

FEBRUARY2023

GRACE NOTES

No. 2 pekingrace.org



highlights

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February 2023

go hungry, and
believes in
be thir



PASTOR'S CORNER

Thoughts, dreams, and ramblings of someone who just wants to connect you to Jesus



Recently I have been asked about the current state of the church, both the local church and the greater United Methodist Church. Understanding where we are and where we are going is always on my plate as a pastor. It is not that I have always had a perfect understanding of that, it is just that a part of my work is in exploring these questions. Recently I have come to some peace of mind about where things stand both for us as a local church and within the denomination.

For our local church, I am grateful and excited. In 2022, we continued to see the types of slow growth that lead to a healthy church. It is consistency over time that leads to excellence. Our worship services continue to make marginal gains in attendance. These gains are ones where if one were to go back to the same acceptable worship size of January 2022 in December 2022 you would feel diminished. This slow growth is not always perceptible on the individual weeks, but truly noticed in the length of time. As we are working on the end of year reports now, it is clear that we have seen another year of positive growth in our Average Weekly In-Person attendance since our low year of 2020 from the impacts of COVID. Like many churches, and other organizations, we have lost a group of people that will not return to us post COVID. Yet, I am writing this a day after welcoming a new member, talking to 4 more persons about their upcoming membership commitment and finding more faces to join us beyond that. The message of Jesus is still reaching many.

We also finished the year in a strong financial position. In 2020 and 2021, we were able to finish in the positive because of the hard work of the congregation and the receipt of several grants (\$50,000+ per year) that helped us navigate those two hard years. In 2022, those grants were no longer available to us. Yet in 2022, with a combination of reduced spending where available and increased giving from the total of the congregation, we are in a healthy and stable position as we enter 2023. We did have to use half of the carry-over from our 2021 surplus (\$18,000), but we did not have to rely on the reserve or endowment funds to complete our work in 2022. As we continue to monitor our budgets, find partnerships for expanded ministry, look toward creative endeavors like our Solar Energy grant, etc... I am confident that we will be in a great position for sharing the message of Jesus in Pekin.

In our denomination, we are in a season of turmoil. This turmoil is around the formation of a separation group known as the WCA (Wesleyan Covenant Association) and their new denomination, the GMC (Global Methodist Church). To simplify this rather lengthy topic, I will attempt to summarize what has happened. Since the insertion of the statement in the 1972 Book of Discipline "homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching..." there has been debate around what that statement means, its validity as found in scripture, and the ramifications for

that statement. People have interpreted it in various ways until the 2019 Special Called General Conference of the UMC. At that time, the language around it was changed such that instead of following a process of complaint that is found in the Gospel of Matthew, we now have an immediate expulsion of persons who identify as homosexual and clergy or who are clergy that lead the wedding of someone who is homosexual. At that session of the General Conference paragraph 2553 was added to the Discipline that provided for churches who disagree with the church's stance on human sexuality to leave the denomination through 2023 once they paid their pension obligation, 2 years of apportionments and any claims from the Annual Conference Trustees.

What happened in response to this action is that most of the WCA aligned delegates were voted out of their positions 10 weeks later at the next Annual Conference where delegates were elected for the 2020 General Conference. With the postponement of that General Conference due to COVID and global travel struggles until 2024, the WCA/GMC aligned churches decided the loss of their delegate spaces would lead to shifts in the denomination that they would not stand for. For that reason, they began to apply for leave under paragraph 2553 (though in technicality, they agree with the Book of Discipline as it stands today). With this more conservative incompatibilists end of the church choosing to leave, we have seen that about 17% of the total United Methodist Church membership and churches will be leaving the denomination by the end of 2023.

For a church to leave, they must have their Leadership Board vote to enter a discernment process. They would then notify the District Superintendent who would guide them through knowing all the facts. They would be given space to have all church meetings and hear from pro Stay UMC and Leave UMC voices. They would be presented with the financial package required to leave. They would be given a 60-day time for prayer and discernment and finally an all-church member vote. That vote would require a 2/3rds vote to leave and at that time the church would have to pay the costs associated to leave and get a final approval vote from the Annual Conference. At that time, the church would be independent and have to choose to either stay independent (roughly 1/2 of those churches who have left under this provision are doing this) or to enter into any other denomination that would have their church.

