



Grace Notes

Brief notes for the members, families and friends of Grace Episcopal Church



The Blessings of a Diverse Community

Grace Episcopal Church is a diverse and welcoming community in many ways. Many of our parishioners have physical or developmental disabilities, and you may have noticed them on Sunday mornings or other church events. Several parishioners who have children with special needs have offered to share information about them, and in this article we invite you to meet David Mahler, Chloe Miller, and Max Olthoff. Their parents would be happy to talk with you more about their children, because with knowledge comes understanding and acceptance.

We are grateful to Elizabeth, John, Amy, Mark, Leah, and Glen for sharing their stories with us. In a future issue of Grace Notes, we will introduce several other parishioners who help make Grace an inclusive and diverse community.

Meet David Mahler

by Elizabeth and John Mahler

Who is David? Born December 2, 1995, in New York City, David surprised his parents shortly after birth by spending almost two weeks in the hospital in intensive care. There he was diagnosed with Rubinstein-Taybi syndrome ("RTS"), a rare genetic disease that involves broad thumbs and toes, short stature, distinctive facial features, and varying degrees of intellectual disability. Most people who have RTS have a defect in a gene usually found in chromosome 16. People with RTS are slow to develop motor skills and have very low muscle tone. David was very lucky to get diagnosed so early in life. Starting as a baby, he was able to get intensive therapies to help him learn to suck from a bottle, and to help him maximize his fine and gross motor skill development. David was not quite three years old when he learned to walk! David also had a number of surgeries during the first three years of his life when the Mahlers lived in New York City. David's parents are John Mahler and Elizabeth Campbell-Mahler. He has 3 siblings: Daniel (who you see in church all the time), and an older brother and sister who sometimes visit (Lyz and Jon).



How does David communicate? David has a severe cognitive disability (the term "mental retardation" is not widely used anymore) and he doesn't talk. Although he is 16 years old and his brain is still developing, he will probably attain no more mental age than that of a 4 year old. David cannot produce speech although he has a collection of approximate sounds to some of his favorite words: "uke" for Duke, the family dog; "ing" for pudding, one of his favorite foods; "ik, for milk; "Op" for Pop (his grandfather). David can sign many more words/phrases. He knows probably 40 different signs. At school, he uses something called an "augmentative communication device" to help him communicate with his teacher and others in the classroom. He pushes different buttons with symbols on them and the machine produces a voice sound. David also loves to use the iPad.

What does David like? David is very friendly, loves to interact with people and repetition is guaranteed! He hardly ever does anything only once. David will sign to you whatever he remembers recently seeing or doing. If he saw his grandfather in the morning he will sign "grandfather" all day long! If he knows that he is going to go swimming he will sign it to every single person all day long until he goes swimming and then for days afterward. He loves tricycles and bicycles and anything that rolls. He loves trains, too.

David remembers faces and if he can get you to look at him, he will shake your hand. If you smile or act like you might hug him, he will hug you. He doesn't dwell on anything for more than a second. While he is shaking your hand, he may be looking to the next person already. One of his favorite hand-shaking things is to grab your hand and have you shake the next person's hand he sees. David wants everyone to be friendly with each other and to love each other!

David loves babies more than anything else. He wants to kiss them on the cheek. We want to be very sensitive to everyone's personal space - and we try to stop David from getting too close. If you don't mind David kissing your child, please let us

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- Environmental Stewardship
- One More Note from Rev. Andrew Walter

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GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**Grace Notes**

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Grace Notes

Linda Caleb

Dining With Grace at the Movies

Friday, February 3



Please join us in the New Year for Dining With Grace at the Movies. In life we often have experiences that lead us to reflection and a change in direction. When we don't learn the lessons that the experiences provide, we might have to repeat the experience until we "get it". That is the premise of our movie, "Groundhog Day". A reluctant, egocentric reporter from Pittsburgh is assigned to cover the annual "Groundhog Day" in Punxsutawney, PA. A snowstorm changes the course for the reporter and he is forced to take a good look at himself. The movie begins at 7:00 p.m. with a brief discussion of the spiritual insights afterwards. Please bring a dish associated with the first letter of your first name:

A - H	Main Course/Casserole
I - Q	Salad/Vegetable
R - Z	Dessert/Fruit

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February Fellowship Brunch

Our annual **February Fellowship Brunch** will take place on **Sunday, February 12**, immediately following the 10:30 a.m. service. We hope you will make plans to stay and share in the fun, food and fellowship.

