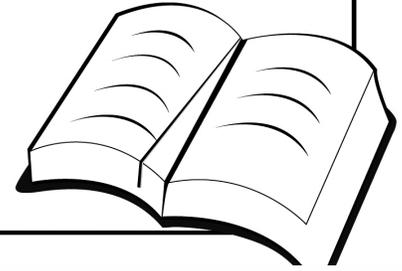


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# CE notes

GRACE COVENANT  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



December 2019 — Volume 64, Issue 11

## Advent is Coming

“Advent” means “arrival” or “coming.” During the season of Advent we celebrate Christ’s coming into the world at Christmas and we wait with hope for his coming again. Advent is also the beginning of the new church year. It is a time—like Lent—for personal reflection and communal discernment about where we have been and where God is leading us.

Advent is an “in-between” time where we wait for the one who has already come. We praise God for the gift of the Son who has already come to redeem us. At the same time, we also hope for the fulfillment of God’s promises of righteous rule and perfect peace that has not yet been fully realized. We remember the Christ child born in a manger to die for us, while also yearning for the time he will rule with justice and righteousness in the new heaven and the new earth.

Advent is more than the month of the year when we gather at special services to sing carols and light candles. Advent is the time between past and future. Advent is the time between memory and hope. Advent is the time when we boldly proclaim, “Come, Lord Jesus” with the confidence of those who believe that our Lord has come.

This Advent we are inviting our neighbors to join us at outreach services and events throughout the season. We will have an Advent wreath outside on the lawn. Those living nearby, who may not have a church or even know what an advent wreath is, will be able to stop by each Sunday of Advent at 5 pm to join in the lighting of the candles for Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. There will be singing of carols and eating of Christmas goodies.

We will host a “Blue Christmas” service of remembrance and hope for the community on Sunday, Dec. 15. Christmas can be a difficult time for those who are grieving or for those who are burdened by health concerns or financial worries or broken relationships or any number of things that have left them anxious or empty or lost or alone. A “Blue Christmas” service is also for anyone who is looking for a time of centering on Christ in the midst of the busy-ness of the season.

And there will be the traditional Advent services, including a Choir Cantata on Dec. 15 at both morning services; and our beloved candlelight services on Christmas Eve at 5 and 7 p.m.

Thanks to Congregational Fellowship Committee, Candy Vander Weide, and all the other volunteers that helped with making the Church picnic a great success. A special thanks goes out to the Blair family and friends for tasty BBQ spread and the hard work that went into preparing it. Also thanks for all the people that pitched in to help clean up afterwards.



Blessings to All!  
Susan Smith



To my wonderful church family, THANK YOU seems so small for the outpouring of love and support since my illness was diagnosed in May. Prayers, calls, cards, visits and food have been constant and are still coming in. Words can't express my thanks and gratitude from a full and happy heart. I promise to pay and pray it forward.

God Bless and In Christ's Name,  
Mark Durham



Dear Grace Friends-  
*True joy is rooted in gratefulness* and we are truly grateful to you for rallying around our boys and their decision to perform their Eagle Scout projects on Grace's grounds. Your kind words of support, thankful attitudes, and generous donations helped both Dylan and Connor complete a majority of their projects ahead of schedule. Dylan only has two more Eagle Scout Board of Review meetings to complete, and we are happy to share that Connor should complete the final phase of his actual Eagle Scout project... the creation of a "Friendship Garden" at Small Blessings, this December. We would also like to specially thank all the members

of the Building & Grounds and Outreach committees, as well as the Small Blessings Childcare Board and Grace's Session for going above and beyond in supporting these nearly Eagle Scouts. These folks advised, shared during presentations, challenged and encouraged our boys with their abilities to raise funds, signed numerous documents, and wrote letters of approval and recommendations. There is a lot of dedication that goes into an Eagle Scout project and we truly appreciate all the behind the scenes support. Grace is truly blessed with generous hearts that serve all ages!

Our love in Christ – Tracy and Manuel Umpierre



**THANK YOU ALL** for another successful ROOT-ED Youth Group sponsored Turkey Drive!! We surpassed last year's monies donated!!! We turned them into gift cards, and then handed them over to the Dover Shores Elementary School PTA.

*In Sympathy*

*A memorial service for Karl Kesler will be held at Grace Covenant, Friday, December 6, 2019 at 2 p.m.*

Joan Rainey



Send Grace Notes items to  
churchoffice@grace.to

Please submit articles for  
**the January issue by December 8th.**

**Inside this issue:**

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## *Holiday Brunch*

**A Christmas covered dish  
with your church family!**

Following the 10:45 service on Sunday, December 8, you are invited to gather in Conway Hall to join in fellowship with members of the Grace Covenant family for a Covered Dish lunch. Each family is requested to bring a dish that is a traditional Christmas treat at your home. Rolls and drinks will be provided. Mark your calendar and come share the joy of the season and celebrate Joe Waddell's retirement.

