

The Friendly Visitor February 2026

Newsletter of Grace Lutheran Church and Community



Grace Lutheran Church:

- *A community of faith, centered in worship, held in Grace, strengthened in love, sent forth in mission, in Jesus' name.*
- *Home of the Being New Spirituality Center.*

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Submission deadline for the March newsletter: February 20

Office & Open Building Hours

9 a.m. – 1 p.m. Monday – Thursday
Or by appointment

Sunday Schedule

9:00 a.m. Worship: In-person & Online
10:00 a.m. Fellowship & Coffee
10:15 a.m. Education Hour

Grace Lutheran Church
5201 Urbandale Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50310
515-276-6873
gracedm.org

The Good, the Bad, and the Bible

We live in an increasingly divided world. It used to be only the individuals on the extremes that would point their finger at the other side. We have become far more polarized and continue to move toward the ends of the political spectrum. Each side claiming the "Good" title while declaring the other side "Bad." Both sides quote the Bible. What does the Bible really say?

There are three major themes in the Bible that feel important right now. The first is that we are to care for the marginalized. This is a theme throughout the Bible. This is not just a teaching of Jesus. It is a central command in the Old Testament. We are to care for the widow, the orphan, the poor, the leper, the foreigner, anyone who is in need. The Bible, in multiple places, states that abuse of the foreigner among you is abuse toward God.

These commands to care for the marginalized and oppressed is not only a social concern. The Old Testament links this directly with our relationship with God. How we treat the "other" is how we view God. That is a humbling truth.

The second is that we are not to curse our leaders. There are times when we do not agree with the decisions that leaders make, and that is on both sides of the aisle. The Bible is very clear that to cross the line toward curse or wishing ill will on someone is also a direct violation of other and of God. God loves the world, the cosmos. To wish ill will on anyone is to detract from their fullness. This should never mean we stand by idly and watch. We are to claim our voice and stand up for others. We are also driven toward our neighbor and the "other." We should look out for one another while holding leaders accountable.

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The Good, the Bad, and the Bible, continued from page 1

This brings me to the third theme I would like to highlight. God continues to hold God's people accountable. Not even King David was above accountability. For justice to work, it has to be for all. There is often the illusion that God's chosen people (however you define that) can take whatever they want because they are, well, God's chosen. That is not the story the Bible tells. The Bible is filled with examples where God holds leaders accountable. God holds the people accountable. God loves you. That does not mean God loves someone else less. If you have to put someone else down to feel better about your relationship with God, it is time to read or re-read the Bible.

Friends, these are tough times. The world is filled with uncertainty and finger pointing. May we stay rooted in the Bible and connected with one another.



We hold the family of Evelyn Dostalik,
Mother of Marty Dostalik, in our hearts and prayers.

Grace Lutheran Church Staff

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515-276-6873



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17 – Deanna and Michael Hummel
19 – Linda and Jim Rundle
20 – Janet and Norman Trentmann
24 – Sally and Paul Thielking



1 – Larry Cramer
2 – Katy Roat
5 – Andrew Trentmann
6 – Karri Brandsfield
James Hoffman
Larry Nordeen
10 – Nancy Robbins
Bonnie Swanson
12 – Lenora Iverson
Tyler Peeler
13 – Timothy Hummel
14 – Theodora Brown
15 – Isaac McCleary
16 – Heather Ashton
Gail Peterson
19 – Ellen Mumm
20 – Jessica Flannery
21 – Allison Olson
22 – Julie Stuckle
23 – Barry Briggs
Jenie Schmidt
25 – Melissa Young
27 – Jerry Westercamp

Mark Your Calendars

Daylight Saving Time
begins Sunday,
March 8, 2026.





Vicars Voice

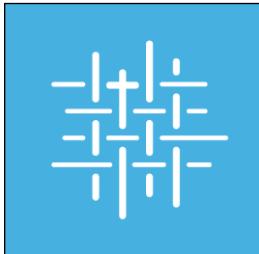
As we step into February 2026, I find myself feeling both excited and deeply grateful. From my mid-year intern perspective, I have already seen the care, dedication, and prayer that sustain Grace community. The new year feels less like a blank slate and more like a continuation of good work already underway, lessons learned, momentum built, a Bible study and confirmation class begun. All of these give me confidence that the year ahead can be both productive and purposeful for this Community and its neighbors.

