



August 2021, a Communications Ministry of
Grace United Methodist Church, Naperville

GRACE NOTES

Gather to Christ • Grow as Disciples • Go to Serve

HELLO PEOPLE OF GRACE

By: Rev. Eric Blachford



Pastor Eric Blachford, Becky, Kate, Isaac, and Luke

My name is Pastor Eric Blachford and it is a joy to be appointed as part of the pastoral staff here at Grace UMC. Becky, Isaac (11), Luke (9), Kate (6), and I are beginning to feel at home here in Naperville now that we are all moved in and settled into the beautiful parsonage. We're enjoying exploring all the area has to offer. Now that we are entering August, Becky and the kids are becoming excited about the new schools they'll be joining soon. Becky will be teaching 8th-grade math at Humphrey Middle School and the kids will be going to Madison Jr. High and Scott Elementary.

As I promised in my first sermon on July 11th, I'm going to share a little of my story with you in this article to help you get to know me a little bit. I'm also going to ask for your help by providing you a way to share a bit about yourself with me too (details at the end of this article). In the previous bio that was sent out

when I was appointed here, you can find details about my 18 years of ministry experience, my educational background, information about a few hobbies my family and I enjoy, and other things. That's all interesting information and I could expand on those things, but what I decided would be best to share with you as one of your pastors is a bit about my calling and relationship with God. I hope that sharing with you how God has worked in my life, it might help you reflect on how God has worked in yours as well.

My relationship with God began before I was even born. Before my mom had any children, she prayed that her future children would know, love, and serve God. For as long as I can remember (and still today) she has always done everything in her power to make me aware of the presence of God in my life.

My own first experience of God's presence was when I was 5 years old, during Holy Communion at First UMC in Belvidere, IL. My parents worked hard to teach me that Communion wasn't just "snack time" after the sermon, but that Communion was an opportunity to encounter the forgiving grace and love of God. After I received it for the first time and returned to the pew, God's presence was real to me and as tangible as the thick humidity of that August day's air. I knew God loved me, that Jesus died to forgive my sins, and I wanted to spend the rest of my life getting to know the God I experienced that day.

By 8 years old, I began to feel called into ministry. I didn't think of it in those terms but when other kids at school started talking about what they wanted to be when they were older, I began envisioning myself as a pastor. This especially came into focus after being asked to be a liturgist when I

was 8. That night I had a dream that I was a pastor, but I didn't share that dream or the feelings of my "call" with anyone at the time.

At this point in my life whenever I wasn't in school, I was either at church or playing sports. These things were the most important parts of my life and I was equally passionate about each. However, with each passing year, the importance of and time dedicated to sports grew. By the time I was in Middle School, sports had become the most important part of my life and I was no longer as passionate about my faith.

My relationship with God remained stagnant and less important to me than sports and other typical teenage concerns until my junior year of High School. That year my parents divorced. That event shook the foundation of my world. Rather than turn to my faith or God during this difficult time, I poured all my energy into sports. I more or less quit church. The only thing that made me feel better about life was winning. When I competed and won, I felt great about myself and life so I did everything I could to feed the idol of winning to avoid the depression that followed losing.

That all changed during the winter of my junior year when a basketball injury landed me in the hospital, paralyzed from the neck down. As I lay in a hospital bed unable to move with nothing to do but think and pray, I realized how backward I had been living. I repented for turning sports into an idol. I repented for abandoning God. I didn't do this thinking that God would heal me if I did. Rather, I wanted a fresh start with God whenever I would finally leave the hospital. As I had this honest "come to Jesus" moment, I had a real sense of God's love, grace, and presence in that it was as real to me again as it was on that day I received Communion for the first time. Thankfully, several

days later more than just my soul was healed. I left the hospital with a new life and purpose. I returned to praying and worshiping with passion and conviction. A few months later while attending a youth group event, I felt and heard the call of God into ministry again and this time I answered yes.

Upon completing college I began working as a Youth Director for a local church. Within weeks of my starting, a major controversy broke out in the congregation. It erupted in worship one morning as people on opposite sides of the issue began screaming and swearing at one another during joys and concerns. The church eventually split, but even after the split occurred, the fighting, backstabbing, and arguing didn't stop. I stayed for a couple of years but eventually decided that if this is what life in a professional role in the church was going to be, I wanted nothing to do with it.

