

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.

Lent - a Very Brief History and a Few Comments

*With Excerpts From: LiturgyGram: A Little About Lent
as Posted on ELCA Worship Blog Archives
and other Internet sources*

Lent, as we know, begins on Ash Wednesday and is the forty-day season (excluding Sundays) of penitence and preparation for the Three Days of Holy Week and Easter. In many languages, the word “Lent” actually means “fast.” This could be where the custom of giving up something for Lent originated.

The term “Lent” originally comes from the Anglo-Saxon word “lencten,” meaning “spring.” The season began as a period of serious fasting leading up to the Vigil of Easter. Catechumens would fast and spend days in intense preparation. For those already baptized, Lent was a period to be renewed in their faith through study.

Although originally only a two-day period of preparation, Lent became three weeks in the middle of the fourth century, then was further expanded into six weeks, or forty days. By the end of the fifth century, Sundays were excluded from Lent.

The current practice of forty days of Lent recall Jesus’ forty-day fast in the wilderness after his Baptism (Matthew 4:2, Luke 4:1-2) and Moses’ forty-day fast on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28).

The liturgical color for Lent is purple because purple has long been associated with royalty. In this case, Christ reigns from a cross. (*LiturgyGram: A Little About Lent*)

Here at Grace as in many congregations, the word “alleluia” is not spoken or sung during Lent. “Burying” the alleluia occurs at the conclusion of worship on Transfiguration Sunday and it is restored at either the Vigil of Easter or Easter Sunday.

Lent is a time for increased charity and giving, for becoming aware of the suffering of others as well as the suffering and sacrifice of Christ. Extra financial offerings, donating goods no longer needed or wanted to charity, or increasing time commitments to near and dear ministries or causes are some things to consider now.

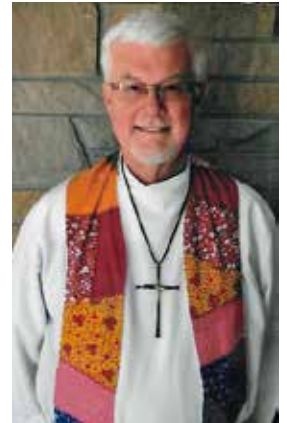
Last but not least, Lent is a time for self-examination. Here are a few questions for consideration:

- Am I sharing gladly what I have with others?
- Do I have a gracious and patient attitude with others, especially those who irritate me?
- Is it time for a change or a growth in my Bible study and the way I view my faith?
- Am I as thoughtful and forgiving of family and others, or do I take my frustrations out on them?
- Do I speak up for the maligned and oppressed, or do I remain silent?



Pastor's Message

Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. (2) Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. (3) Full of honor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. (4) He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds, the Lord is gracious and merciful. (5) He provides food for those who fear him; he is ever mindful of his covenant. (6) He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the heritage of the nations. (7) the works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. (8) They are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. (9) He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name. (10) The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever.



Psalm 111 (NRSV)

Mary Ronen reminded me that she was putting together the “Voice of Grace” newsletter for next week and asked me to write a little devotional thought to include. Well, this week I have been working on the readings for the 4th Sunday following Epiphany and I was “caught” by Psalm 111 in that Sunday’s readings.

Psalm 111 has its own beauty. It is really an “acrostic poem,” which means that each of the twenty two phrases in it begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Poems, I believe, have a special way of touching our souls.

But I was also struck by a little observation from the final verse (vs. 10) which states “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” It caught my imagination and provokes reflection. The “fear” that the Psalmist advocates isn’t the type of “fear” that causes a “flight or flight” reaction, but the Biblical understanding of “fear” that leads to wisdom. As a youth, it took me a long time to shake the first and usual understanding of the word “fear.” Fear here means reverence, respect and a willingness to obey and serve. And so “wisdom” here has to do with willingly pleasing God in life and knowing that the wholeness that comes to us when we are in harmony with the love and intentions that God has for all of his children. That’s the kind of wisdom that makes sense in our lives. When we love as we are loved and when we respect God, were on the way to becoming whole and seeing things in a whole new way. Such is the wisdom in the eyes of faith.

