

# Voice of Grace



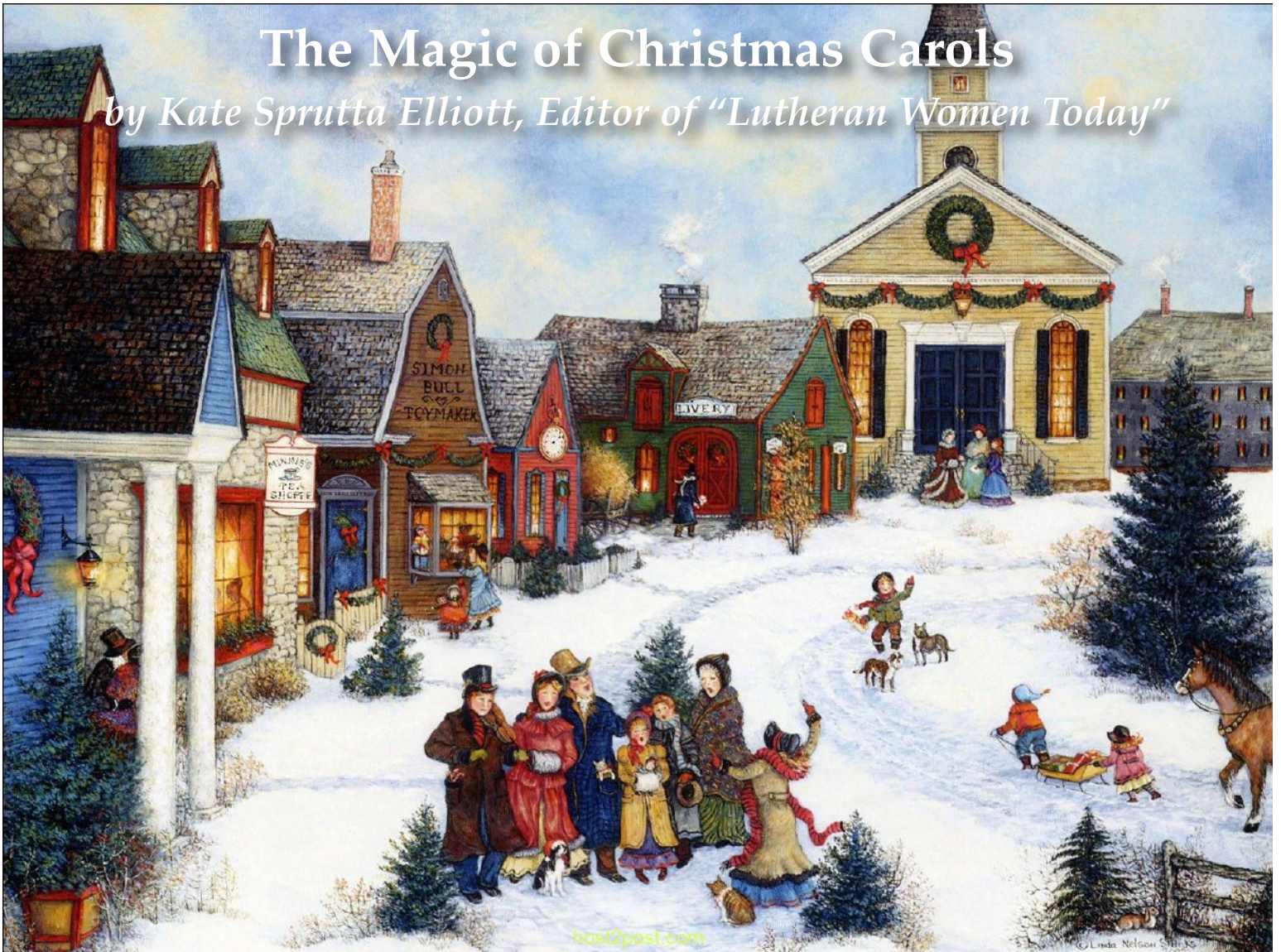
*We are called to proclaim the Word and celebrate the sacraments. We gather in Christian community for nurture and support. We are sent out in service to others.*

A Monthly Newsletter

December 2014/January 2015

## The Magic of Christmas Carols

*by Kate Sprutta Elliott, Editor of "Lutheran Women Today"*



Soon we'll be singing Christmas hymns!

Unlike malls and radio stations, many congregations refrain from singing Christmas carols during Advent. After weeks of singing the somber tones of "O come, O come, Emmanuel," we're ready for some "Joy to the World" or "Hark! The Herald Angels."

My favorite Christmas hymn is "In the Bleak Midwinter" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 294). The words are pure poetry; really, they were written by a famous 19th-century poet named Christina Rossetti. What I like about it is the winter imagery: "In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone." Right now in the

Sunday Worship 10:30 a.m.