I quit my job and planned to quit ministry. I very quickly found another job using some certifications in finance I gained while working during college to get a job in that field. I was promoted twice very quickly and within a few months, my employer began recruiting me to manage a new office opening in Chicago. The job would have come with great pay and incredible perks like access to the company's season tickets to the Cubs, Bulls, and Bears. The only problem was that I wasn't at peace in this job and I couldn't figure out why this perfect opportunity that fell in my lap wasn't fixing my discontent.

The reason of course was because I still had a sense of being called into ministry. As the decision of whether to accept the promotion at my current job drew closer, Becky and I prayed that the Holy Spirit would make the next steps of our journey clear. Within two weeks of praying daily for the Spirit's leading, I received a letter in the mail from the pastor who Confirmed me in 8th grade. We hadn't

spoken in a long time. He had no idea what was happening in Becky's and my life. Yet in his letter, he wrote that the Holy Spirit had laid it upon his heart that God was calling me to be his associate pastor and that he already had the approval of the District Superintendent to ask me to do so as long as I completed licensing school that summer.

When Becky and I read that letter, we broke out in tears. God, through this pastor, had answered our prayers. I had no idea what that would mean or where entering ministry would take me. I was only 22 at the time. But now, 17 years later, I can say I've been given the privilege of following Jesus on the adventure of a lifetime that has led me to Grace UMC.

I could go on for pages but I won't. I hope that sharing this story of God's call on my life, it helps you to know me a bit better and makes you think about where God has worked in your life as well. I'd love it if you'd be willing to share some of the stories of how God has worked in your life as well. You don't have to write as much as I have. Even a few sentences would be great. But would you be willing to tell me some of your stories?

To help you with this, I've created a form for you to fill out. **You can access the form at peopleofgrace.org/hello-questions.**

You'll find a place to put your name, contact info, and some background info about who you are if you choose. Or if you want to remain anonymous for some reason (and I hope you don't), you can skip those questions. But I'd like everyone to try answering these three for sure: First, why God? In other words, why do you believe in God or why is your faith important to you? The second question is why church? Especially after a year of not being able to be physically together because of the pandemic, why does faith expressing itself through the

local church matter? Finally, why this (Grace UMC) church? Why, given that there are hundreds of churches within driving distance, do you choose to express your faith through Grace UMC? What is it about this place, the ministries, the mission, etc. that you connect to?

We all have answers to those questions but it may have been a while since we've tried to articulate them. Doing so will not only be good for you, but it will go a long way towards helping me in getting to know you and the church better. Of course, I'm always happy to meet with you in person or over Zoom as well. If you'd like to do that just shoot me an email or give me a call. Thank you in advance for all you will share. I can't wait to read your stories and experiences and be moved to praise God for God's faithfulness in all our lives and our church!



DISTRICT 204 BACKPACK COLLECTION

District 204 has requested our support for their annual backpack collection! This year, we are asking for empty backpacks and donations of any amount to help purchase the supply kits to deliver consistency in what each child receives.

There is a collection box in the Gathering Space, you can write a check to "Grace UMC" earmarked for the "backpack D204" or donate online at peopleofgrace.org/give and select "District 204" in the drop-down menu. Funds received will be used to purchase backpacks and supply kits equally.

We will need to receive all donations by Sunday, August 1, so that they have time to determine their gaps before their Thursday, August 19, opening date! Contact Chamus (chamuspeopleofgrace.org) for more information.

FALL EVENING SISTERS CLASS

Join us starting Thursday, September 23, at 7 p.m. on Zoom, as we begin a new six-week Bible Study entitled Chasing Vines: Finding Your Way to an Immensely Fruitful Life by Beth Moore.

In this companion piece to her stunning nonfiction book Chasing Vines, Beth Moore explores the ways God delights in watching things grow--and how the land of the vineyard holds the secret for how we can have a more abundant and meaningful life. As she traces the metaphor through Scripture, Beth uncovers how every part of our own lives--even the rockiest, most difficult soil--is used by God to make a difference for His Kingdom.

Books for this class can be ordered via Amazon and run at approximately \$11.60. Contact Sandy Bray (braysnap@aol.com) to receive Zoom details or for more information.

