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GRACE NOTES

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MARCH THEME: WILDERNESS WANDERING



Photo Credit: Sven Mieke on Unsplash

From Mother Jenny, *Priest Locum Tenens*



If you are looking for a spiritual experience in a wilderness-like setting, I can highly recommend the Monastery of Christ in the Desert in Abiquiu, New Mexico. However, from my experience, there are two things you must know if you decide to visit. First, you HAVE to slow down to get there. If you don't, you will surely die.

The thirteen-mile dirt road that must be traveled to get to this monastery cannot be traveled in haste. It must be navigated deliberately, carefully, and--on the steep curves--prayerfully. When an oncoming car approaches, you must be considerate as the two of you negotiate who goes first. And driver beware when it rains, as the road gets very slippery and even more hazardous.

At least that is how it was for me nine years ago when I retreated to this wilderness place in the desert. The necessity for driving slowly calmed me down. Rolling down the windows, I began to breathe more deeply. I leisurely stopped to hear the Chama River far below. I took delight in the red rock beauty around me and marveled at the grandeur. After the hour it had taken to drive the thirteen miles down the dusty, one-way road, I arrived at the guest house of the monastery.

As I get out of my car, a young monk opens the gate. His English is limited as he takes my backpack and guides me to room number three. He then points to the women's bathroom. I nod appreciatively and then he turns to walk away. A little panicked from my childhood fear of not being fed, I ask, "Where do I eat?" He points up the hill and says distinctly the words "church" and "refectory," two words I understand. I'm relieved I will not starve.

My arrival time is such that I have just a few minutes before the Daily Office of Sext and lunch. I don't want to miss either, so I walk briskly up the road for half a mile. Then I see the church nestled in the shadows of the red rock mesa. Adobe-like, simple-yet-spacious, the nave has lots of windows. Once inside, I take my seat. Dressed in black habits the monks file in one-by-one, reverence the tabernacle, and take their seats. The service is chanted. Guests sing quietly. At the end of the service a monk invites the retreatants to follow him into the refectory.

As the doors to the refectory open, I am mesmerized by an icon of the Holy Trinity that is painted across the entire back wall. It is magnificent. I can't take my eyes off of it. The icon extends beyond Rublev's and includes saints, women and men, lining up on either side of the Table, waiting to come and partake. I am drawn in as well. I want to be enfolded into this Love.

Later that evening, as the sun is setting behind the mesa, the colors become darker and darker. A feeling of uncertainty is rolling in with the clouds and shadowy sky. Then as night falls, I learn the other thing about this desert place: You MUST NOT be afraid of the dark!

Some of my grandchildren would never make it here but, then again, this experience is for grown-ups, not children. Even so I have never experienced such extreme darkness. There is no electricity, so no lights. The night sky is cloudy so there is no moonlight or starlight. I can see nothing; not my hand in front of my face, not one tiny bit of light through my door or window. The meaning of "pitch black" is now very real and my mind begins to conjure up doubts, fears, and a sense of dread. What am I doing here? What more does God want of me? How do I find gladness and singleness of heart that yields joy and lightness of heart? What is keeping me from truly trusting God? Of what am I afraid?

These questions still surface from time to time even when I'm not surrounded by darkness or in the wilderness. I hear them murmuring this Lent, being with you at Grace Church. And the best thing I know to do is to slow down, not be afraid, and trust God to lead us.

In closing, Jesuit priest Robert Dufford offers these encouraging words:

*You shall cross the barren desert, But you shall not die of thirst
You shall wander far in safety, Though you do not know the way
You shall speak your words to foreign men, And they will understand
You shall see the face of God and live, Be not afraid, I go before you always,
Come, follow me and I will give you rest*

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mother Jenny". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Dr. Jenny Montgomery



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Grace Notes Submissions and Publication Schedule

Grace Notes is published ten times a year by Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria, Virginia. All parishioners are encouraged to contribute articles and photos. The deadline is the fifteenth of the preceding month. Articles and photos should be emailed to grace.notes@gracealex.org and will be subject to editing. The Grace Notes team includes Joyce Ames, Kevin Hamilton, Diana Jarrett, and Liz Rugaber.

On the Mind of Father Santi



THE REV. SANTI RODRIGUEZ,
ASSOCIATE RECTOR

The Gift and Struggle of Wandering in the Wilderness

Jesus' journey into the wilderness began when he passed through the waters of baptism and was filled by the spirit of God. (Mark 1:9-12) What a stark contrast--going from the living waters of the Jordan River into the dangers and perils of the Judean wilderness.