Here’s something to ponder: if you are afraid that God will not like who you are and what you do, repent and say a prayer, but don’t let that feeling of “unworthiness” keep you from the God who is the God of unfathomable grace and mercy. Wisdom and joy are the gifts prepared for those who love the Lord.

Our prayers many times are like the young father who cried out in tears over his child who the Lord said he would heal in Mark 9. “I believe Lord, help my unbelief!” And so— we ask, once again, for God’s wisdom: “Send your Spirit to us Lord and give us your wisdom for this life of faith. And that my friends deserves an Amen!

Pastor Al Berg



Prayer changes “all things.” If we are to “pray in everything” (Philippians 4:6) then everything must be capable of being changed by prayer.

Sitting down to reflect on this question for the *Voice of Grace* this month, I realize that I have not been making the space for contemplative prayer since before the New Year. Often, I have help from a “Centering Prayer” app on my phone, that allows me to lay out a 20-minute plan for the ritual that is guided through technology. In this day and age, with the business of a full-time job, I will accept help in any way I can! God provides in mysterious ways; sometimes I only need to open my eyes to see that my expectations of ‘how’ something should be delivered can get in the way of receiving the gift as it is.

I find myself sitting in silence in the morning before 8 a.m., before the busy hustle and bustle of the day. This (sometimes) clears my head and allows me to make space in my heart for an intention, for listening to the morning, for a sense of openness and clarity before distractions and the momentum of the day. I am often reminded later in the day of this anchorage of peace, in a moment that I need to regain that peace. I had it once earlier in the day, I can find it again. Sometimes I only need say, “God, meet me where I am. Help me to be useful.”

At the end of the day, I am more likely to communicate clearly with God saying, “Thank you.” I am more likely to set out words of hope and healing requests; names of family and friends and those on my prayer list. A request for specific things sometimes helps me to alleviate anxiety, and to help me find peace that I can ‘accept the things I cannot change.’ Another prayer is “Help” or “Wow.” Sometimes tears are a prayer.

Nadia Bolz-Weber, in her weekly prayers on Sunday mornings, says things to God that I’ve never thought were ‘proper.’ She says things like: “Dear God of all beings, This pandemic is making my life so small that I am thinking of myself way more than I should. So for today, I send my prayers out on behalf of others and not myself. May my prayers connect me to them THROUGH you-like gossamer floss threaded through a divine needle. I pray for calm for all who are struck with terror every time they cough, or a loved one coughs or someone passing them in the super-market coughs. I pray healing for those sick with COVID. I pray rest for exhausted nurses, doctors, and other heroes I don’t always think about like hospital laundry workers and cafeteria cooks. I pray comfort for the lonely. I pray rescue for the evicted. I pray solace for the grieving (and I’m sure you already know this Lord, but that’s basically everyone on the planet right now. Grief is the baseline for all of us. No more taking turns.) I pray the gift of increased generosity in those who have more. I pray mercy for the incarcerated and all who love them. I pray fortitude for those who never ever thought they’d be homeschooling small children and are losing their minds. I pray wisdom for our leaders. I pray humility for the powerful. I pray compassion for clergy and counselors and everyone else who is doing emotional and spiritual triage for others and yet are also deeply affected by the pandemic in their own quiet ways. And for all of us, more joy please. Every tiny bit of joy possible during this shit-show. Amen”

Another favorite author, Anne Lamott writes in her book *Help Thanks Wow*, “Prayer is talking to something or anything with which we seek union, even if we are bitter or insane or broken. (In fact, these are probably the best possible conditions under which to pray.) Prayer is taking a chance that against all odds and past history, we are loved and chosen, and do not have to get it together before we show up. The opposite may be true: We may not be able to get it together until after we show up in such miserable shape.”

No matter what, prayer is a way for me to express a voice of my true self, to practice what it is I want to bring into the light. I get to practice prayer by praying – true experiential education! And in this way, I will change the world around me by bringing light to the only part I can affect, the here and now.

