



## Waiting

Advent is the season of waiting. God's people waited for the coming of Messiah. Mary waited for the birth of a baby. Students wait for school to be out. Families wait for loved ones to come home for the holidays. Congregations wait to celebrate cherished traditions of the season. Children wait to open presents and play with new toys and games.

This year the season of waiting began months ago. Waiting for the numbers to go down. Waiting for the election to be over. Waiting for a vaccine. Waiting for 2021. Waiting for the pandemic to be over already! Advent, the traditional season of waiting, hasn't even started. And this year it isn't going to be the same. Children have been in and out of school all fall. Families won't be gathering for the holidays. There will still be the story of the Christ child and a Christmas tree and presents. But no Christmas caroling or standing-room-only candlelight services.

The long season of waiting leading up to Advent has been expectant waiting. It's been full of challenges and curveballs, but also full of promise and hope. God hasn't just protected and provided for us. God has shown us new things about who we are as God's people and how we are being called to be Christ's body moving into the future.

As we enter Advent, let us continue to trust that God is with us in our waiting. And let us continue to look forward to the day—not too long from now—when we will be able to sing God's praises in a full sanctuary.



### Looking Ahead Events May Be Postponed or Moved Online or Outside

#### December

- 2 - Wednesday at Grace - Advent Wreath
- 9 - Wednesday at Grace - Blue Christmas
- 13 - Christmas Pageant
- 16 - Wednesday at Grace - Caroling
- 20 - Lessons and Carols
- 24 - Christmas Eve Service Online  
Christmas Eve Candlelight Outside
- 25 - Office Closed

#### January

- 1 - Office Closed
- 10 - Ordination and Installation
- 24 - Scout Sunday
- 31 - Annual Congregational Meeting
- 31 - Chili CookOff - Cookie Bake Off

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### **Advent Boxes**

Three year olds through 5th graders - ADVENT BOXES are heading to your home, we will be mailing one box per family.



Advent Season is a very special time of year that sometimes gets lost in the bright lights of the Christmas season it precedes. The first day of Advent is the first day of a new Liturgical (or church) calendar and begins a four week period of preparation in anticipation of the nativity of Jesus at Christmas.

The Advent Season is all about reflecting on how we can prepare our hearts and homes for Christ's birth in the world as it is today. It is a time for families to remember, through prayer, reflections, special music, and good deeds what the true meaning of Jesus' birth is. There are many different traditions associated with the four weeks of Advent.

The Advent season invites us to step away from what can be a frenzied time to consider how we commemorate the birth of Jesus, one of the holiest times in Christian faith.

I will be praying that your ADVENT BOX helps your family take time and celebrate the "reason for the season".

### **POP UP Events**

As we proactively monitor the COVID numbers and the health of our community we continue to look at safe ways to gather for learning and fun. We will be hosting a few pop up events in the coming months, watch your email, the bulletin and our Facebook page for details.

**SHINE** a program of fun, learning and hope originally scheduled to start in January will be pushed back to start in the spring.

**GRACE TIME** on Sundays from 8:30am - 11:00am is in full swing in Smith Hall.

Don't forget **SUNDAY SCHOOL** for three year olds through 5th graders meets each Sunday from 9:30am - 10:30am!

If you need more information on any of these programs please give Miss Sheryl a call at the office.

### **Ruth Circle**

Ruth Circle continues to meet in Conway Hall practicing social distancing , mask wearing and lots of hand sanitizer. With two microphones we are getting better at hearing and participating in the discussion led by Winnie Rutherford.

Servant's Heart continues to be our community project. So far we have contributed 34 gift cards for the purchase of turkey dinners for families in need.

We are thankful to others not in Ruth Circle who helped in this drive. Our diaper challenge also continues. We are the only group contributing diapers to Servant's Heart's for the families in need and the support is amazing!!

For December we will collect unwrapped toys for boys and girls ages 5 to 10 which will be delivered after our next meeting Monday, Dec. 14th at 10 a.m.

All are welcome to attend.

Blessings to all, Barbara Hart

### **Cooking With Grace**

Cooking With Grace is a once a month Zoom cooking group. Those who sign up will receive a list of ingredients and steps to get them ready ahead of time and the Zoom link to join in. At 5:55 PM on December 14, Sarah Lein will lead in preparing multiple appetizers for the holidays via Zoom. We begin promptly at 6:00 preparing the food. Anyone can sign up to lead the group and share their recipes or you can join in the fun and learn to make new dishes with friends. Can't wait to get cooking!

To sign up, email Carolyn Castagno at [carolyn@findingnewjoys.com](mailto:carolyn@findingnewjoys.com)

### **Stay Connected and Current**

Sermons, bulletins and announcements can be found on the church website.

In addition to monthly Grace Notes newsletters, Grace Covenant offers short weekly email updates delivered to your inbox. To subscribe, call or email the church office. You can follow the church on Facebook and subscribe to the church YouTube channel. If you're not receiving your Grace Notes by mail or email, call the church office.