WORSHIP AT GRACE MASKING OR NO MASKING

By: **Rev. Cindy Marino**

It has been truly a blessing to be worshipping together with those who feel confident in returning to the Sanctuary. This vibrant and loving congregation will continue to live the good news of Jesus among us regardless of how we might have to adapt to do so; and adapt we have for many months! Many of those adaptations will become a permanent part of the way we worship and serve, including the live-stream worship we offer for those who prefer to worship remotely. But I cannot deny that seeing your smiles again in person is a gift that goes beyond words!

We continue to temper that gift with the desire to protect the health and safety of our children and those unable to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. The best way to do so is for those who can be vaccinated to get vaccinated!

Beyond that, there are a few other things we as members of a loving congregation can do. In place of asking everyone to mask all the time while in the building, I am hoping we will each express our love for one another by considering the needs of those around us at any given time.

We can provide both a level of safety and comfort for everyone if we each:

- Bring a mask each Sunday (or grab one from the table in the back of the Sanctuary).
- Wear it continuously if you are not vaccinated.

If you are vaccinated:

- Slip it on when in the presence of children or youth. (Masks are required in the Children's Area and Children's Ministry staff are all vaccinated).
- Wear it while singing during worship.
- Wear it when in the presence of those who prefer that you would. If you're not sure, ask!
- Refrain from any comment to those who continue to mask. We are all in this together!

We have worked to bring out the best of the people of Grace, realizing that the most important part of being the church is our relationship with one another, as it grows from the loving relationship we have with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. At this place and time, it is more important to be loving than to be right. So, whatever your opinion, let's first love well!

WORSHIP TIMES

We are planning to return to three Sunday morning worship services beginning Sunday, September 12, the Sunday after Labor Day weekend:

- **8 a.m. Traditional Service in the Sanctuary with weekly Communion**
- **9 a.m. Contemporary Service in the Activity Center with weekly Communion**
- **10:30 a.m. Traditional Service in the Sanctuary**

The live-stream of our traditional worship will continue at 10:30 a.m. and be available anytime on peopleofgrace.org. We hope to also continue to provide an edited version of our 9G service.

Outdoor services are scheduled for 9 a.m. on August 1 and September 5 in addition to the 10:30 a.m. Traditional Worship Service in the Sanctuary.

SUNDAY FAITH FORMATION FALL SCHEDULE

Adult Faith Formation -

9:15 a.m. Visit peopleofgrace.org/adults for class information.

Children's Faith Formation -

9:15 a.m.–10:15 a.m. for ages 3 years to 5th grade. The nursery will be open from 8:45 a.m.–11:45 a.m. each Sunday for ages birth through 2 years old.

Youth Faith Formation -

9:15 a.m.–10:15 a.m. for 6th–12th grades **Confirmation** will be held in 2021-2022 for 8th graders. More details to come!



VBS 2021

By Chamus Burnside-Savazzini, Director of Children's Faith Formation

Each year, as a church we step out on faith and invite children from within our walls and those who have never been within our building to come together. They hear God's Word, worship Him in song and make hands-on connections with craft, science and recreational activities. We do not know who or when a child will give their life to Christ, and we may never know if VBS was a catalyst.

What we do know is that we were obedient to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20: *"¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." When we teach children to know and obey God's commands and remind them that He is with them till the end of the age, we empower a new generation of Believers.

This year our participants represented two continents, five states and 33 families! The program was supported by 13 Shoes of Peace partners, 22 adults, 2 Teens and 6 Apprentices, some of whom not only helped prepare and record but also woke up every morning to be on Zoom with the children each day.

We have been commissioned to go out and make Disciples and Grace

UMC continues to do just that! During this time we have found new ways to connect and be the church beyond the walls of our beautiful facility. God has blessed every effort and our generosity as a congregation has been multiplied by His power.

Thank you for saying yes to reaching the next generation through our VBS program. We welcome all prayers and support for future VBS programming. To God be all the glory, for great things He has done!

If you would like more information about this year's VBS or how to be involved in VBS 2022 contact Chamus (chamus@peopleofgrace.org).

LOAVES & FISHES PANTRY COLLECTION

August's Pantry Collection will benefit Loaves and Fishes Pantry in Naperville. They offer food once a week to all registered households which meet the income guidelines established by IDHS. They primarily serve families in Naperville, Aurora, all of DuPage County and parts of Will County.

In lieu of collecting bags of food at Grace, we invite you to donate cash, or food items via their "Virtual Food Drive" found at www.loavesandfishes.org under the "Ways to Give" drop-down menu. You will see a list of their most needed items and can select the number of items you wish to donate.