Adult Forum & Sunday School 9:15 a.m.

Midwest those images are very real!

I'm also fond of "Once in Royal David's City." Years ago, I belonged to a congregation that had a Christmas tradition in which a young boy would sing the opening lines of that hymn a capella in the candle-lit church just before the beginning of the midnight service. In that quiet, soft light, his lone voice gave me goosebumps. It was powerful.

Do you have favorite Christmas music that you are especially eager to sing and hear? Why are those songs special to you? Memories of your childhood? Beautiful words? A heart-raising melody?

Make a little time this week to reflect on the Christmas hymns that are dear to you. And take a moment to thank God for the gift of music and how it shapes our faith. And, of course, for the gift of Jesus.

May these busy days be full of gratitude and joy for you and your loved ones.

*This article was submitted to the Voice of Grace by Roberta Bymers.*



## Cottage Gatherings

### *A Heartfelt Invitation*

You are all warmly invited and encouraged to attend one of a series of important cottage gatherings scheduled between December 2 and December 15. The purpose of these gatherings is to provide updates and information about Grace Lutheran finances, including giving, spending and the proposed 2015 budget. Over the past few years the cushion between annual giving and expenditures has been decreasing to the point in which it is likely that in 2014 we will spend more than we will bring in. As we consider this situation we would like the opportunity to meet with people in an informal, comfortable atmosphere and present the information and discuss the options. These cottage gatherings are scheduled in people's homes and there are choices of daytime or evening meetings. There will also be a presentation scheduled at an upcoming adult forum. Following is the schedule of gatherings. Please sign up in the fellowship hall for the gathering of your choice.

- Wednesday, December 10 – 2:00 p.m. Hladecek
- Thursday, December 11 – 6:00 p.m. Bender
- Friday, December 12 – 2:00 p.m. Hutchison
- Monday, December 15 – 2:00 p.m. Ronen

- Sunday, December 14 – 9:15 Adult Forum

Thank you very much for participating in these important gatherings.

## Mineral Rights Update

Grace Lutheran Church has received another offer to lease the North Dakota mineral rights owned by the church. We have declined two previous offers from Northern Resources. The latest offer came from a group called Diamond Resources, who is working on behalf of a resource developer called Petro Harvester. The offer includes a \$12,000 upfront payment and royalties of 16.67% on any oil or gas produced. The offer is for a three-year lease with renewal provisions. The council forwarded the offer to the Mineral Rights Development Advisory Committee (MRDAC) for review. That committee includes David Gaenicke, Brad Lee, Lynn Bender, and Joel Peterson. Pastor Coe and Jim Hladecek also participate. The MRDAC carefully reviewed the options available to Grace and recommended that the council investigate the offer further. The council has authorized the Pastor and MRDAC to conduct the investigation and to work with a mineral rights attorney in North Dakota to gather information and advice. The council authorized the expenditure of up to \$960 for attorney fees for this investigation. If required, the payment will be made from reserves with repayment expected if a lease is signed. A report will be presented at the December council meeting. The council is still investigating the options but wants to remind the congregation that whatever happens, no lease will be signed without a congregational vote.

*"When you find yourself wanting to turn your children, or pupils, or even your neighbours, into people exactly like yourself, remember that God probably never meant them to be that. You and they are different organs, intended to do different things."*

— C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

# A Gift Prayed For – A Gift Received

*by Shelley Wolff*

Let me tell you about a story that started 40 years ago right here at Grace Lutheran. In October 1974, Harlan and Linda Wolff were given a gift from God, a three month old baby girl. The church family gave a huge baby shower, welcoming the baby girl, Shelley. On Thanksgiving Day, Shelley was baptized. This began my relationship with God. I was raised in a Christian home and wonderful church family. I knew from a very early age that I was adopted; in fact, on a family vacation to Canada when I was about four, I was asked why I had brown eyes and my parents had blue eyes. My immediate answer was "Because God gave them to me."

As I got older, I began asking questions about my birthmother. Due to adoption rules in the state of Washington, I was only able to have a small biography of my birthmother; this listed her age at my birth and her hobbies but not any other information. This was very hard for me to deal with.

I went to a private Christian school (first through sixth grade), studied the Bible and learned how to be a Christian young lady, but there was always a hole in me.

I took my first communion, and was confirmed. I loved my parents and my Lord, and I prayed every day that I could meet my birth mother. I graduated from high school and went on to have my beautiful boys, Jacob and Alex Brown, but still there was a loss in my heart.