Sonia

More Agape on next page

More Agape

It took me a very long time to even think about challenging God with my tough questions. I was in our Discipleship class with Bruce VanBlair. He made the statement that we need to be in an open, honest relationship with God and that means questioning Him on ANYTHING. Even getting angry. It's good. My response was, "Really? I have permission to do that?" Wow. So, I went for it. Interestingly, it seemed that He put the question in my mind so He could answer it. My first demand (yes, "demand") was for him to define what prayer is – and is not – for me. I said, "Father, I'm confused. I believe that you are Love and cannot act in any way that is not in Love. So, if you answer a prayer for healing for this particular person, then you must have decided not to heal that other person who remained sick, because even not to act is to act." I like to go for the big guns, so I included this: In the holocaust, this person prayed and was saved, the other person prayed but was tortured. My friend, Bertha, who was four at the time, was walking in the park with her friend, also four. A man came out of nowhere and grabbed both girls. The friend got away, but my friend did not and she was molested. Some would say, "Praise, You, for saving the friend!", but I ask why you let Bertha be attacked? You really can't have one action without its opposite. It's physics and You set that up. I find this inconsistent with the loving You I want to believe in. It makes you quixotic and mercurial at best. And downright...well. I'm not sure I want to follow this version of you. I read about prayer chains asking for a certain outcome, usually healing, and I wonder: Do you only act if someone asks? How many people does it take for action? What if not enough, like missing one person, means you say too bad, so sad? You might get the feeling that I'm ticked off.

Father's answer for me: I do not answer the kind of prayers which you describe—healing, safety, jobs, relationships—because you're correct in saying to act with safety for this person driving down the highway, would mean that I directed/allowed another person to be in an accident, for instance. Life happens. Life plays out. I don't stop acts of nature. I allow my children to have choices. Often, the choices that are made hurt others. Often badly. I don't intervene with my children's actions. But here's what I do one hundred percent of the time: I made you in my image. I live in you. You have all of me in you every minute of every day. Never will I leave you nor forsake you. It's just not possible. You are a child of God. Having Me living in you means that all of my promises and blessings are in you ready to be drawn upon. Joy, compassion, strength, patience, hope, the ability to forgive, wisdom, discernment, peace (that's My favorite), all of these things I told you about. Remember, you needn't wait to have these things. They

are already in you. I am in your suffering because I know what it's like to suffer. Think the 23rd Psalm. "Yea, as I walk **through** the valley of death." Not around or over, but through. You and I will walk together, dealing with whatever life brings. I am holding you up; I walk beside you. And sometimes we will skip. MY response: But I'd REALLY like to avoid pain—mine and the pain that others experience. So, I'm not too excited with your answer, but I can see that this is the way it is. Thank you. What's my part in this? Father: When you need one of the spiritual blessings, ask because this brings mindfulness. You already have what you need, but seeing or feeling it takes mindfulness. Anne Lamott says her favorite prayer is, "Help! Thanks! Wow!" all in one breath. Isn't it glorious? Having this understanding of prayer has brought me into an ever-deepening, more profound, and at-one-with-Father. I'm afraid I don't have a word that describes it. It's a beauty. It is so very sweet. The Kingdom of God is living here on Earth, right now, in all of us! Alleluia.

Corinne

Schools in Uganda to Reopen on January 15

Good news for our children! While older secondary grades have been at school, the others have relied on Kenneth to get them their assignments by printing them out and delivering them individually. So far none of them have contracted the virus, though some family members have become infected, and one has died. Kenneth writes regarding the effect of the disease on the schools:

Dear Sharon,
Since the outbreak of the Pandemic, the most affected institutions in Uganda are the Schools and their teachers! Teachers have greatly been affected since most of them stopped receiving a salary in March last year 2020 when the country was sent in a lockdown as a mitigation measure, with no hope that they will ever regain what they lost. Most schools in Uganda right from Primary to Tertiary, are privately owned; for public schools, their story is somewhat different. Many schools may even not come back since they have been operating on commercial bank loans with exorbitant interest and strange conditions. They have received no support from the government. So having to deal with the Covid situation and meeting the requirements of spacing and installing extra water supplies for regular washing of hands, spraying equipment, and the rest, schools decided to increase fees in order to meet the new normal standards. We have received communications from schools on such fees changes.