### ***Celebrating Pastor Karen's Ministry***

We have been praying for Parish Associate Karen Estes and her husband Jon-Paul to find a new job and those prayers have been answered. We are happy for the Estes Family but saddened to see them move to Houston. Pastor Karen quickly became a critical member of the pastoral care team here at Grace Covenant. She made innumerable phone calls, recorded weekly devotions, and found creative ways to visit during the pandemic. We will miss her beautiful singing, thoughtful prayers, and inspirational preaching on Sunday mornings; and her upbeat personality around the church office. We pray that God will continue to richly bless Karen and Jon-Paul in all that God calls them to be and do in the future.

### ***Anne Hallum of AIR Guatemala***

#### **Special ZOOM Presentation**

Thursday, December 3, 7:00 p.m.

As one of the five ministries we support through our PCUSA Five Cents a Meal special offering, we have a long and important connection with AIR Guatemala and founder, Anne Hallum. An acronym for Alliance for International Reforestation, AIR is planting thousands of life-giving trees on the mountainsides of Guatemala. Without AIR, those mountain forests are decimated, allowing for devastating mud slides that make the land uninhabitable. With AIR's strategic assistance, village after village is assured that their crops have cover. They are also building fuel-efficient stoves which use only a fraction of the wood previously needed for cooking and eliminate carcinogenic smoke. AIR educates school children of the necessity of forest preservation, and works hard with the villagers to help them become self-sustaining in their efforts to produce bountiful crops. Learn about how AIR is making a huge difference in the lives of the indigenous Mayan villagers.

Sponsored by our Outreach Committee, we will also be joined by other churches, so plan to sign up early for our ZOOM presentation to be held on Thursday,

December 3rd at 7:00 PM. Instructions will be available if you are new to the ZOOM platform. Please call the church office by Tuesday, December 1st to receive the code you need to get you into this special virtual presentation.

### ***ROOTED Youth Group News***

**ROOTED** meets this month on Dec. 6th from 5:15pm-7pm. We'll have dinner, games, music, prayers, announcements, and a lesson. Bring your friendz!!!

**ROOTED Christmas Party** will be on Sunday, Dec. 13<sup>th</sup> from 5:15pm-7pm at the Umpierre house. We'll provide the main entrée, you bring either a side dish or dessert and enough to share. Don't forget to bring a white elephant gift to exchange, worth no more than \$7.77. Please RSVP by noon, on Thursday, Dec. 10

**MONTREAT** retreat info will be forthcoming soon! Young adult Christmas luncheon for those out of high school through 24 years old will be Friday, Dec. 18 from 11:45am-1pm, location tba. This is FREE, so come meet your old friends, meet Mike, and maybe make some new friends. Please RSVP by noon on Wednesday, Dec. 16.

For more details on our events and other news, friend us on Facebook: Grace Covenant PC Youth, and on Instagram: @rootedgpcpc

### ***Pop Tops***

All the can pop tops we have saved over the years were taken to Ronald McDonald House to help their fund-raising. But because of the pandemic, they have stopped collecting them, at least for the time being. It's really hard to stop saving them, but for now, please do so!

### ***Pecans***

The Women's Council has regular and chocolate pecans left over. We have 8 regular bags which are \$12 and 23 chocolate bags which have been marked down to \$10. Contact the church office.

### **Gift Bags for Share the Care**

Instead of church members taking home a bag to fill, we are asking for donations at \$20 per bag (40 bags needed). The Outreach Committee will buy the items and fill the bags. Donations are requested by December 6.



Donations for the gift bags can be made online or if adding to your offering check, write Share the Care Gift Bag and dollar amount. Thank you!

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**Support GRACE  
when shopping online!**

When you make a purchase on Amazon, go to  
<https://smile.amazon.com/>

Designate Grace Covenant as the non-profit to support.

### **Book Club**

Grace Covenant Book Club will be meeting by Zoom on Tuesday, December 22nd at 7 p.m. In the spirit of Christmas we'll be discussing "**Through the Eyes of a Shepherd**" by Kenneth Winter. We'd love for you to join us. For more information, contact Jane Heppner .

### **Calendar Sale 2021**

The ROOTED Youth Group annual calendar fundraiser will have calendars for sale this month. Cost is \$10 and will be available after each service on Dec. 6, 13, and 20. If you're not coming to worship, please mail in your check with your address and we'll either drop them off or mail them. Thank you!

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Please submit articles to  
churchoffice@grace.to

**Next Deadline - December 10**



Please contact the church office if you would like a copy of the birthday and anniversary list.

## ***Session Summary***

November 2020

Session accepted, with regret, the resignation of Parish Associate Karen Estes; and celebrated the appointment of Jim Pate to the CFP Committee on Preparation for Ministry and Pulpit Supply list.

