



2026

Grace Notes

Volume 78, Number 2



Grace
Lutheran Church

Lead Pastor

Shane Koepke

Deacon

Jessie Camp

Financial Director

Marsha Smith

Music Director & IT

Aaron Bartz

Office Manager

Deb Attig

Building Supervisor

Darin LaFrance

Engagement Director

Jenny Campos

Office Hours

9:00 am—2:00 pm

Monday—Thursday

507-373-6496

Worship Services

Sunday Morning

9:00 am

In-person & online

Sunday School

Sunday Morning

10:00 am

Sept. through May

www.gracealbertlea.org

[www.facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/GraceAlbertLea)

GraceAlbertLea

1 Corinthians 12:12–13:

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”

Of all the ways we talk about the church, my favorite is community. What’s yours? When you think of church, what’s the first thing that comes to mind? Is it the way worship deepens your faith? The space it provides for prayer and reflection? Education, music, service, or the quiet work of making quilts and meals for others?

The church is a multifaceted community, full of people, gifts, and ideas. At our best, those gifts point us toward Christ. At our worst, we can slip into infighting, distraction, and frustration. Scripture is honest about this. Community has always been both a gift and a challenge.

The apostle Paul reminds us that the church is not held together by shared interests, but by Christ himself. “For just as the body is one and has many members,” he writes, “so it is with Christ.” We are bound together through baptism into one body, whether we are alike or not. That is both comforting and demanding.

Being part of a church is one of the great gifts God gives us. It gives us places to practice faith, patience, forgiveness, and care. It mentors us when we are unsure and steadies us when life feels heavy. It invites us to walk alongside one another, not because we have everything in common, but because we share the same hope.

From the pulpit to the fellowship hall, from classrooms to kitchens, we are learning what it means to live faithfully together. Community does not just happen. It is formed as we show up, listen well, and keep Christ at the center.

That is the work of the church. And it is holy and wholly wonderful work.

~PShane



Deacon Jessie

“Why did you decide to become a deacon instead of a pastor?”

It's a common question I get. And it makes sense. Most of us only have experience with pastors in our congregations. When we hear the word “pastor”, we know exactly what to picture. And it's a word that means the same thing in multiple different contexts. Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians... we've all got pastors.

Deacons, though...that's a different story. Depending on the context, deacons can be seminarians (i.e., pastors-in-training), volunteers who help with worship, or like in the ELCA, an ordained individual.

Despite all this confusion, deacons actually have a long history. They are mentioned in the Bible (1 Timothy 3 and Romans 16) and there is significant historical evidence of deacons being an integral part in how the early church functioned. Deacons aren't “new”.

In the ELCA, deacons are called to be ministers of word and service: people who are called by God to bridge the gap between the church and the world. This role is vital for the modern church: fewer and fewer people physically attend church. How do Christians serve those who are not physically in the building? We come to them. The church has never been a place where we are meant to keep to ourselves and mind our own business. The church is an opportunity to engage in service in our community. A way that we can do the work the Gospel demands of us: to go out and show others our dedication and love for Christ. To show our love in our service to our neighbors.

So why did I decide to become a deacon? Because I am passionate about this work. Because I believe in the power of the Gospel. Because I'm excited to serve God's people. And I'm excited to take you all along for the ride.

-Deacon Jessie

Music

From Love Songs to Lenten Song

February is a hinge month in the church year. In the ELCA calendar, time after Epiphany runs through February 17, and Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 18. That pivot sits only a few days after Valentine's Day, and because Easter falls on April 5 this year, the whole arc from penitence to resurrection is already visible from the first pages of February.

I often think about that close spacing because it forces two themes into the same measure: love and mortality. The church does not treat them as competing topics. It treats them as one honest spiritual reality. Love is precious precisely because life is brief; mortality matters precisely because God has chosen to love us in the midst of it.