God bless you,
Kenneth

A Note From Mary

February for me is time to crawl out of the winter doldrums. As the days begin to get a little longer, and maybe a little warmer, I want to look forward to better things. One of the first flowers of spring is the primrose, a bright, happy-looking blossom. I'll definitely be buying and planting a few. One thing that I hope to see soon is the beginning of the end of the Covid-19 battle. Vaccinations are now taking place; do get yours, if you are able. I did get the vaccine and noticed only minimal side effects—a sore arm and some fatigue.

It is a short but busy month. What happens in February? Lent begins early this year, with Ash Wednesday on February 17. Plans are being worked out for ways in which we as a congregation can observe this season. Watch for more information to come on that.

February 17 is also Random Acts of Kindness Day, a day for quietly doing random acts of kindness for as many people as you can! This kind of activity helps the do-er as much as the do-ee, if not more. It occurred to me that instead of giving up something for Lent, this could be doing something for Lent – and could even become a habit.

February is Black History Month; it's a chance for us to learn details of our history that are often neglected. One thing we can do during this pandemic time is to check the library for some books covering black history.

A few February tid-bits: If you are born in February, you are either an Aquarius or a Pisces and your birthstone is a purple quartz called amethyst. The Beatles made their first American television appearance in February 1964 on the Ed Sullivan show. February also marks American Heart Month, Canned Food Month, Grapefruit Month, Hot Breakfast Month, and Return Shopping Carts to the Supermarket Month.

There is lots to be said for February. Google it and see what comes up for you. Then just have fun.

Mary

Giving

Please remember that while we are unable to meet in worship, expenses are still being incurred, including payroll, utilities, and building insurance. You can mail your pledges to the church office. Alternatively, this might be a great time to try out our electronic giving options. You can donate directly through the church website, gracelutheranpt.org. Call Crissy in the church office (360-385-1595) if you need help setting any of the electronic giving options up.



Call Committee Update

by Sharon Dembro

Call Committee members Linda Wolf, Jim Little, Steve Brantner, Marty Richards, Don Fristoe and Sharon Dembro, chair, were briefed by the bishop's associate on the call process. The Mission Site Profile compiled by the Transition Team is now in the ELCA data base, accessible to pastors looking for a change in congregation. The bishop's office will notify us when they have several candidates they consider appropriate for Grace.

The Call Committee is compiling a document for candidates with additional information on our community to highlight the unique features of our area including:

- outdoor recreation on the Olympic peninsula
- unique local businesses
- schools and other educational opportunities
- arts and entertainment
- healthcare and helping organizations
- Grace Lutheran history and other documents, plus photos and descriptions of our facilities and art

Online Black History Month Series

Join Women of the ELCA's Racial Justice Advocacy Network for a conversation series celebrating Black History Month. Four leaders in our church representing diverse specialties will share how being an African American woman in the United States influences their work and faith.

Watch via Facebook live on Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m. CST after joining our Racial Justice Advocacy group. See the website (women.elca@elca.org) for details.

Speakers and schedule:

Feb 9: Apu Seyenkulo, Doctor of Physical Therapy, Charlotte, N.C.

Feb 16: Linda Thomas, Ph.D., professor of Theology and Anthropology, Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, Ill.

Feb 23: Antoinette Butler, music director, Shekinah Chapel, Chicago Ill.

March 2: The Rev. Nicolette Marie Peñaranda, MBA, M.Div., pastor at First Lutheran Church of the Trinity, Bridgeport, Ill., and candidate for alderman, Berwyn, Ill.

Grace Gallery

At the Gallery



It's Friday and after a stressful workweek, our Springer Spaniel Roma is cuddled up with me on the couch. She can sense it's been a difficult week and I need some TLC! Roma is 13 years old and we have had her since she was seven weeks old. (Oil painting of Roma and her siblings, Roma far left) When I used to work

with children at our home seeing our Brittany Cassie. I remember one girl saying as Cassie came to be with her, "Why Cassie, you knew I was sad even before I realized it."

God has gifted us with pets and they certainly bring joy and companionship into our lives. Pet adoptions have risen during the pandemic as more people are housebound. I have friends



Roma and her siblings.

in Texas who adopted a rescue dog before Christmas. I surprised them with a pastel painting of their new addition for Christmas.



Ariel.

Pets also give comfort to those who are housebound due to serious health issues. I remember our dear friend George and his constant companion Teddy, a long haired dachshund.