The past days have also reminded me that growth often happens quietly through small improvements, steady teamwork, and the simple faithfulness of showing up. Watching projects take shape and seeing people support one another has been one of the most encouraging parts of my internship so far. As we look ahead and set goals for 2026, my hope is not only for measurable outcomes but for continued collaboration, patience, and curiosity as we move forward together as a community of faith.

One verse that has been especially present for me at the start of this year is Proverbs 16:3: “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.” From a mid-year intern’s vantage point, this reminder is grounding; it calls for trust in God’s guidance while still engaging fully and intentionally in the work before us. May this new year be marked by steady progress, shared purpose, and plans that grow stronger as we commit them to the Lord together as a church of God.

God’s blessings to all of us.

Vicar Lotegeluaki Ole L. Lengai.



“Building a Legacy” Capital Campaign Update

Thank you to all who have pledged to the “Building a Legacy” capital campaign. Since the annual meeting, several more pledges have been received in the office. To date, thirty-one pledges and cash gifts have been received totaling \$481,607. These gifts will be received over five years with over 95% being realized in the next three years. We will be sharing a more detailed report in March.

The highest priority of this campaign is addressing the water problems with the building, and we should be able to address those in 2026 based on pledges and cash gifts.

Thank you again to all who have contributed! We are aware of several more pledges that will be forthcoming so if you have not pledged yet, there is still more time. Thanks again!



February LFP Request: Pasta, Mac n Cheese, Skillet Meals

We are collecting pasta, macaroni & cheese, and skillet meals for the Little Free Pantry in February. The [Grace LFP Amazon Wish List](https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/2NI8R8TTW7UK7/ref=nav_wishlist_lists_2) www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/2NI8R8TTW7UK7/ref=nav_wishlist_lists_2 is also available to have items shipped to the church. Donations can also be made online through the [GIVE](https://gracedm.org/give-to-grace/) page <https://gracedm.org/give-to-grace/> or send a check payable to Grace Lutheran Church with "Little Free Pantry" in the memo.

Your donations are greatly appreciated.

TeamGRACE



The Welcome Statement proposed and shared by TeamGRACE was voted on at the Grace

Annual Member meeting this past Sunday, January 25. One amendment to add "and nationality" was suggested and approved by those attending. The statement as it reads below was voted on and accepted.

"Grace Lutheran Church commits to welcoming and celebrating all people; those in the LGBTQIA+ community, Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and their allies.

We commit to the work of anti-racism, liberation, social and environmental justice for all of God's creation. We affirm the sacredness of all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. We affirm the sacredness of all those who have experienced exclusion because of race, ability, age, culture, or nationality. We affirm the sacredness of those who wrestle with addiction, physical or mental health, imprisonment, socio-economic circumstances, or anything that too often divides us.

No matter the labels others may place upon you, or the labels you may place upon yourself, here at Grace you will find a home among friends in need of a Savior. You are welcome here."



Fat Tuesday Celebration Party!

The last task of becoming a Reconciling in Christ Church is to celebrate completion of the process and commitment to become a fully welcoming community.

You are invited to attend a celebration party at Grace Lutheran Church, 5201 Urbandale Avenue, Des Moines, IA. Our theme is Mardi Gras and we will have snacks, a King cake, music, and fun.

Tuesday, February 17, 6 -ish Grace Hall.

Exact time to be announced - watch the weekly announcements and the website calendar.

Traditionally, people used up fats and meat to prepare for the time of Lent, when sacrifices were made to mark the life and death of Jesus in the Christian church. Mardi Gras translates to Fat Tuesday in English. It celebrates life and abundance. Other names and traditions focus more on purifying oneself and offering penance, such as Shrove Tuesday. The tradition of Pancake Tuesday evolved from those looking for ways to use up egg and dairy items prior to the beginning of Lent. These are just a few of the traditions connect to this holiday season, beginning January 6 to and continuing through the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday.

Carnelvarium (or carnival) means "taking away meat", which is part of the Lenten sacrifice; fish often takes the place of meat during the forty day period.

