

GRACE HAPPENINGS

THE NEWSLETTER OF

GRACE MISSION EPISCOPAL CHURCH

... A TRANSFORMATIVE MINISTRY OF THE FORGOTTEN ...

HOPE • HEALING • HEALTH

ADVENT 2016

Words of Grace

The Rev. Amanda L. Nickles, Vicar

Good News—Christmas and Report Cards!

Elizabeth Crowe, Grace Children's Ministries

Dear Ministry Partners:

Sometimes the glitz of Christmas can leave us feeling a little empty inside. The revelry, shopping, and celebrating can leave us more tired than happy. When the feasting and partying are all over, we may wonder: "Is there more to Christmas than this?" When the food has been digested and the gifts opened, we might think: "Now what?" Indeed, have you ever asked yourself, "Is there a better gift for me this Christmas?"

The good news: There is such a gift. It's made just for you, and it's given by someone who knows exactly what you're going through. It has your name on it, and it's always been waiting to be opened. Unlike the chocolates and other gifts, this gift is custom-made; and it possesses some special qualities. It holds great potential, promises freedom, and gives you more than anything money can buy. And it comes from someone really special. By now, you might be thinking, *This sounds like a great gift. Only it can't possibly exist. No Christmas gift could do all that. It sounds too good to be true.*

But here's the real Christmas surprise: such a gift really exists. It doesn't come in a box, however, but in the form of a very special Person – Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's gift to us. He offers us unconditional love, forgiveness, purpose in life, healing, and a hope for the future. The best part of this Christmas gift is that it's completely free. There are no conditions – we are not part of a 'naughty or nice' list to receive it or not. It's simply there for us to accept and receive. And we don't have to wait until Christmas. Our gift is always waiting for us because God loves us.

As we celebrate Christmas, let's also commemorate the birth of Christ – thanking God for giving us the best Christmas gift of all. *"God has given a son to us ... His name will be Wonderful, Counselor, Powerful God ... Prince of Peace."* (Isaiah 9:6)

Help us at Grace Mission to continue offering the gift of Jesus Christ. Thank you for remembering us in your prayers and your hearts.

Have a glorious and rejoicing Christmas!

Pastor Amanda+

We're delighted to report that 30% of our children made the Honor Roll on their first report cards that came out this week! Our After-School Program (Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays) is off and running at The Episcopal University Center at FSU, where we have 125 volunteers each week working with the children. In addition to our elementary school children, we now also have 6<sup>th</sup> graders with us in the academic program on Tuesdays and Wednesdays (see Pastor Jenni's column on the next page). Our tutors, creative play pals, Christian education group leaders, kitchen aides, and bus riders are mostly FSU students who are grateful to have easy access to our program for earning volunteer hours required by many classes. We also welcome you to join us and we are especially in need of bus riders to accompany the driver and 11 children on each of our two buses. If interested, please see the bus rider info under the "Get Involved" tab at [www.gracemission.net](http://www.gracemission.net) and sign up on SignUpGenius if you feel called to be on the road with us!

In a few weeks we will be in the season of Advent and are already in the midst of preparations for our Family Christmas Celebration for the children and their families. Soon your church should have "angels" up on a tree or bulletin board, so be on the lookout! Please see the box below for Angel Tree instructions. These gifts will be given at our Family Christmas Celebration at St. John's Episcopal Church on Tuesday, December 13. For details, see "Worship! Volunteer!" on the next page.

I am so grateful and give thanks to God for this blessed church community that so lovingly supports us and the families in our program. From us and on behalf of our families, thank you very much!

Angel Trees

Please take an angel from your church's angel tree/ bulletin board and think of the joy you'll bring that child! Return unwrapped gifts to your church or to Grace Mission by **Sunday, December 4**. In lieu of or in addition to a gift, you may enclose a gift card to Walmart. Attach the angel to your gift(s) or clearly mark the name of the child on the gift bag. "Not Named" angels are for siblings of children in our program so we will have a gift for every child present that evening. These gifts will be given at our Family Christmas Celebration on Tuesday, December 13.