The Judean wilderness is nothing like our North American idea of wilderness, of going off the beaten path to witness the incredible beauty of nature untouched by civilization, where our souls, minds, and bodies will be rested and refreshed. In Jesus' time and place, the wilderness meant the desert. The Greek translation for the word "desert" is eremos, which literally means "abandonment."

The Judean wilderness, where Jesus was led by the Spirit, runs from north of Jericho to the southern end of the Dead Sea. This landscape of canyons, rocky mountains, and barren plains was largely uninhabitable and was full of dangers for anyone who dared to venture in it for long. There, they were exposed to peril from scorching heat by day and extreme cold by night, danger from wild animals and scorpions, and scarcity of food and water.

Going into the desert, Jesus followed in the rich tradition of the people of Israel. In the desert, God provided for the needs of Hagar and her son Ishmael when they had been exiled by Abraham and Sarah. Moses had a life-altering encounter with God in the desert, where God caught Moses' attention with a burning bush. Moses would then lead the people of Israel through the desert and to the Promised Land. Elijah ran away into the desert in fear of being killed by Queen Jezebel. There God spoke to Elijah, comforted him with physical and spiritual nourishment, and gave him a new prophecy.

In Christian spirituality, the desert is God's chosen location for encounter, conversion, and transformation. It's a place where God draws us deeper into

We can experience the desert both as a gift and as a struggle. At times, we choose to go to the "desert" to be more free to seek and find God, and to learn dependence on God alone. This "chosen desert" is a place where one is stripped down to basic essentials, a key experience on the road to contemplation. These deserts can be experiences of retreat, silence, and solitude with God.

Often, we experience the deserts of our lives as places and moments of intense suffering, desolation, isolation, and extreme need. The harsh and extreme nature of a physical, emotional, or spiritual desert necessarily leads to pain, suffering, grief, and struggle. These deserts strip us down and bring us to our knees. Sometimes we unexpectedly find ourselves suffering deeply for reasons and in ways that we never expected. This happens to us in the midst of a serious illness, when we struggle with identity and belonging, when our marriages are falling apart, or when we see people we love afflicted by addiction, depression, and grief.

When we find ourselves in these deserts, we struggle to understand why a good and loving God would lead us, or our loved ones, to a place of suffering and desolation. It is in those moments that we hope to remember that suffering is a crossroads, a passageway, but never a landing place. When we experience the desert as a struggle, we are aided by God's companionship and the compassion of others. These experiences reveal to us that suffering can be redemptive.

In the desert, the dangers, perils, and temptations Jesus encountered prepared him for his ministry and for the proclamation of the Reign of God. It was not the challenges and perils themselves that prepared him, but the moments of trust and intimacy with the Father. In our own lives, let us pray that our own deserts, chosen or unexpected, can become occasions for encounters with the God who wanders with us in the wilderness.



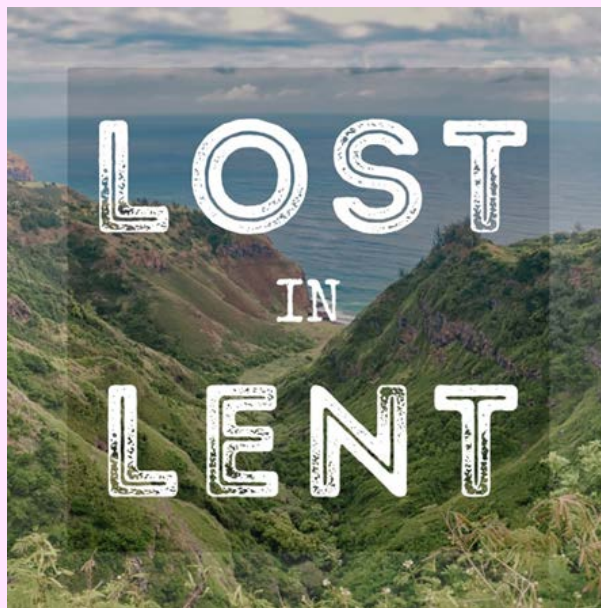
From Mother Emma

THE REV. EMMA BRICE,
ASSISTANT RECTOR FOR FAMILY MINISTRIES & GRACE SCHOOL CHAPLAIN

Lost In Lent

On the rainy and cold evenings of late, my wife and I have been watching the early 2000s television show *Lost*. I've never seen the show before, but she and her family watched it as it originally aired. Not wanting to give any spoilers for potential future viewers (because I totally, one hundred percent recommend it as a great show), *Lost* is based on the premise that an airplane crashes on a remote island, and it follows the survivors as they try to get rescued and evade the many mysterious threats on the island. I don't typically try to connect my leisure TV to the liturgical calendar, but the parallels between *Lost* and Lent are persistent and (I think) worth sharing.