Three colors remind us of Mardi Gras: purple represents justice; green represents faith; gold represents power. King cake is eaten only at this time, to celebrate the birth of the King, Jesus. We are called to welcome people in justice and faith, using our power to show hospitality to all people. Join us for some King Cake in the Louisiana tradition of celebration.

We look forward to seeing you there!

TeamGrace



Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we all have stories that give meaning to our lives and decisions. If you have a story you would like to share, please let us know. We, in the Team, have shared how our experiences led us to our understandings and beliefs.

Several members requested Bible verses to support acceptance of LBGTQ+. We will be sharing information from Biblical scholars in the coming months. Some laws in ancient times were cultural as opposed to spiritual, such as do not eat pork and wash before entering the Temple. Some laws change over time, but some are clearly the foundation of these laws.

Old Testament: Micah 6:8

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

New Testament: Mark 12: 28-31

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord our God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The message is clear: love God and love others; those actions are primary. It does not say make a judgment about who is worthy.

TeamGRACE is looking for a few good people AND ideas!

The hard work is done; we need to plan some fun!!!
We're also looking for ideas – ideas for fun activities, ideas for positive and caring ways to reach out to and welcome new members (and old.). Won't you join us?



Reach out to Mary Helt, Jessye Flannery, or the office.

Instant Soup Mix Service Project



Join us on February 15 after worship for an All Ages Service Project.

This time of year, we are limited in what we can provide for hungry neighbors in our Little Free Pantry because of freezing temperatures. No cans, bottles, fresh fruit or vegetables are safe. Instead, we will make cups of instant soup using dried ingredients. Just by adding hot water and waiting a few minutes, a nourishing meal will be ready to warm a hungry soul. See you there!



Education and Service Projects for All Ages

Elementary Sunday School at 10:15 a.m.

K-5 students meet in the Sunday School room, across from the elevator just up the stairs from the Gathering Hall. Thank you to volunteers Rich Snyder, Val Culp, Courtney Brandsfield, Deanna Weber, and Jenie Schmidt.

Monthly Service Projects: In February we will meet on Sunday, February 15 to make Instant Soup Cups for the little free Pantry (see article on page 5). We typically meet as a congregation one Sunday a month September through May. Instead of meeting in the classroom, students and their families meet in Grace Hall as we all come together to work on a service project for the community.

Adult Education: Middle and high school are welcome and encouraged to participate too!

We meet in Grace Hall at 10:15, after worship and coffee time.

- **February 8:** Bishop Current will be with us in worship. She will also join us during the Education Hour. Please help us welcome her!
- **February 15:** All Ages Service Project in Grace Hall.
- **February 22:** Genesis 19, discussion on the story of Sodom and Gomorrah

Confirmation Classes

Meet with other middle schoolers on Wednesday evenings, with occasional service projects through the year. Wednesdays, 6:45 p.m. in room 102.

- We will meet February 4 and 11. We will not meet during Lent, and will resume on April 15.

Weekday Bible Study: The Ten Commandments

Led by Pastor Mike and Vicar Lotegeluaki. Anyone and everyone is welcome — friends, neighbors, members, drop-ins. You do not have to be there at every meeting to be welcome and find meaning. We offer two options:

- Tuesday mornings at 9 a.m. Meet in Grace Hall.
- Thursday evenings in Room 102 on the lower level.

Exploring Grace With Pastor Mike

A warm invitation to learn about our community, faith, and life together.

Welcome! **Exploring Grace** is an opportunity for you to get answers about us and find out about what being a part of Grace might look like for you.



February 15, after worship

Enjoy coffee and a donut hole after worship; then at 10:15 a.m., meet in the office on the main floor: just up the stairs and to the left from the main entry. **Questions? Contact the office at 515-276-6873 or by emailing Pastor Mike Mike@gracedm.org.** If this date doesn't work for you, there will be addition opportunities on March 29 and April 26. Or, just call the office to make an appointment at a time that works for you!

Lenten Soup Supper and Signup!

Supper begins at 5 p.m. and runs until 6:15 p.m. — come when you can during that time. **Everyone is welcome.**

- Not a Grace Member? Welcome!
- Neighbor? Welcome!
- Part of a group who meets here during the week? Welcome!