## *Shout Out a Big THANK YOU to Joe!!!*

Come to the Holiday Brunch on Sunday, December 8 to celebrate Joe Waddell's service to the church. Joe has been such an asset to Grace Covenant for the past five plus years. Any cards of congratulations on his retirement and/or gifts can be placed in the Golf Bag that day. Joe, Grace Covenant wishes you the very best in your retirement years ahead. ENJOY!

## *Ruth Circle*

Ruth Circle will be meeting December 9th for our Bible study on the Ten Commandments as well as having our celebratory Christmas luncheon. The church staff is invited to join us as we prepare our hearts for the Christmas season.

We continue to support Servant's Heart as our community project and look forward to sharing with needy families in the community. We also participate in their turkey drive to bring holiday fare to families in the area.

Please feel free to join us at any time.  
Barbara Hart



## *Retirement Luncheon for Candy!!!*

A **Retirement Luncheon** will be held in Conway Hall immediately following the 10:45 a.m. service on December 29 for Grace Covenant's lay pastor, Candy Vander Weide. Candy's devotion to Grace Covenant for 30 plus years has been extraordinary. Her outreach to us and the community through the many activities she has hosted has brought so many together for fellowship, fun and learning about Jesus and our Heavenly Father. Her selflessness in serving our Lord is to be celebrated! Cards and/or gifts for Candy can be placed in designated baskets in Conway Hall at the luncheon. Join in wishing Candy happy and blessed years in what God has planned for her future.

## *Building Memories...*

**build a Gingerbread House  
with friends and family**

Sunday, December 8, 3pm – 4:30 pm  
Conway Hall

This is a chance for your family (or your church family) to spend time together building a gingerbread house to take home...a chance to make memories in a season that gets so hectic.

All ages are encouraged to participate. Want to join in the fun but don't want to take it home? We'll deliver your house to a place where it will be loved.

We must have you sign up by December 3, so we will have enough supplies for everyone. Please sign up at the Kiosk or call the Church office. (407-898-6571)

All you need to bring is a bag of candy that can be "put in the pot" to share in decorating the houses. All other supplies are provided.



## *Small Blessings Child Care*



The children at Small Blessings are learning all about the birth of Jesus and the love He brought to the world!

December brings class work and Christmas joy! Each year SBCC provides 25-30 Christmas Child Boxes for GCPC to send with our own boxes. They will participate in the Famous Reindeer Games put on by the Christian Education Committee. Talk with Candy if you would like to help with this fun activity! The four year old classes will be putting on their Fantastic Christmas Program for their families and friends. You are also invited to attend and enjoy the wonder of children as they learn the real meaning of Christmas. Parties will be held in each room on Friday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, complete with cookies and gifts for the classroom!

Have a Wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year, while wearing your best childlike smile of trust and love in all that the season brings!

### *Celebrating with Small Blessings*

#### **Christmas Pageant**

Thursday, December 5, at 7:00 p.m., you are invited to see the precious VPK classes from Small Blessings perform their **annual Christmas Pageant**. It promises, as always, to be a very special time of celebration of the season.

#### **Reindeer Games**

On Wednesday, December 18 at 9 a.m. in the gym, the members of Grace Covenant present a Christmas activity time for the Small Blessings children. **We need people** who will come and monitor one of the games or the craft as the children rotate through. If you would be willing to come help with the Reindeer Games and share Christmas

spirit with these little blessings, please email [candy@grace.to](mailto:candy@grace.to) or call the church office, 407-898-6571. We need helpers to come share in this celebration!

### *Annual Alternative Christmas Celebration*

A reminder that gifts “that keep on giving” may be purchased until Christmas. There are many ministry areas to choose from and you will be given cards to send to those you have honored. A listing of choices and information about each ministry are available on the Kiosk or on the Visitor Table in the Narthex.

Bags for the clients at Share the Care are on the Kiosk with instructions. Time has been extended and bags are due back **December 8**.

### *Family Fun Nite*

Tuesday, December 17, 6:29 pm. Conway Hall All are invited to our monthly Fun Nite to slow down a little from the holiday rush and spend some time together with some great friends. We share a covered dish meal (drinks, bread and dessert provided) followed by a time of simple games around the tables.

### *Fourth Thursday at the Garden*

There will *not* be a Fourth Thursday at the Garden in December because of the holidays. Plan to join us on the 4th Thursday in January..

### *Church Picnic Pics*

Anyone with pictures of the church picnic and the Veterans Day program that accompanied the picnic, please email them to the church office ([rhonda@grace.to](mailto:rhonda@grace.to)) and to Herschel Hughes, Jr. . Thanks in advance.