In addition to our shared meal there will also be materials available to make Valentine's Day Cards for loved ones, friends and members of the military.



The main course will be provided, but please bring a dish to shared with others, by following the schedule below associated with the first letter of your first name:

A - H:	Dessert/Fruit
I - Q:	Side Dish/Vegetable
R - Z:	Salads and Bread.

Newcomers are especially welcome!

The Blessings of a Diverse Community, *cont.*

know so we can let him instead of pulling him away.

What is happening to him today? David recently had an operation on both of his knees. Two clamps were placed on his growth plates, just above his knees, to help guide the growth of the bones. The plan/hope is that his bones will continue to grow in the right direction so that his legs straighten out. David is in a special education program at Einstein High School. He is learning skills to be able to work in a supervised job setting. His current job site is at Wheaton Plaza where he hands out flyers to the public. He will be in High School until he is 21.

What is Grace Church like for David? David loves to be in church and we have found Grace Church to be a welcoming place for David and our family. When you don't see David at church on Sunday, it is usually because he is "helping" his grandmother lead a worship service at one of the area nursing homes. The seniors love it when David visits them! You've probably noticed that David has a favorite pew at Grace Church. He loves to sit up front where he can get a good view of the clergy and the choirs. If you look closely, you will see that David really is following the worship service! Sometimes he makes the same hand movements that the clergy are making during communion and the blessing. He knows the liturgy and sometimes you can hear him utter sounds that mimic what the congregation is saying. He has learned how to take communion all by himself. David loves music and at the end of the service, David likes to listen to Mr. C. play the postlude on the organ. He moves to sit in the choir chancel with his mother for the postlude because the sound is pretty amazing up there!

Meet Chloe Miller

by Amy and Mark Miller

Who is Chloe? Chloe was born on Valentine's Day in 2004. She was evaluated at a very young age for speech and cognitive delays, and at age 2 she was diagnosed with autism. About a year later, she began having seizures. (An estimated 25 to 40 percent of people with autism also have seizures.) Chloe takes medications to control her seizures, but she still has about 10 to 15 on a typical month. At her worst, she used to have 100 or more in a month. Even though she does not have many seizures now, they can occur at any time with no warning, and that's why she often wears a cloth helmet to protect her head in case of a fall.



Autism is actually called "autism spectrum disorder," because there is a wide range of symptoms. Some people with autism talk a lot but are awkward socially. Others are extremely isolated, anti-social, and resistant to being touched in any way. Chloe does not fit into any typical category. She does not talk, but is more affectionate than many other people with autism. Chloe has severe cognitive delays, which has been exacerbated

by her seizures. She still needs a lot of assistance with dressing, feeding, and other self-help skills. It takes a lot of repetition for her to learn things.

How does Chloe communicate? You may think that because Chloe does not talk, she does not communicate. But she connects with people in many ways. If you get down to her eye level and hold your hand in front of her, she will lift her hand and give you a soft "high-five." If you sit in front of her at church, you may feel her reach out and touch your hair or collar – she is very tactile and sometimes seems to be showing affection by gently touching people's faces, hair, or clothes. (If a child is confused or afraid about this, we usually explain that it means Chloe likes them and is saying hello.) She doesn't often make eye contact or play with other children, but she enjoys being around children and adults. When she is happy, she smiles a lot and may make humming, sing-song noises. When she is tired, bored, or agitated, she often expresses herself with loud noises. She knows just a little sign language, but her use of it is inconsistent.

What does Chloe like? Chloe likes music, soft textures, warm baths, swings, and all types of food. Her favorite book for many years has been "Brown Bear, Brown Bear." She loves her fuzzy pink pillow, and she enjoys musical, light-up toys, especially her talking frog named Tad. She enjoys swimming in warm water (with water wings), and she likes to be pulled around the neighborhood on her adaptive bicycle.