My artist friends have also contributed some animal and pet photos and art.

Enjoy!

Nina



Teddy

Gloria's Art

I enjoy painting pet portraits for people and I did the two dogs for my cousin. These are the ones she has at present. Also did two paintings for her of dogs that have passed on. Have also done two kitty paintings. One for a friend and the other for a friend of my sister. There have always been dogs and cats in my life and in later years, just cats. They are so much company and are always part of the family. I have done paintings of my own cats over the years. We have no pets at present although we would like to have a kitty. We just figure that it would outlive us and that would not be fair to the cat. So I just enjoy looking at other people's pets on Pinterest.



Maggie and Cooper



Marilyn's kitty.

This is Ziggy

Ziggy and I met a couple of years ago at Petco in Silverdale when I stopped in there just to look. I had recently lost Tigger due to his advanced years. Well needless to say this handsome gray fellow with an outgoing personality caught my eye. He is a chatterbox.



We quickly became good friends. His first few days with me he talked and talked some more. I am sure he was telling me all about his life on the streets of Bremerton before being rescued by Kitsap Humane Society.

Now, he is my constant companion, and he is always there to greet anyone who comes to visit. He helps me with my work on the *Voice(s)*, looking over my shoulder as I work. If he feels I am ignoring him, he will get my attention in a hurry. If I am ignoring my alarm clock, he will see to it that I get up in time, and he tells me when it is time for bed. What would life be now without him?

Mary

Hi everyone,

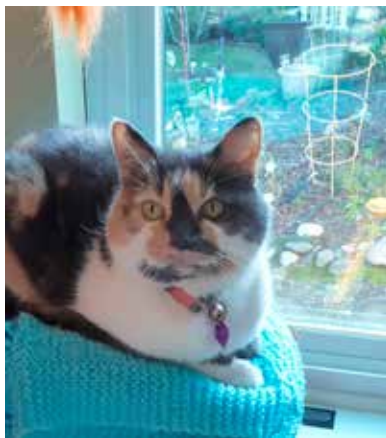


My name is Rose, and my sister Daisy and I adopted David and Linda 16 ½ years ago. The last few months they seem a little lonely stressed and watching a lot more TV. I have been working on keeping them happy and helping them to pass the time. When they

are working a puzzle, I advise them where the pieces should go with a swish of my tail. This also helps them to do aerobics when picking the puzzle pieces off the floor. I usually do afternoon nap duty with David and cuddle up with him on the bed for a snooze. On Sundays I watch the church service with them and paw at the computer screen so I can see the picture better. I also help Linda with sewing and pull the stick pins out of the cushion and scatter them all over the area. I grant them lap time which seems to relax them while watching the news. While they tidy the kitchen, I request that the water faucet be turned on so that way while I supervise the kitchen duties, I get a cold drink of water. They are on the phone a lot more visiting with family and friends, I pull the phone away from them so I can hear what they are saying. To soothe away any worries they might have, I make sure that they get plenty of rest. I remind them that bedtime is approaching by running back and forth to the bedroom about 8:30 p.m. When I finally get them in bed (about 11:00 p.m.), I snuggle next to each of them until they fall asleep. I do not know how other pets manage, but I find this exhausting.

Greetings,

I am Daisy, the other sister who adopted David and Linda. Keeping them upbeat is a hard job but I manage to keep them distracted. I keep them informed of the birds on the feeders outside by calling to them to come and look. I also call David to alert him the squirrels in the yard so he can run



outside and chase them away. (This amuses me more than him.) Sometimes I share my toys with them and I love to hear them laugh when I catch the feather on a stick. My specialty is distracting them while watching TV. I sit on David's lap and talk to him and gently paw his face to tell him that I love him. Sometimes I sit in front of the TV screen and tidy my face, but I get different reactions from that. I supervise folding the laundry by sitting in the laundry basket and playing tug of war with Linda and the socks. I too love to help with puzzles, but I work on them at night while they are sleeping and hide a piece or two. My human family always had lots of visitors for coffee hour in the afternoon or people over to play dominoes. Sometimes I explore the craft room and help Linda with scrapbooking. I get the impression that my efforts are not valued when I get glue on one of my paws. My sister and I think they look funny wearing masks when they go outside, or someone comes over. My sister, Rose, and I find it harder and harder to comfort and keep David and Linda busy. We hope that our home is again full of friends and visitors and that David and Linda are joyful again.