### Calendar Sale

ROOTED Youth Group have 2020 God’s Creation calendars for sale in December. There is no need to pre-order, we’ll have them for sale after church services, cost is \$10.

### Caroling on the Lawn

Sundays, December 1, 8, 15 and 22 at 5:00 pm

Join with your Church family and friends and neighbors of the Church for a short devotional time, carol singing and treats of the season on the front lawn of Grace Covenant each Sunday evening of Advent. If you play carols on a guitar or other instrument, you are invited to bring it along and join in the praise.

### Book Club is on the move!

On December 3, Book Club will meet at Panera’s located at 3138 S. Orange Ave., Orlando, FL. We meet on Tuesday evenings at 7:00 pm. Currently, we are planning discussions of the following books:

12-3-2019

*Prayers of a Stranger*

by Davis Bunn

1-28-2020

*The Wednesday Letters*

by Jason F. Wright

### YOUNG ADULT CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

Attention, those out of high school through age 24!!! On Wednesday, Dec. 18 from 11:45am-1pm there will be a lunch at Los Generales. This is FREE, so come meet your old friends, meet Mike, and maybe make some new friends. Please RSVP by noon on Monday, Dec. 16.

### #GivingTuesday

Giving Tuesday is celebrated on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving in the United States, after the widely recognized shopping events Black Friday and Cyber Monday. This year, #GivingTuesday, is December 3, 2019. Please consider an extra gift to Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church or one of the many deserving organizations highlighted in the Alternative Christmas Celebration.



### Support GRACE

#### when holiday shopping online!

When you make a purchase on Amazon, go to <https://smile.amazon.com/> Designate GCPC as the non-profit to support.

## ROOTED Student Ministry Schedule

### December

**8** *ROOTED Christmas Party* will be a progressive dinner once again on Sunday, Dec. 8<sup>th</sup>. Time to be announced, we’ll have appetizers, dinner, desserts, AND a white elephant gift exchange. Please RSVP by noon, on Thursday, Dec. 5.

**8** **MONTREAT** non-refundable deposit of \$50 for both high school and middle school is due at the *ROOTED Christmas Party*.

**21** A sad but *glorious* time we’ll have together when we go watch the final *STAR WARS* movie together on Dec. 21, at the Premiere Cinema 14 in Fashion Square, @ 3:50pm. Cost is \$10 and we’ll be watching it in 3D!!!

**Sunday School** meets every Sunday in the Youth Room with FREE, yessiree Bob, FREE donuts, juice, and Jesus!!! Sunday School runs 9:30-10:30 a.m.

For more details on our events and other news....

**you can friend us on Facebook at: Grace Covenant PC Youth, and on Instagram at: rootedgcpc.**

## GOD IS WITH US

What was the most perfect gift you ever received? A bike or doll when you were a kid? A video game, perhaps? Maybe it was the day you met your husband, your wife.

For most of us, the most perfect gift is not necessarily a thing, but something else. Something bigger, deeper, more meaningful.

One of the most powerful things that Christians claim is that God saw the great needs of the world and offered a perfect gift, a gift that brought God and humanity closer together. God's perfect gift to us, Jesus Christ, offered the power of being with us. According to Matthew's Gospel, one of the names given to Jesus is Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." This is one of the reasons we share gifts during Christmas. We, too, want to share the power of being "with" those we love and those in need, by offering gifts like those we give to the Christmas Joy Offering.

When we give to the Christmas Joy Offering, we step forward to be with the young people attending Stillman College, Presbyterian Pan American School, and the Menaul School, recognizing their potential and rejoicing in their talents.

We also step forward to be with church workers and their families who have faithfully served the church but find themselves in critical financial need because of changing health situations or an emergency. We offer the gift of being "with" them by giving a gift to the offering to help restore hope through the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions.

We give these gifts because God shows us how powerful it is to "be with." The power of "with" is the power God shows us in Jesus Christ. God's perfect gift: Emmanuel, God is with us. Let us share our gifts and celebrate our church leaders — past, present, and future. Christmas Joy Offering envelopes will be available in the bulletins on December 22nd.

## H 2 O YARD SALE

Neither rain, wind nor threat of tornados will keep GCPC from having a yard sale. Granted it was a week late, but what a sale we had!

Thank you to everyone who contributed items for the sale, went through the items, set up tables, carried countless boxes of items to the tables, arranged the items, stood by the tables to help make the sales possible, took items to Goodwill, Dave's House, Servant's Heart and Russell Home Thrift Shop.

**Because of you all and your willingness to help, we made \$3036.00 and still counting!**

In 2012, as a church mission of GCPC, we promised to find a way to provide safe and clean drinking water for the students of Good Shepard School in Port au Prince, Haiti. And this year, \$1000.00 sale money will be used to fulfill our commitment. The remaining money will be used by the Buildings and Grounds Committee to complete necessary GCPC campus projects, such as a new outside door for the Share the Care kitchen.

