Grace Church, you are unique. God has given you tremendous gifts and resources along with humble and passionate lay and staff leaders. In the church world today, that’s a rare combination. It’s not that Grace is without its challenges. It is the way you approach these challenges that so honors God. You’ve allowed them to become opportunities. You are grabbing the opportunities as ways to share love for Christ not only in the decisions you make, but in the way you make the decisions.

There will always be change to manage, risks to take, and problems to solve. Allowing God to use these as opportunities to grow us closer to God and to one another, to include more people, to listen with new ears, and to see with new eyes; this is the true blessing. This is where we’re going and how we are going to get there.

Over the next few months I will lift up examples of where I have seen God working in your approach to these opportunities. There are many more than I can share in this column, so I will start with a few examples:

**Grace Church Foundation** — The Foundation is not only working to protect the wishes of donors, but is seeing itself as a more integral part of Grace Church and its mission.

**Margaret Harrison** — Margaret is retiring after many years of exceptional ministry with children. Throughout this difficult time of decision-making I have watched her bloom, seeking God’s “what’s next?” as she leans into the changes around us.

**Vision Teams** — The many who have been meeting, planning, researching and praying together are finding solutions rising up in their midst. That’s how God works! Seek and together you will find!

**Staff** — Staff is meeting weekly with fearless and patient leader John Bodine to learn new ways to collect and use data. This will allow us to better serve and communicate with our members. It also will allow members to better communicate with and serve one another, and give lay leaders a tool for efficient and effective record keeping and sharing.

**Cathy Connor and Ruth Wills** — who gathered close to 60 volunteers from many different groups to provide food and hospitality to our Northern Illinois Conference friends. They provided an opportunity for the Body to serve and the Body did.

This is how we get there: together. We are the body of Christ. Each member is equally important and needs to be valued. The body as a whole is also important and is called to address the even greater needs in our world. I am fascinated as I see God molding us to be part of the ‘how,’ even as God remains the ever-faithful ‘why.’

**Grace Feeds the Need!**

More than 200 Grace Church volunteers joined Feed My Starving Children’s “Feed the Need” in packing 1,053,216 meals at North Central College on February 20 and 21. During the 3-5 p.m. shift, 88 people from Children’s Music Ministry assisted at the event (pictured).
By John Bodine, Visions Team Co-Chair

This past August, a Visions Team was formed at the request of Pastor Cindy, and with the approval of Church Council, to follow up on opportunities and issues raised in the 2014 Grace Member Survey.

Recommendations from the Visions Team were presented to Church Council in December, and reported in Grace Notes at that time. Two key proposals were high graded for action due to their relevance to all Visions Team areas:

Establishing a “World Class” Children’s Sunday School Program — recognizing this as a channel for attracting new members and young families; and

Implementing a new Member Data System to assist in tracking and engaging the entire Grace community.

In light of Education Director Margaret Harrison’s retirement, Staff-Parish has been working with the Pastoral staff and the Children and Family Council to review job descriptions and roles to tune them as needed to continue the growth of quality children’s education.

At the same time visits have been made to area churches and software demos have been attended to assess more modern church management systems. Identification of a preferred data system has been made, and a recommendation to move to this platform for Member Data Management was made to Church Council at the February meeting.

Review and discussions of Visions Team recommendations have been scheduled for the first four Church Council meetings in 2016, with a purpose of gathering input and feedback, better shaping the recommendations, and developing plans for action. Input, advice, and volunteer help from the people of Grace will be critical for us to head in the right direction, bolster vitality in our church community, and enable service to the membership and greater community.

The Visions Team includes:

- Chairs John Bodine and Jim Nelson; Joan Meador, who leads the Preaching and Worship group, with a goal of improving the worship experience;
- John Stuart and Traci Weilemann, who lead the Children and Young Families group, and seek to find ways to attract more young families;
- Tom Blair, head of the Outreach & Assimilation group, which is working to develop a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church;
- Bob Pacanowski and Letty Peters, who partner to lead the Christian Education and Spiritual Formation group, which is seeking to find ways to provide more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation at every age and stage of life;
- John Reid, who is leading the Attendance group in conversation on how Grace can provide services and programs to attract and retain attendees.

Rebuild Aurora Together Project Volunteers Needed April 29-30

Thatch Irwin is leading another team in the Rebuilding Together Aurora project (website: www.traurora.org) — which helps homeowners who are elderly, disabled, or low income — on Friday, April 29 and Saturday, April 30. Help is needed on either or both of these days between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Volunteers must be at least 14 years of age, and minors must be accompanied by an adult. Skilled workers are very welcome and needed. But if all you can do is pick up a paintbrush, and offer some elbow grease, that is helpful, too. To volunteer, or for more information, Contact Thatch by phone at (630) 961-3804 or e-mail tirwin@wideopenwest.com.

Kenya Mission Team Prepares for Summer Trip

The Grace Church Kenya Mission began at in 2004, after being inspired by Florence Mubichi, a Grace member from Kenya, to “go and make a difference in the world.” The first trip in 2005 gave participants the opportunity to work alongside the Kenyan people on many different levels. It included hospital and outreach projects at Maua Methodist Hospital, building an AIDS orphan home in a local village, hosting a medical clinic on the nearby campus of Kenya Methodist University, and visiting Jirani Choir in the slums of Nairobi.

This group also worked with the nonprofit Miriam Kanana Mubichi Foundation, named after Mubichi’s daughter who was tragically killed while at the University. MKMFoundation serves the Meru area with a literacy program, health education and resource management training.

It was through this work that “Seeds of Grace” was started by Julie Utter and Annette Swanson, and continues to help fund much-needed projects. Subsequent trips were made in 2010 and 2012, while several trips were postponed due to the changing political climate. This June 1-17, under the leadership of Jan Cosgrove, Grace will once again be sending a team of 10 to Kenya — this time partnering with First United Methodist Church LaGrange — to assist and learn from the people of Maua and Meru.

Projects include hospital painting and the building of housing for interns, building an AIDS-orphan home, and helping with medical clinics.

Sundays will be spent at local churches, where team members will attend services and teach Sunday School.

The second week, the team will resume work with the MKMFoundation by planting a community garden tended by Seeds of Grace. The garden — planted by the team, parents, and children — will help school children and families who often go without proper food. A visit to the local orphanage is planned, as the team will bring school supplies, and games.

“We thank Grace for their continued support of prayer and monetary contributions so that we can continue God’s work in Kenya,” Cosgrove said. “It is with a great love of Christ that we serve to empower those who can continue the work and teach their friends, family, and community.”

Hamball Luncheon April 15

Mark your calendars! Grace UMW’s Hamball Luncheon will be held on Friday, April 15, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Fellowship Hall. This delicious annual treat is a MUST, especially after paying your taxes! The public is welcome, so bring all your friends. For further information contact Ann Walczak at (630) 357-7751.