GIANT FAITH OR GIANT FAITH

When God calls us, He has already prepared work in advance for us to do. He arranges the opportunity and then asks us for our commitment. June 23-26, 50 people, youth and adults, answered the call with a giant YES!

During that time, trees were planted, nails were pounded, toiletry kits were assembled, windows installed, a chicken coop stabilized, food pantry shelves were stocked, rooms were rearranged so new pantry programs could be started, a sustainable garden was weeded and replanted, a fence was built, and a rock drainage ditch was reestablished to allow the water to flow appropriately. In the midst of all of that, God was ever-present! As a team, we prayed and worshiped, exploring whether we had (or needed) **Giant Faith** or **Giant Faith**.

Here are a few quotes from some who participated this year:

What was your favorite part of Side x Side 2021?

"Senior Night, because seeing other people reflect on their time at Grace made me do so as well."

"Worship, because we were all able to come together at the end of a hard-working day."

I saw God in/when _____ on Side x Side.

"When we were able to still find work to do at church during the rain."

Being part of Side x Side _____.

"Made we want to go next year."

Side x Side was a local trip (for this year only) and we are so grateful for all who helped make it possible. Thank you to our prayer partners, our shareholders, and those who have supported us in any way. We truly appreciate every act of generosity and kindness and look forward to Side x Side 2022. Please plan to join us by contacting Gaye Lynn Loufek (gayelynn.loufek@peopleofgrace.org).

LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH

Calling all young adults (18-23)! Please make sure the Youth Office has a Fall mailing address and cell phone number for you by emailing Gaye Lynn Loufek (gayelynn.loufek@peopleofgrace.org). We LOVE to stay in touch!

SUMMER MUSIC FUN FOR ALL AGES

"Music Mashup! Exploring Ways We Can Make Music to Worship God."

Join us on Sunday, August 29, from 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. for Music Mashup: Exploring Ways We Can Make Music to Worship God.

We'll use interactive exploration with our voices as well as instruments (including handbells, drums, guitars, and the mighty pipe organ). Our servant volunteer musicians will be on hand to make the afternoon fun and memorable as we explore the many ways and types of music Grace uses to give praise to our Creator.

Register now at peopleofgrace.org/mashup.

Contact Lynn Letizen (lynn.letizen@peopleofgrace.org) for more information.

THANK YOU! SIDE BY SIDE

By: Ron Laub, Chair of the Trustees

The Grace United Methodist Church Trustees would like to thank the Grace UMC Side by Side group for their help in installing a new fence around the AC unit on the side of the church and improving the storm water flow from the side of the hill. This improves our building and grounds without spending a lot of money.



UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

Guest Speaker: Deaconess Catherine Inserra from Kids Above All

The United Methodist Women invite you to come hear our special guest speaker, Deaconess Catherine Inserra, from the non-profit agency Kids Above All (formerly ChildServ), which is an organization the UMW has funded as a mission for several years. We will be meeting on Tuesday, September 7, at our new time 9:30 a.m. in-person in room 231! We will still offer our Zoom meeting with a link to follow.

Deaconess Catherine Inserra is the Manager of Faith and Community Relations with Kids Above All (formerly ChildServ), a United Methodist-affiliated, non-profit agency building better lives for children since 1894. This organization was originally established as a Methodist Deaconess Orphanage in Lake Bluff, Illinois, by social visionary Lucy Rider Meyer.

Catherine builds mission partnerships with local churches, community groups and schools throughout the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church and beyond. These partnerships help to fortify staff and programs in four counties and, more importantly, the 2,448 recipients of these services. "Together, we stand up and speak up for kids for them to rise up to reach their potential and live a good life."

We will also be collecting our quarters from our summer saving at this meeting. These quarters will go to the non-profit organization Families Helping Families for the families to pay for washing and drying their clothes! Let's see how we can make a difference!

Interested in learning more about United Methodist Women? Visit peopleofgrace.org/united-methodist-women or contact UMW President, Kathy Carey (percula4344@sbcglobal.net).

GRACE CHURCH FOUNDATION

Gifts of stocks and securities are an easy and wonderful way to make a gift to Grace Church Foundation that will make a lasting impact on the work of Grace Church. Because the stock markets are performing so well, this could be an excellent time to donate stock or mutual funds to avoid paying capital gains taxes.