I hate to admit this but I gave up on God and family; I walked away for a time "to find myself," which didn't work. I was broken, sick and hurt. My family took me back; my church family took me back, I started to heal and I came to peace that I would never find my birthmother. Finally in spring 2014, I got a glimmer of hope. On July 1, the state of Washington was going to change the law; adoptees could send their information and \$20 to acquire their original birth certificate with birthmother's name if birthmother had not sealed the records. I sent my information in and waited all of July, all of August and all of September. I was really giving up hope again. Finally on October 1, the letter came with my birthmother's name, Kathleen Sue Glass. What a wonderful gift. I had her name, but now I had to find her. I was able to get a current address with the help of a friend from high school who is a paralegal in family law in Ohio and through a little information sharing.

I learned that Kathleen's birthday was at the end of October, so I sent a birthday card and wrote the hardest letter of my life. I sent her my contact information; I assured her that I did not want to hurt her in any way and would not continue to bother her. All I hoped for was some health information and to know that she was well. I sent the card off the Saturday before her birthday and waited, second guessing what she might do with it. It felt like forever. One super busy day while taking my client for an out-of-town appointment, Kathleen called, leaving a voice mail. Sitting there in the waiting room, I bawled as I listened to her voice mail. I heard her voice. She left me her number, and, "Yes," she was my birthmother and she wanted to get to know me! It was the longest trip home. Making sure my client was settled, I headed home; I ate and called my mom back.

We have since talked for hours, and we have exchanged emails. She wanted pictures, so I tried to find flattering pictures of myself, the boys and my parents. A few days later I got the photos of her and her husband, Michael, and my twin siblings, TJ and Misty, who are five years younger than I. My mom, Kathleen, was absolutely beautiful. The 40-year-

old mystery of my life was solved.

Now, this was all wonderful, but I wanted more; phone calls and emails with pictures were not enough. So, on November 12, 2014, my boyfriend, Chris, and I went to meet Kathleen. Loaded down with apprehension and lots of pictures, we drove to her house. We spent a wonderful day together, even forgetting to eat – we got so wrapped up in talking. Our hope is that in spring we can all get together with extended family for a reunion.

My one regret is that we didn't meet sooner. Kathleen is not in good health. She has emphysema and other major lung issues. Please pray for my beautiful birthmother, Kathleen Sue Shone.

I prayed for so long for this to happen. God truly does listen to our prayer but grants them in his own time. We just have to be patient, to wait and not ever give up. **GLC**



Nov 12, 2014 Kathleen Sue Shone and Shelley Wolff reunited at last.

# What 8 Lutherans Rediscovered

*by Linda Gaenicke*

On Wednesday, November 12, eight members of Grace decided to try the Senior Association Meals at the Community Center. Several members of Grace had attended the previous week and encouraged more of us to attend. For the small donation of \$3-5 dollars, we received a crisp fresh salad, baked cod, baked vegetables, couscous, dessert, juice and/or coffee. The amount of the food was more than adequate and was full of flavor. You can also request the meal to go if you have a family member who is homebound. The hospital chef prepared the meal. All one has to do is call ahead at 360-385-9007 and reserve a meal. The Community Center is located at the corner of Lawrence and Tyler streets; the meal is served at 12 noon. The volunteer staff there greeted us warmly, making us feel at home. The meal is offered every Tuesday and Wednesday. On Thursdays, the Methodist church prepares the meal. Those of us who attended encourage you to try this wonderful service. It is for people 55+ and well worth the experience.

# Snapshots From The Women's Retreat

*photos by Brad Lee*



## Special Musical "Notes"

**Sunday, December 14**, our guest musicians will be Exact Change, a select women's choir directed by Leslie Lewis. They will provide our Prelude music, Offertory, and Postlude, so come early to hear them and plan to stay a few minutes after the service to enjoy their Christmas selections. Our Barbara Thompson sings with the group, along with others who have visited us at Grace, so you'll see familiar faces.

**Sunday, December 20**, at 7 p.m., the Wintertime Singers, directed by Colleen Johnson, will present a program of traditional Christmas carols in interesting arrangements to bring even more celebration to our holidays. Anthems will alternate with audience carol-singing in our lovely festive sanctuary. This group of about twenty-five singers is accompanied by Helen Lauritzen and guest violinist Victoria Poling. Again, some Grace singers are part of the group, so the faces will be familiar. Suggested donation at the door is \$5.

Women of Grace and others from four local churches gathered on November 8 for the third annual retreat, organized by Roberta Bymers. Teresa Janssen, left, presented an engaging illustrated program, based on the theme, "Life is a Pilgrimage." The upper photo shows a few of the attendees in



a creative study session, while in the photo below Karen Erikson puts the finishing touches on her retreat project.