We are looking for individuals, families, or committees who are willing to provide a crockpot or two of soup for one of the Lenten Wednesdays (beginning February 18 through March 25). A signup is available on the bulletin boards. Everything else you need will be in the kitchen: ladles, bowl, napkins, spoons, and the dishwasher, should you prefer to use non-disposables. The coffeemaker is always on and ready to brew.

Supper begins at 5 p.m. and runs until 6:15 p.m.

Worship will begin at 6:30 p.m.

Dates still available to serve: Ash Wednesday, February 18; February 25, March 18, March 25

Ash Wednesday Schedule, February 18



Drive-by Ashes in the parking lot: 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

We will once again offer drive-by Ashes from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Simply drive into the parking lot, and up to the main entrance. Vicar Lotegeluaki or Pastor Mike will be watching from the Vestibule, and will come out to meet you. You may stay in the comfort of your vehicle.

Soup Supper in the Gathering Hall: 5:00 – 6:15 p.m.

If you are reading this, you are welcome! A free will offering accepted to help offset the cost for those providing the soups.

Ash Wednesday Worship in the sanctuary: 6:30 p.m.

This service will also be livestreamed.

Lent and Easter Details

Lenten Devotionals with the theme of Tell Me Something Good will be available in the Gathering Hall and at the back of the Sanctuary at the beginning of the season.

Holden Evening Prayer. Wednesday evening worship (not including Ash Wednesday) will be Holden Evening Prayer.

Dates: February 25, March 4, 11, 18, 25

Holy Week Schedule:

- Maundy Thursday Worship: 6:30 p.m., in-person and online
- Seven Sacred Pauses: All Day, Being New Spirituality Center
- Good Friday Worship: 6:30 p.m., in-person and online
- Easter Sunday Worship: 6:30 a.m. Sunrise
- Easter Sunday Worship: 9:00 a.m., in-person and online
- Easter Sunday Pancake Breakfast 7—8:45 a.m.—freewill offerings accepted





Thank you for the condolences and support for Elijah Torres. Your support meant so much and was such a blessing to us.

Sincerely,

Karen Crooks and Leslie Torres



Chancel Choir Rehearsal Schedule

Choir will meet at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesdays February 4 and 11.

There will be **NO** rehearsal on Ash Wednesday.

During Lent, the choir will rehearse at 5:30 p.m.

Lutheran Day on the Hill

February 26, 2026

Registration is now open, <https://lsiowa.org/ldh/> join LSI for the **2026 Annual Lutheran Day on the Hill Advocacy Day** at the Capitol.

This is a powerful opportunity to connect with fellow advocates, meet with lawmakers, and make a meaningful impact. Come together to raise your voices, share your stories, and advocate for issues that matter to your community.

The 2026 Legislative Priorities are:

1. Investing in a sustainable Model for Food Access
2. Support for Iowa's Mental Health System
3. Support for Services that Empower Refugees and Immigrants

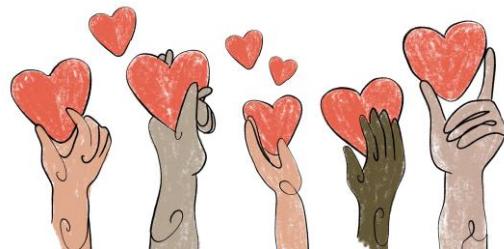


Worship Volunteer Needs

We are looking for poetry readers for Lenten worship services, including on February 18, Ash Wednesday.

Please note that we have returned to two lines of communion, which means most weeks we need 3 Communion Assistants for each service.

Each Sunday we are in need of several volunteers: Greeters, Lectors, Communion Assistants and Coffee/Donut Servers. Anyone can help — if you have questions about what is involved, just ask, and we'll be happy to show you what is needed for each position. Directions for making coffee (no measuring involved!), finding supplies, and setting out the donut holes are posted by the coffeemaker.



Sign up using the clipboard found on a Gathering Hall table, or go to gracedm.org and click on the word "Volunteer" in the upper right corner of your screen; then follow directions on the page. If reading this online, just click here: [Online Worship Volunteer Signup.](#)



Ways to Pray by Cindy Mackey

From childhood we all learn ways to pray, which includes intercessory prayer, prayers of gratitude, and rote prayers such as the Lord's Prayer when we can't find our own words. In prior columns in the Friendly Visitor, we have written about Contemplative prayer practices such as walking meditation, Lectio Divina, Centering Prayer, walking the Labyrinth, sacred gazing, and more.