## From the Other Priest's Desk

The Rev. Dr. Jenni Liem (So-So Bowler—see below)

Grace and peace to all of our wonderful supporters! This has been a whirlwind Fall in the life of Grace Mission (and I am led to believe that this is no surprise). The biggest news from this desk is the formation of our very first Youth Group at Grace Mission. We recruited some of our shining star 6<sup>th</sup> graders to be part of this great new initiative. These are youngsters who have been with the After School program for most of their elementary school life and now that they are in Middle School, we discerned a need to keep them engaged and active and connected. We are working on discipleship and formation with them. We are using the VBS program *Joy in Jesus* as a guide this fall. The program is focused on African-American expressions of faith and history and our youth group has taken to learning more and more about Jesus. Some of our hopes for the coming months is to help our youngsters build relationships with diverse mentors, grow in leadership and service, and to have some good times (there are already plans to go to a football game and starting the Grace Mission Bowling League).

This is a special time for our youth group as they begin to grow out of childhood and towards young adulthood. There are so many diversions and distractions that they face every day. We hope to encourage them to make good choices and to help them build solid and healthy relationships while also growing in their faith and walk with Jesus.

Your support and prayers helped make this vision (a vision for this was cast in April) a reality which provides a sacred space for these great young people. In the coming weeks there will be information about our Christmas Angel program. The Youth Group will be benefiting from the Christmas Angels just as the younger students in the After School program. Please consider a gift for one of our Youth Group members.

It is a joy to begin working with these young people. There is a lot of life and laughter in them! In a world where Middle School students are often left to their own devices, isn't it great to know that this group has a place to be and people who think they are pretty cool?

### Needs

**Children:** Wrapping paper, bags, tape, and gift wrap volunteers for gifts for 80+ children.

**Adults:** Christmas cards and stamps so that members can connect or reconnect with family and friends, opening doors of reconciliation and forgiveness.

**Christmas Dinners:** Volunteers needed for the children's dinner December 13 and the adult dinner December 23.

**Donations:** Please remember us when cleaning out your closets – especially need coats, blankets, and sweaters for the winter! We also need T-shirts (L or XL) and men's white socks.

## Worship! Volunteer!

We would love for you to be a part of the Grace Mission Family Christmas Celebration. We welcome you to worship with us on Tuesday, December 13, at 5:30 pm at St. John's Episcopal Church. Sitting and worshipping with families not familiar with our Episcopal service would help them navigate the service and make this a special evening for them. We also need volunteers for this event: checking families in, setting up, serving dinner, cleaning up, or distributing gift bags. Please call Grace Mission at 224-3817 to volunteer or for additional information.

### Alternative Christmas Market

Grace Mission is an agency that is represented in the John Wesley UMC Alternative Christmas Market. This market features "gifts that make a difference" from more than 30 non-profit charitable organizations. Honor those on your Christmas list who have enough by sharing with those in need. It is a convenient and heart-warming shopping experience! Admission is a non-perishable food item.

### John Wesley UMC, 1689 Old Saint Augustine Rd.

Saturday, December 3 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, December 4 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

### In Appreciation of Grace Mission

Pastor Amanda,

Thank you for your assistance with my newly found spiritual growth. Your kindness generosity and gift of helping me understand the word of God has been priceless to me. The bible study class has been an enormous gift. Yesterdays class was amazing.

Thank you

Julia Uhland



Eleanor Blalock, daughter of Adam and Jenny Blalock of St. John's, requested that her birthday be remembered with food for Grace Mission rather than gifts for herself.

### News

**2017 An Evening of Grace:** Mark your calendars for **April 8, 2017 when An Evening of Grace presents "Cheeseburgers in Paradise."** In a casual and laid-back nod to Jimmy Buffett, the Woman's Club of Tallahassee will be transformed into a beachy Key West setting featuring a cash bar, cheeseburgers and the fixin's, music, dancing, and one major exciting raffle to be given away at the event.

The **2016 Blues & BBQ** was a success generating over \$3,000 to benefit Grace Mission. Thanks to all.

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