## Letters:



*Dear Grace Lutheran:*

*Thank you so much for your donation. We are able to purchase food from Food Lifeline for four cents a pound which includes delivery to the warehouse. An order is placed once a week and we can obtain a plentiful amount of food because of your generosity. In this way, we can continue to serve those who are in need.*

*There are a great number of people in the community who are dependent upon our support, and we are able to help them because of the benevolence of others. With your donation, you will make a positive difference in the lives of so many people, and we are extremely appreciative.*

*You are wonderful!  
Shirley Moss, Manager  
P.T. Food Bank*

*Dear Members of Grace,*

*Ted and I would like to thank you for all the myriad ways in which we felt supported by each of you during Ted's recent medical crisis. Ted has been told that his survival chances ranged anywhere from 80/20 to 98/2. Surely God is gracious in holding us in his hands during this tumultuous time.*

*As Ted's recovery continues, moment by moment and day by day, he is adding a few more activities. These include daily walks, visiting with friends, and getting on a stationary bicycle. It is expected to be six months to one year before Ted is back to the "new normal" in activities.*

*We appreciate your respect for our privacy during this time. Staying connected with family and friends in various places has been quite challenging - and also a gift. We were very blessed that our sons, their families and the "sisters," i.e., Ted's sister, Ann, and my sister, Pam, came to assist us during this time.*

*Due to the limited time and energy available, it may not be possible for Ted to attend church in the near future. Groups require a great deal of energy, and for now the simple life seems to be calling. Part of maintaining our simple life will be limiting e-mails, telephone calls, and visits. Please continue to talk to Pastor Coe for updates and questions. As we are able, we will begin to reach out and re-engage with folks.*

*We appreciate your understanding and continuing prayers, which mean more than words can express.*

*Fondly,  
Ted and Lynn Gifford*





## Pastor's Message: "The Season of Receiving"

Ever since I can remember I have really liked presents. Birthdays, Christmas, graduations, any other event in which I could receive a gift always had my complete attention. So if I am really honest, the child inside me still thinks of Christmas as the "season of get-

ting." There have been more years than I can count when Janet and I have said, "Oh, I think we should cut back on Christmas gifts this year." We always agree . . . but we never really cut back. And underneath, I am always thinking, "I still want lots of presents."

We usually talk about Christmas being the season of giving, but let's back up a step. Before it was ever the season of giving, it was the season of receiving. This is the season we celebrate receiving the greatest gift ever, the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ from our heavenly Father. Let's start there. We received the gift of God come to earth, in human form, as a baby, humble and oh, so earthy. It really does all start with receiving – receiving from God the greatest gift ever given. The gift of salvation, forgiveness of sin, eternal life in Jesus Christ. Jesus, our brother, a light in our darkness, living water for our life's thirst, food for our journey, a companion on the path of life. So first, Christmas is a season of receiving. Take time this Advent, perhaps even weekly, to think about, journal about, and pray about what you have received from God. What does it mean to you that God gave Jesus just for you? What does it mean that Jesus gave his life – for you! What does it mean to be loved unconditionally? Take time to receive – God wants to give even more to you. God wants to give you more and more – of himself, his love, his forgiveness, joy, strength and peace. Take time to receive.

Then – when you have received and received and received from God – *give!* When your cup is overflowing with what God has given you – *give to others.* Give from the abundance that God has given you. When giving comes from God's abundance, giving is a joy! It warms the heart, gladdens the soul. When we realize that all we have, everything, comes from God, then, we give generously without worry or anxiety, because it is not even from our own resources that we give, we give from God's abundance. We give – because we have first received. During this season, I encourage you to receive – and *give!* Give to Grace Lutheran, give to local charities, far-away charities, give to your family, your neighbors, even give to strangers. In doing so, you will be living and acting in God's image, you will be living out your very creation purpose, and I believe, you will be blessed, blessed, and blessed. Give with no strings attached. Give with love. Give with joy. Give until it feels really, really good. Act like God – give.

This Christmas season, may you receive more from God than you can handle, so much that you just have to give it away. 'Tis the season of receiving!