What's Chloe up to these days? Chloe is in the second grade – in the School Community Based (SCB) program at Arcola Elementary School. One thing she likes about school is that they take field trips every Friday! She is in a small class and gets one-on-one attention all day long. She is adjusting well to being a big sister and especially enjoys patting Morgan's head and touching her hair.

What Grace means to us: When you have a child with special needs, it can be easy to avoid settings where your child will not be welcomed or understood. Grace provides a welcoming community where Chloe is accepted for who she is. Over the years, she will attend different schools and participate in different programs, but the people at Grace are like extended family members who are a constant and important part of her life.

Meet Max Olthoff

by Leah Royce and Glen Olthoff

One of the most joyful days for our family with Max at church was the celebration of his 18th birthday. Max loves birthdays, the singing, the candles with lights dimmed, the cake and on that Sunday after the 10:30 service in November 2010, many people from the congregation shared our joy, and it was a great way for the children in the church to see Max's birthday celebration.

(cont. on page 4)

The Blessings of a Diverse Community, *cont.*

brated in the same way that their own birthdays have been celebrated – the singing, the candles, the cake. On Max's 19th birthday, we repeated the event after the 10:30 service on the exact day of his birthday, November 20th, but this time, he seemed to be embarrassed and stayed close to Glen. I laughed because even though Max showed that he was uncomfortable, we were still celebrating and part of the celebration that day was that Max had changed. Wouldn't most teenagers be embarrassed about their parents joyfully and publicly acknowledging their birthday? Max had matured a little and when Max's awareness and behavior is more mature and developmental appropriate, that is absolutely a time to celebrate.

I share this because Max's birthday used to be a depressing day for our family. While for other children, birthdays signal growth and movement forward, Max's birthdays were a reminder to us that Max was not changing or worse, was stagnant. And stagnant for Max included the fact that he suffers delays in development as a result of a brain injury that occurred before his birth. The brain injury resulted in a severe mood disorder, mental retardation, autism which for Max includes a severe language and social/emotional impairment, and mild gross motor issues and moderate fine motor issues. His mood disorder, language and social/emotional issues have served as the most challenging aspects of his multiple disabilities. They impact his emotional availability, social skills development, and make for a very frustrated guy at times. His mood disorder fluctuates in that he experiences irritability, sleep difficulty, food selectivity, aggression and self abusive behaviors in a cyclic pattern and the "down time" comes on often unpredictably and can last around a week or two. When he was young, babyhood until around 10 years, the "down time" could last up to three weeks, followed by a "up time" for about a week or two if he was lucky. These days, the intensity of the "down time" is less as well as the length of time any given day in the "down time". The "up times" have sometimes included new skill obtainment even in a very slight way,

but still very noticeable and valued by his family and others caring for him.

When Max was 4, he was institutionalized for about 2 ½ years – neither his family, caregivers, or the school he was placed in in Montgomery County could manage his extreme and escalating behaviors. He lived in South Jersey at a residential school for about 2 of those years, and we visited him and brought him home more than any other resident at that school. And that was in great part because regardless of the difficulties and chaos of caring for Max, the bottom line was that we loved him. Loving him and bringing him back home was our goal from the time he was court ordered to residential care. In August 2000, we did just that – convinced the school system and harnessed the resources through a special program managed through the Maryland Governor's office, to bring him home. He was the only child ever to leave the Bancroft School at the request of a family – the president of Bancroft came to meet me (Leah) on one of my visits there to see Max (weekly), just to tell me that fact.

How did we come to Grace? I (Leah) was confirmed as an eighth grader at St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church, and the spring of 2001 after months of struggling to meet all of Max's needs now that he was back home as well as absorb the recent death of a brother, I (Leah) came to Grace church with our son Alex (then 11) and daughter Aislinn (then 4). We didn't bring Max because we came to the 10:30 service every week to get a break from Max in a peaceful place for a couple of hours. Glen stayed home with Max.

How did Max come to Grace? It finally dawned on me that Max should be included in coming to church with us. Alex Geyger kept first Alex, then Aislinn busy up in the "loft" recording the service, while Max and I and eventually Glen, sat in the pews.