The church continues to be blessed by faithful giving. Revenues remain steady while expenses are down which has allowed the church to improve its equity position.

The response to the 2021 Stewardship Campaign has been strong; and a balanced budget for 2021 has been approved with \$651,676 in total income and expenses.

A Memorial Hall Bathroom Ad Hoc Renovation Committee (MHBARC) was appointed consisting of: Gary Carver, Rob Cumbus, Diana Ibarra, Bruce Johnson and Bruce Lampman; and Pastor Melanie Ruta and Share the Care CEO Mary Ellen Philbin serving ex officio. A proposal for professional design services was approved.

Revisions to the Endowment Policy and to the Designated Funds Policy were approved.

The new website has been launched with some areas still under construction.

Session approved the 2021 church calendar and set the Annual Meeting for Sunday, January 31 after the 10:45 service.

Laurie Feddon was elected Clerk of Session, and Bruce Lampman Treasurer for 2021.

Elder commissioners were appointed to the December Presbytery meeting.

Ministerio Restauracion y Esperanza will continue as a Fellowship meeting at Grace Covenant; and the Scout charter for Pack 42 and Troop 23 was renewed for 2021.

### ***PNC Update***

The Pastor Nominating Committee is already hard at work. Using information supplied by the congregation (remember those surveys from last winter?) as well as demographic and other information about the congregation and community, the PNC

is writing the church profile. The church's profile will be posted online where it will be matched with the profiles of pastors seeking calls. What can we do in the congregation? Pray for the PNC and pray for the candidate that God is already preparing and equipping to be Grace Covenant's next pastor.

### ***Trim Your Tax Bill***

The CARES ACT stimulus bill which was enacted earlier this year included a one-time \$300 "above the line" deduction for cash contributions to charity. The provision was designed to encourage taxpayers to help charities, like churches, that are struggling to fulfill their mission during the pandemic. Even if you don't itemize, you can still take the deduction this year. The deduction is tied to tax returns not individual taxpayers, so a married couple filing jointly is limited to \$300. Call Finance Director Phyllis Cornell in the church office for more information on your giving.

### ***Christmas Alternatives***

Many of our Christmas benevolent traditions have to be modified because of the pandemic. The Outreach Committee thought about how we can create some Christmas cheer while still staying safe.

This year, Outreach is accepting donations to purchase items from the Presbyterian Giving Catalog (<https://presbyteriangifts.pcusa.org/gifts/>) such as chickens, goats, etc. For example, a family of chickens costs \$25 and a family of goats \$178. Training for their care is provided. Every gift has the power to fulfill a need, change a life and foster hope and faith. Collectively, we are making a difference. Various groups of young people in the church will decide exactly which items to buy. Donations can be made now through December. If you are led to make a donation to any of the organizations that were included in Christmas Alternatives in the past, please do that. Donations for Presbyterian Gifts can be made online or added to your offering check, just note the amount for a particular project. Thank you!

**December 2020**



Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
Permit No. 3597  
Orlando, FL

**GRACE COVENANT  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Return Service Requested

**Sunday Worship**

8:45  
10:45 a.m.  
Online

**Office Hours**

Monday–Thursday: 8:30 a.m.–3 p.m.  
Friday: 8:30 a.m.–noon

1655 Peel Ave., Orlando, FL 32806  
Phone: 407.898.6571  
E-mail: churchoffice@grace.to  
**WWW.GRACE.TO**

To:



*Advent Calendar*

<i>Wednesday at Grace, Wreath Event</i>	<i>Wednesday, December 2</i>	<i>6:45 p.m.</i>
<i>Wednesday at Grace, Blue Christmas Service</i>	<i>Wednesday, December 9</i>	<i>6:45 p.m.</i>
<i>Christmas Pageant</i>	<i>Sunday, December 13</i>	<i>5:00 p.m.</i>
<i>ROOTED Christmas Party</i>	<i>Sunday, December 13</i>	<i>5:15 p.m.</i>
<i>Wednesday at Grace, Caroling in the Courtyard</i>	<i>Wednesday, December 16</i>	<i>6:45 p.m.</i>
<i>Young Adult Christmas Luncheon</i>	<i>Friday, December 18</i>	<i>11:45 a.m.</i>
<i>Morning Worship Service</i>	<i>Sunday, December 20</i>	<i>8:45 and 10:45 a.m.</i>
<i>Lessons and Carols</i>	<i>Sunday, December 20</i>	<i>5:00 p.m.</i>
<i>Christmas Eve Service Online</i>	<i>Thursday, December 24</i>	<i>All Day</i>
<i>Christmas Eve Candlelight in the Courtyard</i>	<i>Thursday, December 24</i>	<i>7:00 p.m.</i>

Please continue to support the work of the church by mailing your tithes and offerings to the church or by making a donation through the church website. Go to the "Online Giving" page at [www.grace.to](http://www.grace.to) and click on the "Give Now" button.