*God Bless,  
Pastor Coe*

## President's Message:

### "A Little Dab'll Do Ya!"

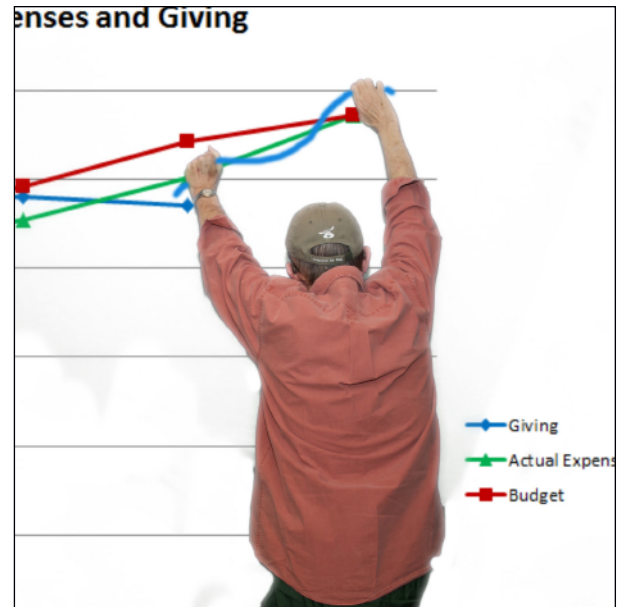
I feel so very comfortable in our church. I can't help but take delight in our worship, our Bible study opportunities, our men's and women's study groups, our various mission projects and the fellowship that abounds. It fills my heart and helps give meaning to my life. And then I am reminded that for all of this to take place, I have a responsibility to help make things happen. Maybe, just maybe, I should not get too comfortable.

We have had several good years from a financial perspective. We have no debts, we have been able to be fairly generous to our staff, we have been able to accomplish all the mission activities we have undertaken and are looking at ways to do even more. We have successfully undertaken some basic remodeling and maintenance projects, including updating the parsonage and reroofing the sanctuary. We have supported outside missions, such as the Uganda orphan project and Habitat for Humanity. We have even been able to develop a modest surplus for emergencies. All in all, for a congregation of our size, I see a lot of generosity in the time, talents and funding categories.

Recently, the budget committee addressed our finances in preparation for a congregational report which will be presented to you at the January 2015 annual meeting of the congregation. The committee made some interesting observations and shared them with the church council. The budget will be more fully developed by the committee and pastor and approved for presentation to you at the January meeting. As usual, a printed copy will be made available to you at least a week prior to the meeting. At the meeting you will have the opportunity to discuss and question the budget as you prepare yourself for the vote. You will note in the data that our spending has been kept within our budget for this year. Our giving has not, nor has it kept up with our spending. We are often reminded that we do not contribute or tithe to a budget. Rather, we give to God, our church and mission. The amount we contribute is the result of prayer, contemplation and more prayer.

I can't help but think of the 1950s commercial for Brylcreem: "Brylcreem, a little dab'll do ya!" To put things in proportion, just a little extra effort on our part, with God's help, will do ya.

*Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, for God loves a cheerful giver.*  
(2 Corinthians 9:7)



# The Tree Man

by James W. H. Tumber



When I press my cheek against the window and melt a spot in the frost, I can see Nick Santos – the Christmas tree man – brushing off trees, turning on colored lights, and brewing cocoa in the shed behind his house.

Our apartment is small, so when I jump out of bed, my dad hears my feet hit the floor. He greets me with a big hug, and we eat breakfast. As we eat he says to me, “Not much of a Christmas this year, with me between jobs and with everything else going on.” We both have trouble talking about Mom’s death.

“But I’ve been watching Nick Santos,” he says, “and I’ve been remembering the smell of a tree lot just before Christmas. A smell you never forget. Can’t buy us a tree this year, but that doesn’t mean we can’t get a whiff of the stuff to get us in the mood, to give you something to remember. What do you say we make a social call on Santos, see how business has been?” He winks at me.

When we arrive at the yard, Mr. Santos says, “I’ve been waiting for you.” He hands me a cup of cocoa.

Dad asks about each variety of tree on the lot and where each tree came from. He breathes in deeply, capturing the sharp smell of the trees as if he were reaching for a memory. As we are about to leave, Mr. Santos asks me if I see any trees I like. “Not much time left, you know, being Christmas Eve and all. Plenty of good trees here to pick from.”

Before I can explain that we aren’t here to buy a tree, Dad clears his throat. “Sorry, Santos, maybe next year.”

Then the strangest thing happens. Mr. Santos laughs. He laughs so hard a button pops off his shirt.

“So serious, Mr. Andrews,” he says. “It’s Christmas Eve. Where’s your joy?” He bends down and says to me, “Have you

ever wondered what happens to all these trees in a few hours if I don’t sell them? Worthless. Too green to burn, too big to leave for the trash collectors.” Then he says to Dad, “But you won’t see old Nick being so serious about it. No sir! No time for that in this business. By Christmas Eve my trees are worth a great deal more to you than they are to me. So take one. Take it, with all my best wishes.”

I carry the top of the tree and Dad carries the bottom, and as we walk we talk. I say if I could have anything for Christmas it would be a leather basketball, the kind that feels smooth and broken in. Dad says he’s had his eye on a pair of work boots in the window at Kelsey’s Shoe Shop. We would both like steak for dinner. But we know there will be no presents this Christmas.