Valentine's Day is not a clean origin story, and it is not just a modern Hallmark invention. One strand of the story reaches into ancient Rome. Encyclopedia Britannica notes that Valentine's Day has been linked (not conclusively) to Lupercalia, a mid-February Roman festival associated with spring and fertility rites, and that Pope Gelasius I forbade Lupercalia in the late fifth century. At the same time, Britannica is blunt that the holiday's true origin is “vague at best.”

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Music (continued from page 2)

The saint in the name is also historically complicated. Britannica summarizes that there were several Christian martyrs named Valentine and that the day may take its name from a priest martyred around 270 CE under Emperor Claudius II Gothicus. The legends that grew up around him—secret marriages, a farewell note signed “from your Valentine”—are part of the tradition, even if they cannot be verified like a modern biography.

What matters for our purposes is the timeline: Valentine’s Day did not become a widely recognized day of romance until much later. Britannica places that shift around the 14th century. History.com adds a vivid detail from the medieval imagination: a belief in France and England that February 14 marked the beginning of birds’ mating season, and a literary milestone when Geoffrey Chaucer connected St. Valentine’s Day with romantic pairing in his 1375 poem *Parliament of Fowls*.

So the holiday is a layered thing: a Christian name, a tangle of legends, and a medieval cultural turn that reshaped it into what we now recognize. For a Lutheran congregation, that history is freeing. It means we do not have to accept the commercial script, nor do we need to sneer at the day. We can simply let it point us back to the church’s sturdier definition of love: love as vocation, love as faithfulness, love that takes responsibility for the neighbor. If a hymn or anthem that week names love in those terms, it will feel less like “Valentine’s Day in church” and more like the Gospel telling the truth.

The juxtaposition, Ash Wednesday, is far less ambiguous. In Western Christianity it is the first day of Lent, immediately preceded by Shrove Tuesday; it is commonly observed with ashes and fasting, and it functions as a sober reminder of mortality and the need for reconciliation with God.

Even the structure of Lent has a history that explains why Ash Wednesday sits where it does. Britannica notes that early Christian practice varied, but that Lent eventually began six weeks before Easter. Because Sundays were not counted as fasting days, that yielded only 36 days of fasting. In the 7th century, four days were added before the first Sunday in Lent to establish the symbolic 40 fasting days in imitation of Christ’s fast in the wilderness.

The ashes themselves also developed from concrete pastoral practice. Britannica describes how, in Rome, penitents and grievous sinners began a period of public penance on the first day of Lent: they were sprinkled with ashes, clothed in sacks, and kept apart until reconciliation later in the season. When that public system faded (8th–10th centuries), the sign of ashes was extended to the entire congregation as the season’s communal beginning.

If you want one more historical detail that underscores how old this practice is: the Catholic Encyclopedia notes that the term *dies cinerum* (“day of ashes”) appears in early liturgical books (the Gregorian Sacramentary) and “probably dates from at least the eighth century.” It also records the long-standing Western custom of making ashes by burning the previous year’s palms.

Musically, Ash Wednesday is the day the church retunes. The point is not gloom; it is clarity. A simpler texture often communicates more than a fuller one, and silence stops feeling like an interruption. Some traditions make that restraint explicit. In the Roman Catholic rite, Lenten practice limits the organ and other instruments to supporting the congregation’s singing, not showcasing solo pieces; even the sending hymn may be handled with a subdued hymn or with no music at all.

February teaches us how to change keys without changing the subject. Valentine’s Day reminds us that love is worth celebrating. Ash Wednesday reminds us that life is fragile, so love cannot be postponed. Love and repentance are not separate topics; they belong to the same song, now taken up in a quieter, more intentional register.

~Aaron Bartz



Church Council Minutes

January 13, 2026

Present at meeting: Doreen Pontow, Jerry Dahl, Gerry Vogt, Robert Jacobson, Dave Drommerhausen, Erica Samp, Markie Samp, Pastor Shane, Jen Zoller, Deacon Jessie, Philip Lonneman, and Adele Rosnow

Opening Devotions: Given by Jen Zoller, Hebrews 13 reminds us that we are called to love one another. We are here to help, care for, and be there for each other. None of us have all the answers, but together we can get through anything. We are on this journey together, 'walking each other home' with Christ as our guide and connector.