**Because of you, GCPC love and grace will be felt as far as Haiti and as close as our own community! Thank You GCPC!**

### *Donation Request*

Donate your clothing and shoes to Dover Shores Elementary School Men's, Women's and Children's Clothing. Every bag of clothing counts in raising money for Dover Shores' programs for their students. Just drop off bags of clothing in the permanent recycle bin located in the parking lot at Dover Shores Elementary, 1200 Gaston Foster Rd, Orlando, FL 32812.

If you have any questions, please call Donna Throneburg.

### *Grace Prayer Focus*

The Care committee invites you to pray with them each week for businesses in our community. Businesses to pray for are listed weekly in the bulletin.



## *Session Summary*

Stated Session Meeting,  
November 21, 2019

New elders and deacons were examined by Session.

Job descriptions for the part-time children's ministry director and part-time facilities manager were approved.

New guidelines proposed by the Care Committee for disbursements from the Good Samaritan Fund were approved.

A balanced budget for 2020 was approved.

The Technology Committee was authorized to pursue funding for AV upgrades in the Sanctuary.

Communion dates for 2020 were approved.

Session reviewed the results of the USCVS Survey and made plans for a second survey that will measure the congregation's preferences for the characteristics and leadership traits of the new pastor. The second survey is scheduled for January. Small group discussions about the future vision of the church are planned for February.

Kristen Stieffel was elected Clerk of Session and Bruce Lampman was elected Treasurer for one year terms.

Kristen Stieffel and "M" Waddell were appointed commissioners to the December 3 Presbytery meeting.

Seven members were removed from the church rolls by transfer/Session action.

## *We're hiring!*

With Candy's and Joe's retirements, we have some mighty big shoes to fill! We are looking for a couple of highly motivated, enthusiastic, and out-going persons to be our next Children's Ministry Director and Facilities Manager. If you are interested in learning more about these positions, know someone who might be interested, or know someone who

you think may be qualified for these positions, contact the church office at [churchoffice@grace.to](mailto:churchoffice@grace.to) or Jim Malcolm, Personnel Committee Chairperson. We can provide more information about how you, or someone you know, can become a part of the Grace Covenant staff family. Thank You!

## *Congregational Vitality Survey Results*

Worshippers at Grace Covenant were invited last month to take the U.S. Congregational Vitality Survey offered by the PCUSA. The results are in! Grace Covenant was given a "vitality score" of 76% which is right in line with the benchmark of 77% representing the average score of all the congregations that have taken the survey. Or as the USCVS puts it: "This church is spiritually vital and alive." That's good news for Grace Covenant (but no surprise!) Based on the worshiper survey results, Grace Covenant's greatest strength is "Caring Relationships" and we are least strong in "Outward Focus." Again, maybe not a surprise to us here at Grace. But it does represent a challenge to maintain our caring for one another even as we extend the love and concern that we have for one another to those in our community. Other strengths: "Spirit-Inspired Worship" and "Lifelong Discipleship Formation." Thanks to all who took the time to complete the survey.

## *Mission Study*

The USCVS survey is just one of several opportunities the congregation will have to "weigh-in" on the selection of our next installed pastor. Session is working on a second short survey that will ask people to rank the characteristics and leadership traits they would like the new pastor to have. That survey will be made available on-line so members who can't attend regularly will be able to participate. Session will also host a series of small group discussions about the future vision of the church beginning in late January. Help shape the future of the church. Take the survey. Come to a discussion group.

**December 2019**



**GRACE COVENANT  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Rev. Melanie Ruta  
Interim Pastor

Candy Vander Weide  
Commissioned Lay Pastor

**Sunday Worship:** 8:30 & 10:45 a.m.

**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

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# *ADVENT CALENDAR*

**Caroling on the Lawn/Light Advent Candle**

Sundays  
December 1, 8, 15, 22  
5:00 p.m.

**Small Blessings Christmas Program**

Thursday, December 5  
7:00 p.m.

**Happy Holiday Brunch**

Sunday, December 8  
11:45 a.m.

**Making Memories Making Gingerbread Houses**

Sunday, December 8  
3:00 p.m.

**Youth Group Progressive Dinner**

Sunday, December 8  
4:00 p.m.



**Christmas Caroling at Care Centers**

Sunday, December 15  
2 p.m.

**Blue Christmas Service**

Sunday, December 15  
6:30 p.m.

**Family Fun Nite**

Tuesday, December 17  
6:29 p.m.

**Young Adult Christmas Luncheon**

Wednesday, December 18  
11:45 a.m.

**Christmas Eve Candlelight Services**

Tuesday, December 24  
5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.