We set up the tree, but it looks bare with nothing under it. Dad sees my face and tells me to think about all the people who need more and have less than we do. Later, I go up to my room to read. Through the window I see Nick Santos wrapping presents on the bench in his backyard. I watch as he places what looks like a basketball inside a large box and wraps the box in comic papers. He must have a family somewhere, I think, and this thought makes me happy.

On Christmas morning, much to my surprise, there is a present wrapped in comic papers under our tree.

There is no name on it, but I know it’s mine. And I know who brought it. I am about ready to tear into it when my dad walks in, holding a large box wrapped in purple foil paper

“It’s not much,” he says as he places it on the floor next to the box wrapped in comic papers. “But I know you’ll like it.”

The two boxes are exactly the same size and exactly the same weight. And when I shake them, they give the same



leathery thump. Mr. Santos has brought me a basketball. But it seems that my dad has, too. I open the present from my father first, and I find the basketball I've always wished for. I am about to cry.

"What's the matter, James?" my dad asks. "Don't you like it?"

"Well, you see...," I say. But I can't tell him what I know. So I say instead, "I just wish you had a present to open."

"Well, I don't see any names on this present wrapped in comics. If it makes you feel better, I'll open it." And before I can stop him, he tears open the present.

"Well, I'll be dipped," he says, pulling a pair of black leather boots from the box. "Now, who did this? he asks. And for the first time all morning, I have no idea.

After lunch I sneak over to thank Mr. Santos, but he isn't there. It's as if he never was – no trees, no needles, no lights. A note tacked to his door reads, "Went to Miami. Back next year. Merry Christmas! Every day of your life."

He never did come back. Even after I grew up, I looked for him every Christmas when Dad and I got together. I looked for him after I left the city and bought a farm where I raised Christmas trees and five boys of my own. I looked for him whenever I saw someone who needed something I could do without. I looked and looked until I finally realized something: Nick Santos did come back. Every day of my life.

## Grace Lutheran Athletes

### *Jeni Little and the NYC Marathon*

### *Eli Harrison and the Rangers*

"Brooklyn ... Brooklyn ... Brooklyn" ... constant encouragement – "You got this!"

Running clubs from Italy, Peru, Canada, Australia, Mexico to name a few weaving in and out

Orange shirts saying "Imagine a world without Cancer"

Yellow shirt Achilles Club runners buffering blind runners and wheelchair athletes

Quiet contemplation on the Queensboro bridge

Long Island ... South Bronx ... East Harlem

Keeping pace with NBA Kids' relay last seven miles; film crew on motorcycles

Finally, Central Park ... four hour pacer zooming past ... maybe I can jump on...

One point two miles to go when a ginormous NBA player passes with final kid relay runner in tow ... crowds go wild!

Through the finish line ... Yay!!! then, walking a ways, getting medal ... Yay!!! ... walking ... given water ... walking ... given heat sheet ... walking ... checking cell phone to see if running buddy has sent a text with finish time 4:19.2 ... walk-

ing ... call Mom ... walking ... call husband ... walking ... given snack bag ... walking ... exit park at 85th, text cousin who's waiting at 81st ... walking 40 blocks down to Port Authority and catching bus back to New Jersey.....Yay!!!

New York at its finest!"

*Editor's Note:*

*The NYC Marathon hosted 50,869 starters with 50,564 finishing in this years 26.219 mile race. Jeni Little completed this epic race in 4 hours, 19 minutes and 2 seconds. Jeni's overall finish place was 21,613. She ran an average of 9 minutes and 53 seconds per mile.*



The above photo by Patrick J. Sullivan appeared in the *Port Townsend Leader* in November. It highlighted Eli Harrison of the Quilcene Rangers on what will be remembered as a wet and muddy day. Eli plays junior quarterback and defensive back. Way to go, Eli!

"A real Christian is a person who can give his pet parrot to the town gossip."

— Billy Graham

# When War Becomes Commonplace

by Olga Levoushkina Maslo

“Mom, now that the war is over, can we go to Crimea?” – asked my 7-year-old daughter in May. I did not know what was sadder in this conversation – the fact that the word “war” is being used so casually by my girl in a conversation, or the fact that Crimea is no longer part of my country.

The conflict in our country started from student protests in November 2013 against the president’s decision not to sign a trade agreement between Ukraine and the EU. Then, after these students were brutally beaten up by police in our capital, Kiev, a nationwide protest against injustice and corruption in our country ensued. Things escalated by the end of January. On February 20, almost 100 people were killed; hundreds were injured. On February 22, our president and several other top government officials fled to Russia. The spring began with Russia annexing Crimea and with violent anti-Ukrainian demonstrations in the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk. Then, in April, several cities in Eastern Ukraine were captured by well-trained armed people who had leaders from Russia. Ukraine responded with an anti-terrorist military operation. Ever since, we use the word “war” every day.