Open Forum: There was discussion on candidates for the board. Robert and Adele agreed to stay for their second terms and Philip Lonneman is willing to be on the board as well as possibly JD Carlson.

Approval of Today's agenda

Motion made by: Jerry Dahl

Seconded by: Jen Zoller

Approved

Review of Last Months Minutes

Motion made by: Dave Drommerhausen

Seconded by: Robert Jacobson

Approved

Financial Report:

Given by Dave Drommerhausen, the church was about \$5,300 dollars short for the budget, which was much better than the previous 8-9 years. Pastoral changes, insurance, utilities and upkeep of the church were the main areas of change in the budget.

Motion made by: Gerry Vogt

Seconded by: Erica Samp

Approved

Food for Backpacks: The third order has been placed for this school year and is due to arrive Feb 4th.

Old business: The kitchen remodel has begun, and fundraising has gone very well, we have about \$48,000 left to raise.

Fundraiser in the works thanks to Matt and Angie Moller. They will be selling printed aprons, laser engraved wooden spoons and mugs with church sayings. Order forms will be due by Ash Wednesday.

New/other business: There will be a leadership seminar at St. Olaf's in Austin March 14th if anyone is interested in going.

Lead Pastor's Report Pastor Shane:

- Deacon Jessie's ordination went very well and was well attended by family, friends and fellow clergy. Her installation at Grace was also a success and well attended.
- Christmas services went well, and had good attendance with the times the services were held.
- Ash Wednesday will be February 18th. We will be having Holden evening services at 6:30pm again as well as a meal open to anyone prior to the service.

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Church Council Minutes (continued from page 4)

- Tuesday morning Bible study will focus on comparing religions examples are: Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, atheism and several others.
- Deacon Jessie will be preaching once a month starting out.
- January 25th will be the annual meeting to vote on the annual budget.
- We are looking for volunteers to count the offering after church.

Deacon Jessie's Report:

- Looking for volunteers to assist with leading Sunday School.
- Youth will be meeting to plan out the programming for the rest of the year and start working on some summer ideas. Looking into ideas for smaller day trip ideas for the youth trip as it is getting late in the year to line up a trip farther away.
- Confirmation students will be helping with the Lenten services.

Committee Reports:

Altar guild: None

Building and grounds: Working on purchasing and installing new security cameras.

Education: Z-tag is scheduled for February 6th and Bingo scheduled for March 6th. The AL Robotics team will be seeking volunteers after church.

Library: None

Mission team: Reviewing library books to switch out the youth and teen books and finding books to put out for each holiday.

Music: Has worship music planned out until Easter, including songs for the choir, bell choir and instrumentals.

Usher: None

Visitation Group: Meeting the Tuesday after the board meeting, we will have an update at the March meeting.

Round Table:

Positives from congregants: Deacon Jessie has been well received by several members including those watching online.

Negatives from congregants: The kids area was quite loud, it was noted the carpet had not been put back after the fire in December.

Tasks for next council meeting: None

Prayer Intercessions: Prayers for church members and their loved ones. Also, for the kitchen remodel, the contractor and sub-contractors.

Next meeting time and date:

February 10, 2026, 6:30pm

Adjournment: 7:23 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Adele Rosnow

Grace Lutheran Church Council Secretary



Grace Prays

Prayers of Healing

For Daniel Schindler

For Siglind Kleih, daughter-in-law
of Gerhard & Irmi Kleih

For Wynnette Flores

Prayers for those Grieving

For the family and friends of
Paulette Calderon, Bryan
Calderon's mother

For the family and friends of
Truman Thron

Prayers of Joy

Lord, bless Jessie as she begins her
ministry as deacon. Grant her
wisdom, courage, and compassion
as she serves your people. Amen.