(*cont. on page 5*)

ADULT FORUM TO EXPLORE STRONG WOMEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

For three weeks beginning **Sunday, February 5**, the Adult Forum will host sessions about three women from the Old Testament. Radically marginalized in different ways, **Tamar, Ruth and Rahab** each succeeded in claiming her rightful heritage as God's chosen. By Jesus' day these women were so iconic Matthew included them in his list of Jesus' ancestors. Along with Mary, then, these were Jesus' foremothers. Storytellers **Pam Hamilton** and **Anne Sheldon** will present the stories and facilitate discussion.

February 5: The Story of Tamar (Genesis 38) "Bring her out and let her be burned!"

February 11: The Story of Ruth, (The Book of Ruth) "And the woman was left without her husband, and without her two sons. So she arose..."

February 18: The Story of Rahab (Joshua 2 - 6) "Now then, swear to me by the Lord that as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with... me...."



The Blessings of a Diverse Community, cont.

Over the years, Max adapted to this new “activity”. These days, Max chooses to come to church – not every Sunday, but most. He’s become quieter over the years, and developed the stamina to stay for the whole service. He used to come for the donuts (he’d point to the picture of donut in his picture communication book all during the service), but now he comes we believe, because he likes being part of the community. We feel that Max feels very welcome to be there. Sometimes I’ll see him sitting on the stage, with children playing and socializing around him, and it’s clear that he’s made the choice to be there sitting on the stage nearby the action. Sometimes he gets a donut, sometimes other snacks, many Sundays he just wants to get out of there. But in general, he chooses to be a part of the routine of the service each Sunday, and he confirms that when he approaches the altar to receive communion. I used to wonder what motivated him to take communion, this kid who is often socially withdrawn and picky about what he eats and drinks. It’s clear though that he is there for the same reason the rest of us go to the altar – to be in community to receive communion. It’s one of the highlights of my week to kneel next to Max. Sometimes he lingers a little, taking in the scene at the altar and that’s inspiring too. Now we find ourselves admiring Max and his commitment to

being included much more than the feeling that we are overwhelmed by taking care of him.

We know that when people say hello to Max, and when some of the children at church have made simple gestures of getting Max a refill on his drink or a cookie or getting him the extra napkin he needs, all of this means a lot to Max. Max wouldn’t be who he is today without love. Being loved has allowed Max to grow and become the person he is and we are grateful that he has been able to be a part of the community at Grace Church and that he has learned more about being loved from the Grace Church community. Sometimes he can be funny in how he chooses to experience the service by turning around to look at the people behind him while everyone stands to sing or pray, or when he laughs or makes some vocalizations during the service. At times, he’ll reach out to join in accepting someone’s hand during the peace, but he’ll also accept people reaching out to him and wishing him peace by patting his shoulder. While Max may not initiate much socially, and sometimes he may be agitated or irritable or impatient, those around him can be confident that he is very aware of the community of Grace church and that that community is full of others who chose to show up, be together

Dear Friends,

Now that the bustle of Christmas preparations and musical activities are past I wanted to take this opportunity to express my thanks to everyone, our supporters and volunteers, who participated in making our first production of Amahl and the Night Visitors (ANV) a huge success. Over 130 people volunteered to help, which is, in itself, pretty extraordinary, and I wanted to share with everyone our results.

ANV was a Music of Grace event. Music of Grace, our concert series, has been a part of Grace Episcopal’s musical life for over 25 years, and it exists for only one reason, that is as one of our church’s outreach programs. We work hard at the series in hopes that new attendees will leave with a positive view of our community and its activity. Of course, not every person who is introduced to our church by attending a Music of Grace concert will return and become a part of our community. But we all know that life gives us things to be thankful for along the way, and sometimes lemons too, and it is our hope that when some of our former visitors feel the need to come to a church one Christmas, or on a regular Sunday, they will remember having been to Grace before and will come back. Speaking as a liturgically focused church musician I often have to remember this when producing Music of Grace presents its challenges. I have to remind myself that in the last chapter of John, Jesus told the disciples to cast their nets over the side of the boat, and that their nets were barely able to hold the number of fish that they caught.