As your pastor, I want you to know that I am not going to be leaving the United Methodist Church. I am investing my personal time as a delegate to General Conference to further the growth and effectiveness as a witness of Christ to the world. I have had no persons ask me to guide our board through this process of disaffiliation. I know of persons who wish for us to retain the current language and denominational stance on human sexuality. I also know of persons who desire it to be changed completely. All of these positions are of members of this Grace Church. I know many of you sit next to one another in worship every Sunday and it is my goal as your pastor to help us maintain that ability.

I bring this local and denomination pieces together because of a sense I have about both. In John 15, Jesus speaks of pruning the vines. I believe that in some ways, the local church and the denomination are nearing the end of a season where we have been pruned. The cutting away hurts and it will leave a mark. But, it will also produce a space for growth, for life and for vitality. I have only recently gotten to such an understanding, but it is bringing me a hope for tomorrow that is filled with the life of Jesus and I cannot wait to share that with you all.



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Emmy Thies
Director of Children & Family Ministry



Pre-K through 1st grade class during lesson time

In January, UNITEkids were given the chance to ask questions about God, faith, the Bible, and church for us to answer on our Wednesday nights together. Wow, these kids are smart, insightful, and curious! 2023 will be a challenge for us adult leaders as we navigate answers to the best of our ability. We will definitely be leaning on the Holy Spirit to give us the understanding and the right words to help us answer the kids.

Each of the classes at UNITEkids: Pre-K through 1st grade, 2nd-3rd grade, and 4th-5th grade are consistently reaching over 10 kids per class per week! We are looking forward to the time when each grade has enough students and teachers to be on its own!



4th-5th grade class playing a question game

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Emmy Thies
Director of Children & Family Ministry

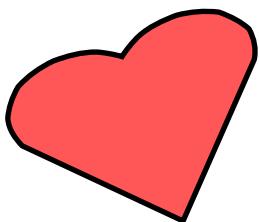


Game time in the gym for 2nd-5th graders, with junior high helpers

If you are an adult interested in volunteering at UNITEkids, please contact Emmy at ethies@pekingrace.org.

There are opportunities to lead games in the gym or teach during lesson time. We are open to mission projects that can be completed on a Wednesday night also.

The kids would love to meet you!



Youth Ministries

For the last two and a half years Greta has been leading our youth ministry while working diligently on her degrees for moving into ministry and counseling. As she has progressed toward that long term goal, the cost of time to her school-work and clients she has started to see in her ministry has progressed to the point where she would compromise one of them were she to continue to do all of them and so with great wisdom she is moving forward toward her calling and ministry.

As a congregation, we took the Sunday of January 29th to thank her for her ministry, pray for her future ministry and send her forth with our love, prayers, and encouragement. Many of our church took the time to encourage her at a reception that was held between the services. If you would still like to send her an encouraging card or letter please feel free to contact the office for more information.

She will be missed, but we send her forth with love, care and prayers knowing that God will use her and her gifts for the good of His kingdom.



We will miss you!

Church News

Journey Class

The Journey Class is currently studying the ministry of John the Baptist. The group meets between services in the Upper Room. Please join us. We will have an evening of fellowship at 6 p.m. Saturday, February 18, at the home of Jan and John Darnell, 626 West Shore Drive. They will provide sloppy joes sliders, and everyone is asked to bring a dish to share. If you have any questions about the class or would like to join us on February 18, please call Nancy Ridgeway at 309-267-6918.

Calendar Clarification

There has been some confusion about how church members are to reserve spaces at the church. The office has two calendars that are maintained. One is the calendar on the website of known church activities. The other calendar is a private calendar of events that are affiliated with outside organizations and building usage. Just because the church calendar does not show an activity, that does not mean that space is open for your gathering. We have added the Union Mission to the open calendar because it takes up such a big part of the schedule. Not all events are included. In addition, not all groups are remembering to let the office know when a space is needed. This can create confusion and double booking.

When using an area for a special activity, please make sure you go through the office and get the space placed on the calendar. The office also requests that the information is given in writing as this reduces the chances of mistakes. It gives the office a resource to look back to and a reminder to place it on the calendar. Being on the calendar assures you that the space you would like to use is actually free and there will not be any activity conflicts during that time. The secretary tries to call the leaders of groups when other activities may interfere or create a problem. We thank you for your flexibility when changes or issues arise.