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

PASTORAL CARE

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

Please call 507-373-6496

February

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

1. Christopher & Jernelle Baas
Grant & Alex
2. Nancy Brandt
3. Mary Carlson
4. Tony & Vonnie Daub
5. Sandy Fredrickson
6. Gretchen Gade
7. Mark & Nancy Greiner
8. Jackie Groeneweg, Connor
9. Carroll Hovland
10. Wayne & Sharon Jahnke
11. Millie Jensen
12. Dean & Tara Ketterling, Dalten
13. Kathy Knutson
14. Jason & Dayna LaRue, Zachary
15. Jakob Kilby
16. Phil Goodmanson, Kennady
17. Mike & Heather Leiste, Abe & Joise
18. Joel & Teresa Matheson
Carly, Benjamin, Leah & Samuel
19. Bruce & Patricia Palmer
20. Milton Paulsen
21. Kelvin & Amy Rehneit, Sydney & Rachel
22. Daniel Sailor
23. Bette Schaub
24. Steve & Julia Thompson, Griffin & Malana
25. Derreck Walk, Peyton
26. Ross & Mianne Wittmer
27. Natasha Grove, Benett & Averie
28. Larry Madson

February

Caring and Sharing

Chairperson: Becky Tennis Hanson

Stacy Adams
Brandy & Mike Boettcher
Nancy Boyer
Tricia & Jerry Dahl
Julie & Kevin Grahn
Cynthia & Brad Haugen
Darlene & Richard Jordahl
Irmgard & Gerhard Kleih
Kristin & Matthew Larson
Ginny & Rick Loberg
Sheila Matson
Suzanne Mauer
Jody Mondeel
Regis & Robert Olson
Shannon & Chris Paulsen
Lynnette & Mark Rasmussen
Beth & John Ruud
Patricia & Bill Searles
Sarah & Matt Stay
Mianne & Ross Wittmer

Thank you to everyone who helped in January! We're grateful to all who helped or provided food. There's still time to sign up as a co-chair, your support makes a difference!

STUDY OPPORTUNITIES for Adults at Grace

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

Tuesday Morning Women's Bible Study
10:00-11:00 am

This study for women offers fellowship and great discussion.

Thursday Morning Bible Study
7:30-8:30 am

Consider joining this group for an opportunity for good discussion and good fellowship.

Grace WELCA Women's Circles
Mary Circle (meets every 1st Monday/5:00 pm)

New members are always welcome! Call the church office, 373-6496, for more information.

Caring & Sharing

**Please consider signing up for
co-chair.**

**You can choose a month that
works for you.**

The sign-up sheet is in the narthex.

thank you

Pastoral Act for January

Funeral for Truman Thron

Gifts of Love

Backpack Food Program

In Memory Of:

Larry Johnson given by David & Jeanne Lundak

Muriel Hoeg given by David & Jeanne Lundak

Muriel Hoeg given by Lee & Jodi Walters

Muriel Hoeg given by James & Judy Munyer

Brady Hanson, Ray & Vivian Hanson, & Dwayne

& Geri Sorenson given by Ken, Kris, Adam & Nicole Hanson

Fred given by Mary Lea, Jeanne, Elaine & Joyce

Gift Given By:

Moscow Lutheran Church

Mick & Becky Hanson

Albert Lea Public Education Foundation

Central Freeborn Lutheran Church Women

Caleb Flugum

Albert B Cuppage

Dale & Dorothy Baldwin

Grant Given By:

Sons of American Legion Post 264

Camilla Kolker-Sparks

Pro Manufacturing

Disabled American Veterans, Chapter 16

Building Fund

In Memory Of:

Donnie & Pat Johnson given by Debbie Christensen

Gift Given By:

Kent Jasperson

Donald Hamberg

Chew & Chat

Gift Given By:

David & Jane Smith

Delores Ost Scholarship

Gift Given By:

Milt Ost

Don Gross Scholarship

Gift Given By:

Kent Jasperson

Ecumenical Food Pantry

In Memory Of:

Muriel Hoeg given by Kenn & Gerri Breamer

Food Shelf

Gift Given By:

Greg & Marsha Smith

Kitchen Remodeling Fund

In Memory Of:

Muriel Hoeg given by Muriel's friends & family

Muriel Hoeg given by Daniel & Joyce Purdy

Muriel Hoeg given by Craig Williams

Muriel Hoeg given by Carlyn Tufte

Mary Lee Peterson given by Carlyn Tufte

Muriel Hoeg given by Mike & Karen Hendrickson

In Honor Of:

Carlyn Tufte's birthday given by Kevin Tufte & Stacy Stauss

Gift Given By:

Faith Ryan

Hazel Spiering

Ona Meyer

Frank Wakefield

Gaylen Johnson

Tammy Hamberg

Mildred Johnson

Alex & Angie Johnston

Linda Andersen

Joel Erickson

Randy & Lynn Stay

Dorothy Field

Don & Melody Munden

Kathe Grodhaus

Yvonne Daub

Eugene & Barbara Lysne

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Gifts of Love

Kitchen Remodeling Fund

Gift Given By:

David & Carol Larson
Betty Stahl
Lester & Diane Shaunce
Jen Zoller
Joan Moyer
Barb Tullberg
Charlotte & Dale Elvebak
Steve & Jodi Schulz
Darin & Tonia Palmer
Judean & Carol Thompson
Kenneth & Kristine Hanson
Kent Jaspersen
Edward Jones
Jeremy Brue
Gary & Sandra Thompson
Raymond & Carol Pedersen
Carroll & Mavis Hanson
John & Joan Holt
Dale & Dorothy Baldwin
Marilyn Anderson
William & Jane Buege
Al & Pat Arends

LOVE

Gift Given By:

JD & Mindy Carlson
Robert Jacobson

Memorial

In Memory Of:

Ila Quade given by Ross & Shelly Peterson
Jean & LaVerne Godtland given by Shane & Christine Keran

Martin Luther

In Memory Of:

Muriel Hoeg given by Gerhard & Irmgard Kleih
Paulette Calderon given by David & Jeanne Lundak

Gift Given By:

Alex & Angie Johnston

Music Ministry

In Memory Of:

Muriel Hoeg given by Dexter & Janet Henschel

Prayer Garden

In Memory Of:

Cliff Engebretson given by Darla & Ronald Nemec

Gift Given By:

Tammy Hamberg

Quilters

In Memory Of:

Linda Engebretson given by Dell & June Claussen

Sunday School

In Memory Of:

Muriel Hoeg given by Muriel's friends & family

Muriel Hoeg given by Mick & Becky Hanson

Undesignated

In Memory Of:

Muriel Hoeg given by Muriel's friends & family

Gift Given By:

Mary Peterson

PLEASE NOTE that any additional "Gifts of Love" recorded by the church office after **January 14, 2026** will appear in the next issue. If you have given a gift and your name has not been recorded, please call 507-373-6496.

FAIR TRADE COFFEE

We will be selling coffee
before our worship service on
Sunday, February 1, 2026.



Remember your Coins
for Sunday's Noisy
Offering!

Announcements

Library Corner

Books currently available for checkout in the Narthex on the bookshelves.

- (5) Daily Devotion books for one year. You may checkout for the year or less.
- Adult Fiction books.
- Children's story books and "The Way I Feel" books about Caring About Others, When I Feel Scared and When I Feel Sad.

*These books are located on the bookshelves in the Narthex.

Altar Guild

We'd love to have you join the team that has a role in preparation for our church services which includes altar environment, communion, baptism, flower care and decorating i.e Christmas and Easter.

Training is provided, we work in pairs and scheduling is flexible.

Contact Jane Madson.

You're Invited! Z Tag at Grace

Dinner provided!

February 6th, 6-8 PM

All 6th-12th graders are welcome to come, have dinner, and play Z Tag together.

If you've never played, no problem--we'll teach you!

DEADLINE
February 2nd

Sign up on Flocknote:



Chew & Chat Volunteers Needed

You do not need to be a confirmation parent, and all expenses can be reimbursed.

Thank you for supporting our youth!

You can:

- Make a meal
- Drop off food
- Serve students
- Or donate toward a meal



Scan the QR code to sign up to prepare & serve a meal or go to:
<https://gracelutheranchurch2.flocknote.com/signup/221589>

BINGO FUNDRAISER & SILENT AUCTION

MARCH 6, 6-8 PM

Dinner costs \$5. Bingo is free.