Well, we caught a lot of fish with our production of ANV, actually well over 600 attendees who came to Grace and were able to see a community that, with many hands, told a story of generosity and hopefulness, and demonstrated a joyous, energetic, and active Christian community working together. Some of those visitors will return, and we are more ready for them than ever before. I see Grace focused on welcoming new people, making the extra effort to greet a new face in the Undercroft after service, inviting them to be a part of one of the ministries at Grace. I know from my home life and work life that being open to one more challenge, or one more thing to take on, is often a challenge in itself. But we’re doing it, and it’s important, and it’s working. I just wanted to say thank you.

*Peace,
Danny*

Pennyworth - The Place for Toys

When some people think of thrift stores such as Pennyworth, used clothing and household goods come to mind. However, we also sell many toys appropriate for children of all ages. One can find gifts for young infants such as rattles, and musical toys as well as stimulating educational toys for toddlers.

We have a nice selection of games and puzzles for preschoolers and elementary age children and we always have an abundance of books and soft stuffed animals for quiet time and cuddling. Dolls and cars are always in the mix as well. When donating your gently used toys please keep in mind that items with small pieces are easier to sort and sell if they are intact and necessary directions are included.

We replace batteries as needed but fresh batteries in your donation are an added bonus. For your next children's gift whether it's for a birthday, Valentine's or a "whatever occa-

sion" gift please think of Pennyworth.

At Pennyworth, we are keenly aware of the old adage: "Many hands make light work." In a previous Grace Notes column, we told you about volunteer Ann Kitts, who has taken responsibility for sorting and pricing jewelry. We are deeply grateful to **Cathy Ocheltree**, who has taken a good deal of responsibility for sorting and pricing toys. We have other "departments" that could benefit from someone with a passion for books, antiques, vintage clothes, household items, art, etc. If you have a passion for one of these, we'd love to hear from you!



Annual Parish Meeting

The Annual Parish Meeting was held on Sunday, January 22. Along with other reports, **Kent Kester**, Chair of the Budget & Finance Committee, presented the operating budget for 2012 and **Reverend Andrew** shared how much he is enjoying serving as Rector of Grace Church.

Aileen Moodie was unanimously elected to a second term as Junior Warden. **Kathryn Allen**, **Paul Brown** and **Matt Hardwick** were elected to three year terms on the Vestry.

Anne Sheldon and **Theresa Wheeler** were elected as Delegates to the Diocesan Convention. **Faye Haskins** was elected as an alternate delegate.



Malcolm Lester, who will serve as the next Head of GEDS, is introduced at the Annual Meeting.



Aileen, Matt, Kathryn and Paul are sworn in as members of vestry.



Men's Group to Host Family Game Night



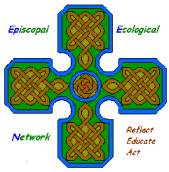
Do you enjoy a rousing game of Monopoly? Parcheesi? Clue? or some other favorite? Then be sure to attend the **Family Game Night on Saturday, February 4.**

Hosted by the Men's Group, the Game Night welcomes all ages Game Night will take place on Saturday evening from **7:00-10:00 p.m. in the Undercroft.** There will be snack food and prizes.

There will be a nominal fee (\$1 per person or \$3 per family) to help us pay for the food.

Every one is welcome, whether or not you had a chance to sign up for a favorite game on one of the sheets in the Undercroft. Just show up with your best game-playing skills. **Game On!**

Stewardship of the Environment



The focus of Stewardship at Grace Church includes stewardship of the environment and the commission will be sponsoring some special events in April, as part of a celebration of Earth Day.

The **Episcopal Ecological Network (EpEN)** is a nationwide network within the *Episcopal Church USA* that coordinates with the **Peace and Justice Ministries Office** of the Episcopal Church USA. The EpEN includes all concerned Episcopalians who are helping our Church assume a leadership role in the worldwide environmental movement, just as our Church leads in other peace and justice issues.

The EpEN's mission is to educate, encourage, and facilitate congregations, dioceses, provinces, and the *Episcopal Church, USA*, toward local, regional, national, and international activities for the stewardship of God's Creation. The following is taken from their website, <http://eenonline.org/>:

Each of us is in a different point our our ecological spiritual journey and the path we travel may move back and forth across the areas of Reflection, Education, and Action.