Thank You

Dear Grace Methodist Church,
Thank you for hosting this great event [MLK Day Event] and all your support of our children!

Willow Primary 3rd Grade

Thank you for your generous and thoughtful donations. The socks & shoes will truly make a huge difference for so many of our students. We are beyond grateful for your support!
With Gratitude,

Shana Steward & Lynne Johnson
Pekin Public Schools

Dear Grace United Methodist Church,
I wanted to say from my heart...Wow! Thank you for the food pantry. I appreciated it. My mom and I been praying for the pantries and your ministries. That God will bless you and restock it. May the Lord Guide you in your church and humbly bless you as you obey the Lord's way. God Bless you.

Carla

Book Club

Book club will meet Tuesday, February 14, 10:00am at the library of Pekin Estates. All are welcome! If you need more information or have questions, call Sandy Isenburg 309-241-1411.



Church News

New Board Members

The new board has started meeting and met for the first time in January. If you are interested in learning about what is going on in the church or have a concern you would like the church to be aware of, these are the people you would ask. Board Meetings are tentatively scheduled for the 4th Thursday of the month. These meetings are open meetings and all are invited to attend.

The board for 2023 is the following:

Alisha Dault
Brian Garman
Mason Tennel
Michelle Hunt
Greg Ranney
Rich Kriegsman
Dale Golden
Marj Oesch
Eric Swanson, Pastor

Again, we thank them for their service to Grace Church and to its future.

Birthdays

Please let the church office know your birthday. This way we can celebrate with you on your special day!

Susannah Circle

Susannah Circle will not be meeting in February. They usually meet the fourth Thursday of the month. They will resume regularly scheduled meetings next month and meet Thursday, March 23 at 9:00am. If you are interested in joining this group please contact the office or talk with Carol Booth.

Church Van

If you are interested in starting a ministry to pick people up for church, please let the office know.

Amazon Smile

Amazon is ending their amazon smiles program in February. Thank you to everyone who signed up for this program. We do appreciate the support we have received .

Sermon Series

In February we will be mostly focusing on the Parables of Jesus. Though this series technically started at the end of January, we will be looking at 4 of the most shared parables, asking questions about them, and finding meaning for our lives today. This will be a fun series for all of those who love the question, "what's the thing behind the thing." After this series, we will begin the season of Lent with Ash Wednesday on Feb. 22nd and a Combined worship service Sunday Feb. 26th. Lent is a space where we intentionally focus ourselves on the path of Jesus to the cross and ultimately to resurrection. We hope you find space to grow in these coming series together.

Maintenance Volunteer Opportunity

TCRC service cleans our church two days a week in place of a janitor. They primarily clean the bathrooms, empty garbage, and vacuum/straighten the main areas of the church and the education building. They have agreed to clean other areas on an as needed basis. This is one way we are able to keep maintenance costs down.

If there is an area that needs to be cleaned or maintained, please let the office know. There are a lot of spaces around the church, and it is hard to monitor them all. After reporting an issue, the office will find out if TCRC can tend to this area. If not, a maintenance task member will be asked for assistance.

Our church has a few volunteers (maintenance task force) that have been donating their time to assist any maintenance issues that arise with our buildings. If being a member of this task force is of interest to you, please let the office know. When time allows, members of the maintenance task force check the list (located in the office) of maintenance jobs. Volunteers have been choosing the job(s) they want to tackle which greatly helps to whittle down the list of maintaining our church.

Church News

Grace Food Pantry Update

Grace's Food Pantry is full of miracles every month. To begin with, once a month we take the church van and the trailer up to Midwest Food Bank in Peoria. Regardless of what and how many food items are offered for us to choose, by the time we leave the warehouse... the van and trailer are both fully crammed with tons of food! We often receive triple the amount that is originally offered to us! **Miracle #1 is the amount of food and the gracious generosity of Midwest Food Bank EVERY month!**

Miracle #2 occurs at both Midwest and our church... the packing and unpacking of the trailer and van. There are only a few paid employees at Midwest; the rest of the workers are all volunteers, and many are retirees. They are also expert Jenga gamers positioning every box and package to fill every inch of the vehicles and trailers! Our van drivers are miraculous with their expertise in managing and driving the overloaded van and trailer! Likewise, our pantry team and Pastor Eric are amazing in how they unpack all of the food when we return. Time is very limited before our Thursday Pantry begins to hand out food in our drive-through! **Midwest's and our pantry unloading volunteers are Miracle #2.**