All proceeds will go to Youth Ministry at Grace.
All are welcome to attend!

Have Silent Auction donations?
Contact Deacon Jessie:
deaconjessie@gracealbertlea.org ★

The Church Cookbook!

CHURCH BASEMENT LADIES
HOODISH IN THE KITCHEN, JESUS IN OUR HEARTS

- February's theme: Soups
- March's theme: Bars

Generosity at Grace

December
2025

Average
Attendance
in person was:
141 per worship

Giving
\$49,325.03

Expenses
-\$46,286.47

Year to Date
Giving vs
Expenses:
\$559,602.60
- \$564,974.18
-\$5,371.58

February 2026

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1 8:30 am Fair-Trade Coffee 9:00 am Worship 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship 10:00 am Sunday School 10:00 am Adult Forum Faith & Mental Health in Winter	2 1:30 pm SAIL 5:00 pm Mary Circle 	3 9:00 am Staff Meeting 10:00 am Tuesday Morning Bible Study	4 9:00 am Quilting 5:45-6:15 pm Chew & Chat 6:00 pm Bell Choir 6:30 pm 7th & 8th Grade Confirmation 7:00 pm Adult Choir	5 7:30 am Early Morning Bible Study 1:30 pm SAIL	6 Building and Office Closed 6-8 pm Z-Tag Youth Event	7 Building and Office Closed
8 9:00 am Worship 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship 10:00 am Sunday School 10:00 am Adult Forum 	9 1:30 pm SAIL	10 9:00 am Staff Meeting 10:00 am Tuesday Morning Bible Study 6:30 pm Council Meeting	11 10:00 am Thorne Crest Communion 5:45-6:15 pm Chew & Chat 6:00 pm Bell Choir 6:30 pm 7th & 8th Grade Confirmation 7:00 pm Adult Choir	12 7:30 am Early Morning Bible Study 1:30 pm SAIL 5:00 pm 2 nd Wind at HyVee	13 Building and Office Closed	14 Building and Office Closed 
15 9:00 am Worship 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship 10:00 am Sunday School 10:00 am Adult Forum Love Has More Than One Meaning	16 Newsletter Deadline 1:30 pm SAIL 	17 9:00 am Staff Meeting 10:00 am Tuesday Morning Bible Study	18 Ash Wednesday 9:00 am Quilting 5:00 pm Bell Choir 5:45 pm Lenten Meal 6:30 pm Worship 7:30 pm Adult Choir Confirmation attend worship & short discussion afterwards in chapel	19 7:30 am Early Morning Bible Study 1:30 pm SAIL	20 Building and Office Closed	21 Building and Office Closed
22 9:00 am Worship 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship 10:00 am Sunday School 10:00 am Adult Forum Reading Through the Bible	23 1:30 pm SAIL	24 9:00 am Staff Meeting 10:00 am Tuesday Morning Bible Study	25 Lenten Worship 5:00 pm Bell Choir 5:45 pm Lenten Meal 6:30 pm Worship 7:30 pm Adult Choir Confirmation attend worship & short discussion afterwards in chapel	26 7:30 am Early Morning Bible Study 9:00 am Grace Notes Mail Prep 1:30 pm SAIL	27 Building and Office Closed	28 Building and Office Closed

Grace Lutheran Church
918 Garfield Avenue
Albert Lea, MN 56007

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

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Worship Schedule



Sunday Worship Service

Time: 9:00 am

Options: In person and online

Watch: Facebook (facebook.com/gracealbertlea)

YouTube (youtube.com/@gracealbertlea)



Sign up for updates from
Grace Lutheran. Receive
announcements via text
or email. Scan QR code to
sign up for FlockNote!

Sunday School

Time: 10:00 am

Confirmation

Chew & Chat: Serving from 5:45 - 6:15 pm Wednesdays

7th & 8th Grade: Wednesdays, 6:30 pm