Reflection

We reflect by opening our hearts to creation with scripture, prayer, theology and liturgy. We feel it is necessary to remember that every element of creation is a gift of God and a revelation of God – with the understanding that how we relate to our world reflects also on our relationship with God. Our website provides theological reflections, liturgies, music, and information to consider in our relationship with and stewardship of God's creation.

Education

We educate ourselves about the issues before us. We feel it is necessary to gain a deepening knowledge of the theological and spiritual issues, as well as scientific and practical ecological issues. Our website provides bibliographies and references materials, notices of meetings of interest, and information about legislation at General Conventions.

Action

We increase our awareness of the responsibility to act in ways that protect, heal, and honor the integrity of God's creation, leading to intentional changes in lifestyles that reflect a reverence for God's Creation. We feel it is necessary to develop responsible individual and community activities which protect and heal all Creation.

One of the possible actions that can be taken at Grace is the formation of a **Green Group**.

There are lots of different names for this, but basically it's a core group of people who are committed to working for environmental change and responsibility in the community - in this case, Grace Church.

You may have already noticed many people informally working toward this goal by such actions as using regular coffee mugs instead of Styrofoam, or refraining from using plastic table cloths and dishes whenever possible. There are already several parishioners who know how to use the dishwasher and do so on a regular basis, thus making it much easier to move toward reusable items for hospitality events.



If you are interested in becoming part of a Green Group at Grace Church, please let **Reverend Andrew** know, or if you have ideas or thoughts to share about a Green Group, please pass those along as well. The **Stewardship Commission** would love to hear from you.

PANCAKE SUPPER

The annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper will take place on **Tuesday, February 21 from 5:30 - 8:30** in the church Undercroft. Be sure to join us for this full-filled Shrove Tuesday/Mardi Gras celebration, complete with pancakes and all the fixings, New Orleans music, beads, masks and a flurry of alleluias before they're put away for Lent.

Tickets will be on sale after Sunday services in the Undercroft and on Shrove Tuesday itself at the door: **\$5.00 per person, \$20.00 for a family of four or more.**

Laissez les bon temps roulez!



Transitions

Baptized:

Sunday, January 8
Elliot Michael Bugala,
Noelle Marie Robles

Deaths:

Barbara F. Geyger
died January 3

Thinking about Summer Camp? Think GEDS



Even before the first snow flakes have fallen, we begin to think of summer. Over the last several weeks our summer camp director, Jason Dejavitlert has been planning our "Grace is the Place" summer camp offerings. There is something for children ages 3 to 12 years of age. One of our new camps this year is one week of Sticks Lacrosse coached by our new head of school, Malcolm Lester. Sticks Lacrosse is a coed camp where campers can learn, have fun and meet new friends in a safe supportive environment.



Mr. D. describes our summer camp as "a time to dive into a world of play and activity. It's the season to create, wonder, imagine, and explore with opportunities to learn, build confidence and make new friends." The summer camp runs for eight weeks beginning June 18 and ending August 10.

Some of the camp offerings include:

Young Explorers Camp, especially for 3-5 year olds

Renaissance Kid General Day Camp for 6 – 12 year olds

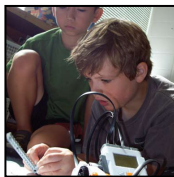
There are specialty camps in the morning

Bach to Rock: Rock City Camp for 3-5 year olds

Bach to Rock: Glee Club for 6 – 12 year olds

Bach to Rock: Rock Band for 6-12 year olds

Excite Soccer Camp for 4 – 12 year olds is back



Adventures with Robots Plus is for ages 6 – 12.

What's Your Drama? This is a specialty camp for ages 6 – 12.

Language Immersion Camps is a morning specialty camp for ages 6-12, including one week each of Chinese, Spanish and French.

Art is a morning specialty camp for ages 6-12.