I believe that God speaks to us where we are, and because God already knows our needs and desires, our best prayer often begins with awe. I find that awe always leads me to gratitude. In the words of Benedictine Abbot John Chapman, what is important is "to pray as we can, not as we can't". I find that the way I can pray changes daily.

It is often through the door of our ordinary experience that we are brought face to face with the Divine. Where else would God be but right here? Believing that God speaks through the circumstances and people in my life, it is critical that I slow myself down and give my attention to what is here and now. In the Ignatian Spirituality tradition this is identified as taking "a long loving look at the real".

We respond most completely through awareness in our three centers; heart, body, and head. Admittedly my head sometimes gets in the way! To reveal God's truth without words, without interpretation or analysis I often find the practice of Visio Divina very helpful. This is prayer inspired by a sacred image. It is experiential and sensory. You could say that the Holy Spirit prays in and through my very human response to the image. It is a type of sacred gazing.

To experience Visio Divina, I invite you to sit in stillness with Daniel Bonnell's image called "The Baptism of the Christ". You can search for this image online at fineartamerica.com. Or, you may choose an image that you have more readily available if you cannot be online.

Spiritual Direction Offer

Spiritual Direction is one way to help you begin to find a path through some of the difficult moments we find ourselves in. Members of Grace can meet with Deb Richards free of charge, as the Being New Spirituality Center has received a generous donation for the cost of your initial sessions. Contact Deb at (515) 422-4510 or debcarrigerrichards@proton.me

Spiritual Direction (or spiritual friendship, guidance, or companionship) is an opportunity to engage more deeply with your faith. Despite all the fancy terms, spiritual direction is really just a conversation.

It's a conversation much like the others that take place in our everyday lives, but with more intention. And greater **attention**. It's a chance to explore what you truly think and feel, in a safe, non-judgmental space.

Meeting in the company of a trained spiritual director supports our sense of well-being, and is a place to ask real questions, and make meaning of our experiences.

Lenten Retreat with Centering Prayer and Contemplative Practice

February 14, 2026, 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM, Grace Lutheran Church

Cost: \$40 (includes lunch) to be paid at the door. Scholarships available. Offered by Contemplative Outreach of Central Iowa (COCI). [Lenten Retreat | COCI](#)

Schedule

8:30 a.m. – Arrivals and Hospitality; Check-in and Registration
9:00 a.m. – Opening Circle
9:20 a.m. – Centering Prayer
10:00 a.m. – Noon – Contemplative Practices
Noon – Centering Prayer
12:30 p.m. – 2:20 p.m. – Contemplative Practices
2:20 p.m. – Centering Prayer
2:40 p.m. – Closing Circle

Lunch from In the Bag will be set out between 11:00 and 1:00 for you to enjoy when you choose.

Contemplative Practices: Visio Divina, Spiritual Journaling, Labyrinth Walk

Silent Meditation for Peace (Hybrid)

Monday, February 16 | 10:00-11:00 a.m. | Being New Center

“A restructuring of consciousness is the fruit of a regular practice of Centering Prayer - transformed hearts and minds that flow out as service to a world in dire need of love.” — Contemplative Outreach
Following a 20 minute sit of Centering Prayer or other silent meditation we will watch and discuss a video relevant to what is happening in this world of dire need.

All are welcome. Bring your prayers, your grief, your hope, your wisdom. This hybrid event, with [Zoom](#) available, is a collaboration of Being New and COCI.

Willing Workers and Quilters move quilt rooms!

The Quilters are now all set up in room 102 on the classroom level, with a room for storage on the same level. Having a storage room means more space to work in, while being on the classroom level means easy access by elevator – also very handy when packing and moving boxes of quilts to the sanctuary and then for shipping twice a year. Here are the Willing Workers and Quilters setting up and getting to work after the room was cleaned and painted.



Annual Meeting – A Brief Recap

Thank you to all who were able to attend the Annual Meeting and church potluck. The Congregational Budget and new Welcoming statement were adopted. Congregational Council: Jessye Flannery, Carol Woodruff, and Chuck Denton were elected to three-year terms. Endowment Committee: Paul Kallenbach was elected to a three-year term. Southeastern Iowa Synod Assembly: Julie Honsey and Rich Snyder were elected as voting members. Full and complete minutes will be available from the office or council.