The Foundation was established to receive and distribute financial and other resources to be used for programs and projects which enhance or supplement the work and vision of Grace Church.

Please consider making a gift of stock or mutual fund shares to the Grace Church Foundation. Your gift will provide funding to support and expand existing ministries, provide continued education and training, strengthen local and global mission initiatives and creating endowments for future building and maintenance needs.

For further information or to ensure a smooth transfer of your gift of stock, mutual fund shares or bonds, please contact John Abe (johnabe25@gmail.com) or Scott Oats (soats@sbcglobal.net).

Sample illustration:

Sally bought shares of stock in her company for \$3 per share while working in the 1980s. That stock has appreciated to \$35 per share. She donates 1,000 shares to Grace Church Foundation to enhance the work of the Church. Grace Church Foundation will receive a gift of \$35,000. Sally will save \$6,400 in capital gains taxes and Sally's actual "cost" for this gift was \$3,000. Sally feels good about helping to provide additional funding that will be used for special needs and projects to enhance the Church's work.

WILLS VS TRUSTS SEMINAR

Join us for a Wills vs Trusts Seminar presented by Ted Kuczek, an estate attorney from Ted Kuczek and Associates. Ted's educational seminar will help you start the process of creating or updating your estate plan in a friendly setting.

This event will be held both in-person at Grace in Room 231 and live on Zoom at noon on Sunday, September 26, and is sponsored by the Grace Church Foundation.

Register at peopleofgrace.org/willsvstrusts by Monday, September 20. Contact Scott Oats (soats@sbcglobal.net) for more information.

"This was a very informative and easy-to-understand program on the topic," said Ron Laub, Grace UMC member and previous program attendee.



SAVE THE DATE! MISTLETOE MARKETPLACE

Mistletoe Marketplace will be back this year!* So, mark your calendars for Saturday, November 13, to shop for those special holiday items!

If you are a crafter, start putting your talents to work at home! We won't have workshops this year. But, if you would like ideas or kits for crafts, contact Kathy Carey (percula4344@sbcglobal.net).

Mistletoe Marketplace is the main fundraiser for missions for the United Methodist Women. So, let's put our talents to work for another successful Mistletoe Marketplace! * Unless COVID restrictions change.

TALKING ABOUT INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

With Your Kids and Teens

Have you ever been caught off-guard when, in public, your child asks about someone's disability? Despite your intention to love people of all abilities, perhaps you had a moment of panic in how to respond? Or, has your own child recognized that they learn differently or make friends differently than their peers? Are you unsure what to say to him/her?

Join Parenting with Grace and the Open Doors Ministry (ODM) on Sunday, September 19, at 4 p.m. as Nicole Zaccaria, ODM's Coordinator, addresses these questions and builds your understanding of how to talk openly about disabilities.

Nicole has been working in special education as a speech-language pathologist in District 204 for over 20 years. Additionally, she has served as the ODM Coordinator, welcoming and supporting individuals of all abilities at Grace United Methodist Church since 2014. She always says, "The more we know, the better we do," and this is the perfect opportunity to ask questions and learn in an engaging and safe environment!

This event will be held in-person at Grace UMC but we will be able to stream it on Zoom for those who would prefer to attend virtually. Childcare will be available for those attending in-person.

Register at peopleofgrace.org/parenting and follow "Parenting with Grace Group" on Facebook for updates. Contact Stefanie Abderhalden (stefanie.abderhalden@gmail.com) with questions.



INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS WITH DEMENTIA

The mission of the Open Doors Ministry is to welcome and support people of ALL abilities into the life of Grace UMC.

Here are 6 easy suggestions we can all follow to help make Grace a more inclusive, comfortable church home for individuals with dementia:

1. Wear a name tag and keep it visible. Eliminating the stress of remembering names will help all individuals feel comfortable when in fellowship with one another.
2. Refrain from asking, "Do you remember me?"
3. Repeat yourself. Avoid saying, "I told you..."
4. Listen patiently. Avoid saying, "Yes, I remember you telling me that already."
5. Care for the caregiver. Offer a phone call or a visit over a cup of coffee.
6. Remember who we are in Christ. We are called to love one another, and we know that God's love is never dependent on our skills, what we accomplish or what we remember. Focus on that love. Live that love.

Contact Nicole Zaccaria (nicole.zaccaria@peopleofgrace.org) for more information on how Open Doors Ministry could help you.