Nature Camp is a morning specialty camp for ages 6-12

HoopEd Basketball Camp either full or half day for ages 6-12

Inventions is a morning specialty camp for ages 6-12

Kidball All Sports Camp for 3-1/2 to 12 year olds

Sticks Lacrosse for 5 – 12 year olds

Lego Mindstorms for 8 – 12 year olds

Academic Enrichment Program

You will find our brochure on the school website at www.geds.org and soon copies of our brightly colored summer camp brochure will be in the Nave of the church. All camp programs are held in Kensington with before and after care offered. Hope you include GEDS in your summer plans!



Donna Harshman
Acting Head of School

Fiscal Officer Report

Many thanks to all those who paid up their pledges in 2011 and to those who have made payments on pledge balances outstanding at the end of 2011.

January is a difficult month in which to discern trends because of

- ♦ the impact of the holidays
- ♦ the number of people who fully pay their pledges at the beginning of the year
- ♦ the fact that there were three dates in January 2012, and the quarterly payments that are due for pension contributions.

Taking into account all of these factors, January was a very positive month - we are going to end the month with only a slight deficit, estimated right now to be in the range of <\$2,000.00> - we had projected a larger deficit of <\$8,400.00> to be seen at the end of January.

Pledge income for January totaled \$54,649.34 for the five (5) Sundays of the month, roughly two percentage points higher than the factor that we would normally see in January – so we are deeply appreciative to all those who are keeping their pledge payments current at the beginning of the year.

Expenses continue to remain "in check" - special thanks are do to all those who are involved in the areas of buildings and grounds and hospitality, because we are starting off the year in line with projected expenses instead of starting off the year "behind" our forecast.

Finally, and thankfully (at least from our perspective), there was no significant snow fall during January; and, for the first time in a couple of years, we did not have to cancel services on Sunday. Best wishes for a wonderful 2012.

One More Note . . . from the Rev. Andrew W. Walter

Two days ago, one of my sons sent me a link to a YouTube video entitled, "Why I Hate Religion but Love Jesus" by a young poet named Jefferson Bethke. Bethke wrote the poem to highlight the difference between Jesus and what he considers false religion, and in the two weeks since the video was uploaded to YouTube, it has received an incredible 16.8 million hits. The video has caused such a sensation, or uproar (depending on your point of view), that Bethke has appeared on the early morning television talk shows.

Why such a fuss?

In his poem, Bethke says:

*I mean if religion is so great, why has it started so many wars
Why does it build huge churches, but fails to feed the poor
Tells single moms God doesn't love them
if they've ever had a divorce*

Bethke strikes a nerve by pointing out the incongruity which he feels exists between organized religion and the essence of who Jesus was. For many people, he is absolutely right for all they see in religious institutions and leaders is people not practicing what they preach. For others, his condemnation of religion is too simplistic and generalized – not all religious institutions and leaders behave so hypocritically – and overlooks all the good work which so many people of faith do in the name of Jesus Christ.

The reality, of course, probably lies somewhere in between. Organized religion can often get in its own way with institutions and leaders sometimes disappointing, even frustrating or angering us, and people in the pews arguing over what seem like trivial matters given all the problems in the world. As Barbara Brown Taylor, the Episcopal priest and author, reminds us, though: "Wherever people are people, there will always be things to offend... Do you wish

to go away sometimes? Of course you do. We all do. But where else would we go? This is where we have heard the words of eternal life. This is where we have come to believe and know the Holy One of God."

At Grace, we try to practice, not just what we preach, but what Jesus preached. We strive to live into our baptismal promises: seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves, and pursuing justice and peace among all, as we respect the dignity of every human being. This is our work and ministry, and it begins with our welcoming of ALL people. EVERYONE is welcome at Grace because everyone is created in the image of God and we respect the dignity of every human being, no matter who they are.

In his poem, Jefferson Bethke says church is not a museum for good people; it's a hospital for the broken. He is exactly right. We are imperfect, each of us. That is why we gather together to care for each other, to love each other, to hear the words of eternal life and know more deeply the Holy One of God. We come together at Grace to experience that Grace.

To view Jefferson Bethke's video, go to www.youtube.com and search for "Why I hate religion, but love Jesus."



Have thoughts, comments or questions about Andrew's articles (or even his sermons)? He would love to hear from you.

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