Our Pantry team also includes 4 ladies who make a total of over 165 telephone calls twice a month to our pantry guests who have shared their numbers with us! They call on the day before our pantry to remind our guests to come and share other info when needed. It's amazing the relationships that have developed between the callers and those on their call lists. Many guests express genuine gratitude and also share requests for us to pray for their needs or needs of others in their lives. **Our caring calling team and those who receive the calls make up our Miracle #3!**

Our pantry team usually packs about 225 sacks and frozen food bags so that each family receives two paper sacks and one or more plastic grocery bags full of food, toilet paper and other items. We often get so much extra from Midwest to hand out that day ... it takes 10 or more volunteers to hand out everything to each car in line! Another amazing blessing are the conversations that our volunteers have with our guests! We often share our faith and they often say, "Thank you so much, and God bless you!" That warms our hearts so much! **Miracle #4 is our Pantry team packing the sacks, distributing them, and conversing with our guests!**

Our Pantry Team will agree that Miracle #5 is the BEST Miracle of all! **Miracle # 5 is that God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are involved in every aspect of this miraculous outreach mission of our church!** For months, as Midwest kept insisting upon putting more and more in our trailer, I'd say that we have more than enough. I finally came to the realization that **God** was saying, "I'll say when you have enough" as He was guiding the Midwest volunteers to fill every inch possible in the trailer. At church about 45 minutes before the Pantry starts, we pray to **Jesus**, telling him sometimes in a panicked mode, "We have the food, now please bring the guests because we only have 2 cars in line and tons for food!" Once again, He never fails us... cars are often lined up around the church within an hour! Lastly, we all feel the **Holy Spirit** guiding us as we greet our guests. He also guides us as volunteers help each other during these very busy and sometimes complicated times! **God has truly made a family within our volunteers!**

So... how many people did we feed this year? Within 22 pantry days, we gave food to 1,373 families feeding 4,042 people. Thank you, Jesus, for being our role model for helping those in need. Amen.

Church News

2022 NEWS: UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH

(GRACE UNITED METHODIST WOMEN—GUMW)

Each year in December, the GUMW reviews its finances and determines if it is feasible to support agencies that work to help others as Jesus would do. We are happy to share the various agencies that we were able to support this year totaling \$4,100. Every year, the GUMW always supports the Methodist-based Cunningham Children's Home and the Leslie Bates Davis N. House. We also choose to donate locally to help those in need.

The recipients this year are:

- Carol House of Hope in Pekin
- Pekin Hope Chest
- Pekin Salvation Army
- Pekin Police Foundation
- Pekin Outreach Center
- Pekin YWCA Literacy Program
- Crittenton Crisis Nursery in Peoria
- Wooden It Be Lovely (new program with Springfield Methodist Church; women in rehabilitation working on refinishing used furniture to sell)

The GUMW would like to thank all of its members who have been so generous with their annual pledges for our missions, etc. We are also so grateful to our congregation for your continual support with our annual Pecan Sales and Bake Sales. Thanks to all of these pledge and sales supporters, we are able to support our missions.

Lastly, the GUMW would also like to thank our ladies who commit so much time and hard work with the funeral meals held at our church and those who donate salads, vegetables, and desserts. Your loving care and efforts are appreciated by so many people.

With much gratitude to everyone,
The GUMW Executive Board

Funeral Dinner Volunteers

Our church has a longstanding funeral dinner ministry of hosting grieving family members while providing an opportunity to celebrate a loved one's life following a funeral.

Harriet Canopy has coordinated this effort for many years. Her leadership qualities are put to work as she contacts people to make side dishes, cook the meal, serve, and clean-up. Harriet purchases supplies and arranges for the chicken, main course, to be picked up. We thank Harriet for her faithfulness in organizing this mission with grace, along with all of the team members who also serve in this capacity.

Our grieving families are gifted with this meal. It is a time when they can relax, reminisce, and start the healing process from their loss. Providing a meal for friends and out-of-town relatives relieves some of the stress for families in mourning.