The reality of war is brutal. Yet, the human mind adjusts to everything. The news of first kidnappings, first tortures, first deaths shocked at first; later they became ordinary news that increases sadness. And then there is the reality of the peaceful big city in which we live – Dnipropetrovsk. Everything looks normal, people are playing and enjoying themselves, going to work, taking kids to school, but you also know that despite all of that, there is a war. With an uncertain future, people stop planning things, live one day at a time, suspend big projects, do not buy things that they do not need; they begin to spend more time with loved ones and want to do something kind for others to encourage them.

This is a good time for Ukrainian churches. For the first time in many years, the church actually had the chance to serve people who were struggling and hurting in so many ways. Believers from many denominations came to protest at Maydan in Kiev and set up prayer tents there to tend to the physical and spiritual needs of the thousands gathered there. They shared hope when many had no hope. We heard amazing testimonies from non-believers about how they started to respect Christians because of how the churches served people. Now, with Russian threats many Ukrainians realize that keeping the country united and at peace will take a miracle. Many churches gather in the



central squares of our country's cities to pray for peace and unity. During critical times, our president addresses the churches with a request for prayer and fasting. It is amazing to see how the pastors from different protestant churches unite in prayer for the country. There are a lot of refugees in our region. Several churches allowed them to live in their church buildings. Churches also provide meals and clothes for them. People help refugees fix and renovate their rooms and offer entertainment for their children. Young people make surgical serviettes for local hospitals and visit soldiers there. Many of them are asking for prayer and are searching for truth.

The situation in Eastern Ukraine is devastating; the infrastructure is destroyed, cities experience problems with water, gas and electricity supplies. No social government help is available to the people in the rebel controlled territories. Stores and businesses are closed. The churches there have become the centers for social help for the communities. Many distribute simple food packages and provide shelter for people who lost their homes. Churches also help to evacuate people from the war zone. A former student of mine is a pastor in Eastern Ukraine. His city was captured in April and liberated by the Ukrainian army in July. He says there are only four people who remained in his church from the original congregation (others fled the city), but the church is packed with new people. This is mainly because of the social ministry done by the church – its actions of love and compassion are more powerful than sermons at this time.

Russian rebels support the Russian Orthodox Church and limit activities of other religious groups. Donetsk Christian University (the largest theological school in Eastern Ukraine, with an amazing resource library) was invaded by the rebels in early summer. Several Protestant churches were burnt; people were rushed from their buildings. Protestant pastors and lay people were threatened with arrest if they continue services and outreach. Christian foster families had to evacuate from these regions; their homes were also destroyed, and rehabilitation centers were seized by the rebels.

With the international peace talks, there is faint hope that the situation will normalize. There are lots of needs that the church will have to address in the society. The church has a unique measure for truth, and it is not political slogans but the Word of God; God gives us the power to forgive, to heal broken

*Continued, next page*

relationships, to love, to be compassionate and have mercy, to share hope and face uncertainty.

During a Sunday school class, I took some five year old boys to play outside and gave them a box of chalk. They ended up drawing pictures of the Ukrainian flag and discussed what the colors represent there. They also talked about how much they love their country. The conversation was held in Russian.

*Olga Levoushkina Maslo is a national missionary through the Evangelical Free Church of Canada (EFCC) helping develop the Centre of Christian Learning, teaching courses for small Bible study group leaders, Sunday school teachers and youth leaders, overseeing the Christian Library, and helping in the development of Sunday Schools in the Dnepropetrovsk region. Her husband, Anton, helps with small group leadership, preaches in different churches and helps lead the Alpha & Omega Christian Student Society. The Maslos and their two children were on a short trip to Canada when the Ukrainian war broke out. At the time of this Mosaic News publication, the Maslo family is still unable to return to Ukraine. They await clearance to return while in temporary housing in British Columbia.*

*This article is reprinted with the permission of Regent College.*



## My Faith Story

by Mary Ronen

Let's face it. I started out right, with all of the right beginnings. From my earliest memory, church was a big part of my family's life. Sunday school, church, pancake breakfasts, you name it, we went. I remember being in Sunday School Christmas programs, all of that. I remember one of my strongest wishes for Christmas was to get a Bible for my very own; I had seen it at church – it was called Bible for Children (or something like that). I was absolutely ecstatic when I received it – I still have it somewhere. I used to look at the sky and the cloud formations and imagine that God was right there because the clouds were so beautiful.