It feels like the world is cracking open, at least the one we knew. None of our lives have been untouched by this shift, even if, for some of us, the changes are slight. We have seen the statistics, the data asserting itself, stark and grim. When we let the numbers talk, we can see the disparities, the ways people with darker skin are paying a higher price.

If the world is cracking open, perhaps it is your light, God, that illumines these long-standing disparities. Perhaps it is your Holy Spirit that invites us to look long and hard at this moment. Do we, people of every ethnicity and culture, have the courage to stand in this light? But especially, do we who are white, who have benefited from privilege for so long, have the courage?

God, open our hearts. Teach us to see the wonder of the world you imagine—a just world where all have enough, where all are loved.

This message is an excerpt from “Amen: Upside down or right side up” by Cathy Malotky in the October 2020 issue of *Gather* magazine.

WELCA News

BOLD WOMEN'S DAY 2021

Celebrate bold women.
Sunday, February 28

Visit welca.org/bwd
for ideas for observing
in your congregation.



Women of the ELCA (WELCA celebrate Bold Women's Day every year on the fourth Sunday of February honoring all Lutheran women who have acted or are acting boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. Some women are bold in their unceasing prayers. Other women are bold in their service to those in need. Still other women are bold in their advocacy or through their hospitality. Whether we

live out our bold story of faith in the workplace, family home or community, our faith compels us to make a difference in the lives of others. It's all about living out our baptismal call, about being a disciple of Christ. Are you bold? Check the website at WELCA (women.elca@elca.org) for more information.

The Black Prayer

Carol Kong submitted a poem for Black History Month that I was unable to print here. It is a very powerful poem titled *Lord Why Did You Make Me Black* written by a black woman, RuNett Nia Ebo. You may have heard of it, or even seen it, but if not, you can read it at this website

[idjddavis.wordpress.com/2013/03/07/lord-why-did-you-make-me-](http://idjddavis.wordpress.com/2013/03/07/lord-why-did-you-make-me-black-poem-by-runett-nia-ebo)

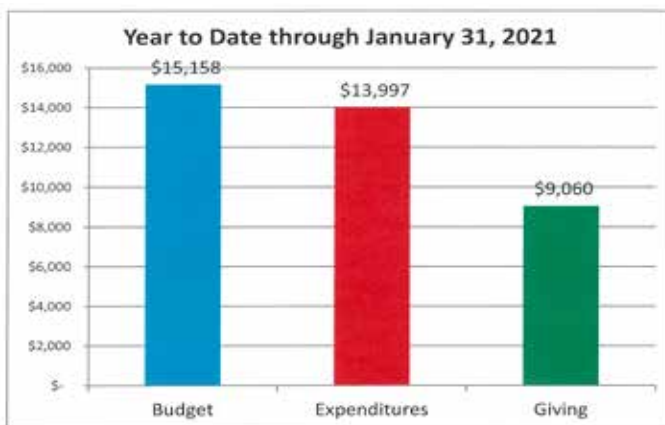
[black-poem-by-runett-](http://idjddavis.wordpress.com/2013/03/07/lord-why-did-you-make-me-black-poem-by-runett-nia-ebo)

[nia-ebo](http://idjddavis.wordpress.com/2013/03/07/lord-why-did-you-make-me-black-poem-by-runett-nia-ebo) or at [facebook.com/AfricanAmericanArt/post/10153315552816451](https://www.facebook.com/AfricanAmericanArt/post/10153315552816451)



Art by Ruud van Empel

Grace Financials



Help Wanted

Do you have an interesting picture, or have you written a story or a poem? Just have something interesting you want to say? The *Voice of Grace* needs your input!

The pay? Not so much (well, none, really.) But just imagine seeing your work in print! Email to Mary at maryeronen@gmail.com

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Photos of church events may be published in print or online. If you do not want your picture included, please contact the office at gracelutheranpt@gmail.com or (360)385-1595.