The Annual Report is available [on the website here](#). For those not reading this online, go to www.gracedm.org/resources/reports/ and open or download the 2025 Annual Report. Some financial information has been removed from the online version. Copies with the full Budget and Finance report and spreadsheets are available to members. Please contact the office and let us know if you would like a copy, and whether you would like that by email or sent through the U.S. Postal Service.

Your 2026 Grace Lutheran Church Council:

- **Term ending February 2027:** Tom McCleary, Linda Moravec, Brian Gerling
- **Term ending February 2028:** Mike Hilsabeck, Pam Hellman Palmer
- **Term Ending February 2029:** Chuck Denton, Jessica Flannery, Carol Woodruff

Exec. Team

Tom McCleary – President, Carol Woodruff – Vice President, Mike Hilsabeck – Secretary
Brian Gerling – Member at Large

Chuck Denton

Tammy and I have been members at Grace since 1989. We have a son Gary (wife Samantha) and a daughter Leslie (husband Christian). I retired from Wells Fargo in 2022 and currently work for CKF (a cabinet and countertop company). I enjoy spending time with family and friends, working on home remodeling projects, woodworking, and exercising. At Grace I have been a part of the property team for many years. Helping with various projects around the church. I volunteer with the Tech crew on Sunday mornings and help with the monthly Saturday work group.

Jessica Flannery

Jessica and her family started coming to Grace in the mid-90s when she was in preschool. Since 2017 Jessica has worked part-time on staff at Grace compiling the weekly bulletin and PowerPoint. She participates in member care, TeamGRACE, and Thursday Bible Study. Jessica has worked for the State of Iowa for the past eight years. When not working, she enjoys traveling and spending time with her friends and family.

Carol Woodruff

Carol and her husband, Carter, were married at Grace in 1985 and joined in 1986, in addition to attending when she was young. They have a son, Dmitri, and two daughters, Emily and Bailey, as well as a son-in-law, Alex (Bailey's husband). Carol has been involved in many activities at Grace over the years including (but not limited to!) leading Sunday School (both adult and children), Choir, Bell Choir (leading children and playing adult), Altar Guild, Companion Congregation Committee (including traveling to Tanzania), lectoring, and more. She retired as Vice-President of Information Systems at EquiTrust Life Insurance Company in 2023. In retirement, she enjoys knitting, crocheting, reading to pre-schoolers and elementary age children through United Way, traveling, water aerobics, yoga, doing puzzles, and having more time with family and friends. She also served on the Merle Hay Neighborhood Association Board for the last 5 years and is completing her tenure in January.

Vicar Lotegeluaki working with the quilters, and some of the quilters with the latest quilts.



Bulletins, announcements, and sermons are all online!

For those of you who look for Grace worship materials online, we've now moved everything onto the Bulletins Resource Page. Go to the website www.gracedm.org.

- Find the word [Resources](#) — On a laptop or desktop screen it is in the upper right-hand corner. If on your phone, click the 3 lines in the upper right corner, then find Resources, Give, and Volunteer at the bottom of the drop-down menu that appears.
- Once on the Resources page, look for the red bubble that says Bulletins, Announcements, Sermons. Click to open that page.
- Once you have the [Bulletins](#) page open, locate the date of the worship you are looking for. You can now open any of the bulleted links related to that date. You may read these online, download to your device, or print as you wish.

Videos currently remain available on a separate page in the Resources section here: [Worship Videos](#). Sermons and Worship videos are posted approximately 24 hours after each worship. We tend to only keep six months' worth of worship material and video links on our pages.

Other helpful links:

[Altar Flower Signup](#) — <https://volunteersignup.org/7RXMJ> We invite you to sponsor a bouquet of flowers for the altar. You can include a special message in the bulletin, and the flowers are yours to take home after the worship service on Sunday.

[Online Giving](#) — Use our secure site at <https://gracedm.org/give-to-grace> and decide where you want to donate: the general church budget, the Little Free Pantry, the Mission Action Fund, youth, etc. Make a one-time donation or set up a recurring gift.