Our church had a school attached to it, grades K – 8 (I think it was 8), which I attended from kindergarten through 2nd grade. Then, my family moved to Long Beach, California. One of the first things my dad did was to get us attached to a church and to get me enrolled in a Lutheran school. I attended 3rd and 4th grades there; then, I had to enroll in public schools due to finances. But church still was a big part of our lives. I went to

confirmation class and was confirmed, all of that. (By the way, not only did we have to memorize the small catechism, we had to be able to recite parts of it on demand and answer questions at our confirmation. You know, all of those “What does this mean” things.) So you can see all the roots were there.

Somewhere between confirmation and high school graduation, sorry to say, I lost a lot of the interest that I previously had. Church lost its appeal, and I gradually quit going. I still believed all that I had learned but just was not interested in attending church. Over the next decades (yes, decades!) a lot of things occurred to cause me to begin to question why go to church and if there were really any good reasons to go. It didn't seem as though God was listening to me or if He even knew I was there. He was not paying attention, so it seemed.

My first marriage didn't work out, like a lot of young ones don't seem to. My second husband was Catholic (with a capital C) and that didn't set well with his church because I was divorced. Another reason for my turning against going to church, I lost two babies – why did God not allow me to keep them? Yet another “reason.”

I honestly don't know what happened to change my path – most people would probably say it was the Holy Spirit at work. And they are probably right. Shortly after my parents passed, and I had gone through a cancer episode, I felt as though something was missing in my life. Could that have been Him working? I think so. I was browsing the Internet and found Grace Lutheran's website – and thought it looked interesting. They had a Saturday evening service which did appeal to me. So I decided to give that a try.

First time here, I was welcomed with open arms. Sometime a little later Pastor Fosser did an Intro to Christianity and Lutheran class and, then, a Bethel Bible study class. Got me thinking some more. One of the liturgies, the one we did last Sunday: Christ is Risen, then, Come, Lord Jesus, and, then, Come Holy Spirit; this had a definite effect on me. Gave me, and still does, goose bumps.

It goes on from there, (including the privilege of Via de Cristo), and I have come to realize what was missing all of those years. Maybe it was necessary, maybe God meant for me to experience all of that. I do believe that now. He is in control; I am not. I think He meant for me to find that out in order to have the relationship with Him that he intended.

Finally the last thing I learned is that to have a relationship with God, it is probably first necessary to have relationship with each other which means keeping relationship with church family. I learned that one may experience many doubts (I think everyone does at one time or another), but God is always there – no matter what. And He loves us and sent his Son for us.

I have had many ups and downs in my life. I look forward to the ups yet to come, now that I am back on track. But I know that life throws many a curve at us, but with God's will, I can keep on track. I mess up and then mess up again, and He just sighs and says, “Ok, I love you anyway.”

## World Tour: *Voice of Grace*



An email arrived from Earl Kong who shared the above photo of Carol, their copy of the *Voice of Grace* and a couple of their new friends.

"Carol and I encountered this moose family waiting to be photographed just across the Canadian border, above Idaho. They had to wait their turn, as the caribou was first in line! We took a detour while enjoying fall colors along the Northern tier. This was part of our annual fall color extravaganza."

Meanwhile, many miles away in a totally different climate



and location, Betty Oakes and Penny Westerfield were vacationing on the sunny island of Hawaii. The photo was taken in the "Painted Church" near the place of refuge on the big island of Hawaii.

*When you visit new and exotic places here in the U.S. or abroad, take a copy of the Voice of Grace along to display in a photo of you that helps illustrate your travels and the travels of our church newsletter.*

GLC

### Church Mice

**Big Problem  
or  
No Problem?**  
**Helpful Hints  
for Pastors**  
by Rev. Cheese

Copyright Karl A. Zorowski

Q: You plan a fellowship meal for 100 people, and then you have 250 show up for worship... big problem or no problem?

A: No problem!

PRAISE THE LORD AND SEND SOMEONE TO COSTCO!

#### Church Council

**President:** Jim Hladecek  
james@hladecek.com  
**Vice President:** Mary Ronen  
**Secretary:** Betty Oakes  
**Ministers:**  
**Resources (Treasurer):** Anne Argites  
**Facilities:** Jim Little  
**Worship/Music:** Nina Daly  
**Stewardship:** Don Fristoe  
**Social Concerns:** Teresa Janssen  
**Fellowship:** Karen Erickson

#### Church Staff

**Pastor:** Rev. Coe Hutchison  
pastorcoeh@gmail.com  
cell 206-369-0606  
parsonage 360-385-2281  
**Secretary:** Crissy Dunlap  
gracelutheranpt@gmail.com  
**Organist/Pianist:** Lisa Lanza  
**Choir Director:** Colleen Johnson  
**Sunday School Superintendent:** Linda Wolff  
**Editor, Voice of Grace and church Web site:**  
Jim Hladecek, james@hladecek.com