Morena

(At the new location)

Marion Medical Mission

Join us for Adult Forum as **Grant Arends** shares about Marion Medical Mission.

MMM Water works to provide clean and safe drinking water to communities in Malawi.

Sunday 13 December

10:00 AM | Fireside Room

Poinsettia Plants

Purchase a poinsettia to help decorate our sanctuary for Christmas.
Take your plant home after Christmas!

Poinsettias are $13 each.

Please place your order by
Tuesday, December 15.

Order forms are available in the narthex.
Return your completed form and payment to the office, drop in the mailbox, or by mail.

Christmas Caroling

Help spread Christmas cheer at St. John's!

Caroling followed by a meal at Grace.

December 16 | 4:45 p.m.

Meet at St. John's
1861 Eagle View Circle

REGISTER NOW

Service of Hope & Healing

Grace Lutheran Church
918 Garfield Ave, Albert Lea, MN

Wednesday 16 December

Community Meal
begins at 5:30 PM in Fellowship Hall

Worship at 6:30 PM

Christmas Eve Worship

Candlelight Services

Thursday, December 24

3:00, 5:00 & 11:00 p.m.

December 2026

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1 10:00 am Women's Bible Study	**2** 9:00 am Quilting Grp. 5:45 pm Chew & Chat 6:00 pm Bell Choir 6:30 pm 7th/8th Grade Confirmation 7:00 pm Adult Choir	**3** 7:30 am Early Morning Bible Study 1:30 pm SAIL	**4** **Building and Office Closed**	**5** **Building and Office Closed** **9:00 am Lefse Making**
6 8:30 am Fair Trade Coffee **9:00 am Youth Led Worship** 10:00 am Coffee Fell. 10:00 am Adult Forum 10:10 am Sunday School 10:20 am Youth Bible Study	**7** 9:00 am Staff Meeting 1:30 pm SAIL 2:00 pm Grief Share 4:30 pm Mary Circle	**8** 10:00 am Women's Bible Study 6:30 pm Council Mtg.	**9** 10:00 am Thorne Crest Communion 5:45 pm Chew & Chat 6:00 pm Bell Choir 6:30 pm 7th/8th Grade Confirmation 7:00 pm Adult Choir	**10** 7:30 am Early Morning Bible Study 1:30 pm SAIL 5:00 pm 2nd Wind	**11** **Building and Office Closed**	**12** **Building and Office Closed**
13 **9:00 am Worship** 10:00 am Coffee Fell. 10:00 am Adult Forum **Marion Medical Missions-Wells in Malawi by Grant Arends** 10:10 am Sunday School 10:20 am Youth Bible Study	**14** 9:00 am Staff Meeting 1:30 pm SAIL	**15** 10:00 am Women's Bible Study	**16** 9:00 am Quilting Grp. 4:45 pm Caroling at St. Johns 5:30 pm Community Meal **6:30 pm Hope & Healing Worship** 7:00 pm Confirmation	**17** 7:30 am Early Morning Bible Study 9:00 am Grace Notes Mail Prep 1:30 pm SAIL	**18** **Building and Office Closed**	**19** **Building and Office Closed** **10:00 am Christmas Program Rehearsal**
20 **9:00 am Worship & Christmas Program** 10:00 am Adult Forum & Coffee Fellowship **The Real St. Nicholas by Bill Barber with Cookies & Cocoa**	**21** **Newsletter Deadline** 9:00 am Staff Meeting 1:30 pm SAIL	**22** 10:00 am Women's Bible Study	**23**	**24** **Office Closing at 12 p.m.** 3:00 pm Worship 5:00 pm Worship 11:00 pm Candlelight Worship	**25** **Building and Office Closed**	**26** **Building and Office Closed**
27 **9:00 am Breakfast Worship** 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship	**28** 9:00 am Staff Meeting	**29** 10:00 am Women's Bible Study	**30**	**31** 7:30 am Early Morning Bible Study		

Grace Lutheran Church
918 Garfield Avenue
Albert Lea, MN 56007

Phone: 507-373-6496
Email: office@gracealbertlea.org

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Albert Lea, MN
Permit No. 208

Worship Schedule

Sunday Worship Service

Time: 9:00 am
Options: In person and online
Watch: Facebook (facebook.com/gracealbertlea)
Youtube (youtube.com/@gracealbertlea)

Sunday School

Sundays at 10:10 am
(Now-May 2)
Fellowship Hall

Music

Wednesdays
(Now-May 5)
Bell Choir - 6:00 pm
Adult Choir - 7:00 pm

Confirmation

Wednesdays
(Now-May 5)
6:30 pm | Fellowship Hall

Chew & Chat

Wednesdays
(Now-May 5)
5:45-6:15 pm | Fellowship Hall

Youth Bible Study

Sundays
(Now-May 2)
10:20 | Youth Room