Would you like to help? Additional volunteers, male and female, will make this valuable ministry easier on everyone. Since there isn't a lot of time to prepare for a funeral meal, it is important to have a pool of names to contact since some are not available every time. Please call the office or Harriet Canopy if you'd be willing to be part of this team; providing side dishes or assisting with the preparation and serving of the meals. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Romans 12:13



Church News



Chili Fundraiser

The Grace softball team will be having their annual Chili fundraiser. The money raised pays the entrance fees for the softball team. Pick up your chili at the hospitality counter Sunday, February 5. They will be offering the chili from 10:00am-1:00pm. You can take some chili home or enjoy a bowl here and let them clean up the mess. A love offering will be taken. Give what is in your heart to give.

Ash Wednesday Service

Ash Wednesday comes from the ancient Jewish tradition of penance and fasting. The practice includes the wearing of ashes on the head. The ashes symbolize the dust from which God made us. As the pastor applies the ashes to a person's forehead, he speaks the words: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.....Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Season of Lent. It is a season of penance, reflection, and fasting which prepares us for Christ's Resurrection on Easter Sunday, through which we attain redemption.

You are invited to come to our Ash Wednesday Service on February 22 to start this process of remembrance. The church will hold its service in the sanctuary at 6pm. If you do not like to drive at night, Pastor Eric will be holding a smaller informal service at the Pekin Estates at 2pm. You are welcome to come to either service to receive the ashes.

One Service Sunday

We have an opportunity to get together as a community, worship together and enjoy fellowship. On February 26th there will only be one service at 10:00am. It will be held in the Sanctuary and a luncheon will follow in the GFFLC. We hope all can attend and fellowship as a church. The Saturday service this weekend will be cancelled.

Christmas Eve Offering



Thank You! Thank You!

Our Christmas Eve Offering is complete thanks to your generosity! The project team wants to thank our Grace family for helping us meet and exceed our goal of 3,000 pairs of socks for the children of Pekin District 108. Each week as we counted and sorted the socks we realized how truly blessed we are at Grace! The socks were picked up and delivered to the schools. There will be happy, warm feet on the children very soon!

The offering taken at our Christmas Eve services was equally exciting — \$8625.00 was collected!!! Way to go! Thank you for getting out in those extreme temperatures and sharing with our two projects. Thanks to you, the Unity Point Mental Health facility for youth and Pekin District 108 will share these funds. Pekin 108 will use the funds to purchase much needed shoes for children.

The administration at both organizations were so very appreciative to learn of the donations coming their way. Many thanks to YOU Grace Church for making this happen in the lives of so many in our community!

God Is Good!!



Birthdays

Donald Jackson	2
Lisa Poole	3
Bill Russell	3
Judy Dietrich	4
Jana Swisher	5
Joy Wojtas	6
Chris Ward	7
Emily Weyhrich	7
Theresa Holly	9
Nancy Springer	10
Kristy Whitman	11
Savannah Butler	13
Marcia Gazza	14
Debra McKinley	17
Willie Fahnstrom	20
Branson Whitman	23
Donna Bignell	24
Elisabeth Sandoval	24
Mitch O'Shaughnessy	25

Connect!

**601 N. 4th St.
Pekin, IL
309-347-7131
secretary@pekingrace.org
pekingrace.org**

**Worship Times
Saturdays 5:30pm
Sundays 9:00am & 11:00am**

**Office Times
M-F 8:30am-4:30pm
Closed 12pm-1pm**

Wednesday, February 1
Radical moves to Wednesdays
6:00pm-8:00pm, Mason building

Sunday, February 5,
Chili Luncheon, between the services

Thursday, February 16
Drive-through Food Pantry at 4:00pm

Monday, February 20
Office Closed, President's Day

Wednesday, February 22
Ash Wednesday Service, 6pm, Sanctuary

Saturday, February 25
Drive-thru Food Pantry at 11:00am

Saturday, February 25
No Chapel Service
Come on Sunday for Celebration

Sunday, February 26
One Service Sunday at 10:00am
Followed by a Luncheon

Prayer Concerns

Brittany Sharp

Kyree Travis

Carol Gustoff

Charlie Stroemer

Dave Champlin

For Jill Garman and family on the
passing of her father, Dick Becker

Judy Warner

Les Seman

Margarete Hall

Mark Weber

Paul Pearson

For the family of Terry Zimmerman
on her passing