As I reflect on wandering through the wilderness of Lent, one repeated statement from the show stands out to me. It is a line that seems to be in every episode of *Lost*: "You have to trust me." Characters who I think are the "good guys" and the "bad guys" all seem to plead with other characters for trust. And this raises the very real spiritual question of how do we learn to trust? In God? In ourselves? How do we sort through all the confusing influences and figure out when and where God is leading us?



I think most of us want to put our trust in God, but it is all too easy to get lost. And instead of trusting God, we get distracted by work, by our drive for success, by our desires to please other people.

Trusting myself is perhaps the hardest of all. Trusting that my understanding of God is just as worthy as anybody else's understanding of God. Trusting that my body knows what it needs. Trusting my gut instincts about situations and people as important sources of information. I also struggle with how to trust institutions like the one I serve--the Church. And yet, I do not conflate my struggle to trust with distrust. To me, distrust implies a closed-off stance, holding something away at arm's length. And that is not how I feel. I feel trust, but it is a cautious trust. It is a trust with my metaphorical antennas still up, keeping an eye out for trouble. And I wonder if that is enough. I wonder if I am meant to give up my antennas when I pick up my cross and follow Jesus. Or maybe Jesus gave me the antennas. I still don't know. I still am discerning and listening for God.

And likewise, each one of you reading this is still discerning in one way or another. We are all somewhat lost in Lent, still learning how to find and trust God in new ways, and that is precisely the point of Lent. So rather than jumping to any neat and tidy conclusions, I invite you to join me during this holy season in the places of unknowing. I invite you to join me in the trust and the doubt and the questions. I invite you to let yourself be a little lost this Lent because at least we can be lost together.

OPS & COMM

Operations & Communication @ Grace

KEVIN HAMILTON,
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS & COMMUNICATION



One of my practices since arriving at Grace has been to walk the building and grounds weekly. During these walks I find myself allowing my mind to wander a bit, imagining all the stories the building could tell me if it could speak. I know, it's a bit out there, but think about it: what would the building say to me if it could talk?

Perhaps the vesting rooms would tell me about the pride of a young acolyte vesting for the first time, getting to experience what it means to serve the God who loves them abundantly. Would the nursery call out to me so it could share about little ones who are cared for and loved by the dedicated nursery workers they see weekly? The classrooms might impress me with the knowledge they have learned from eavesdropping on the amazing educators of Grace Episcopal School over the years or share the joy of all the smiling students who love their school. (Some even come back thirty years later to get a look at the building that was so important to their formation.)

Maybe the children and teen rooms would ask me to pull up a chair as they share Grace's history of quality programs for children and young people. They would definitely share how young people are challenged in their faith by caring and trained volunteers who are committed to encouraging them on their journey. "What is that, St. Mark's room?" I would say as it tries to grab my attention in an attempt to share about the forums that allow adults to grow in their faith. It could also go on about the vestry meetings where members, inspired by their faith, strive to make a difference through shared leadership and service.

I think the auditorium and kitchen would keep me on the edge of my seat, sharing details of the wonderful gatherings held, planting the seeds for parishioners to cultivate lifelong, meaningful friendships. Would they get emotional as they talk about the thousands of people who have found hope in the AA group that has met at Grace for seventy plus years? Maybe they would tell me all of these things, but only if I could find the time to go up there after the sacristy tries to tell me "just one more story" about the Altar Guild, going on about the commitment and passion for worship and behind-the-scenes work that this team does to make our services meaningful to those worshipping.

And what about the nave? I think the nave would share stories of connection and peace. There would be stories about the lives that have been changed and the hope experienced. There would be laughter and singing and organ music. I can almost hear the nave's voice tremble, accompanied by tears, as stories are told about those who were once seated in the pews every week but are now gone. I imagine the tears would be intertwined with hope and reassurance that, though they may be gone from our site, the nave has heard us ask God to "*give us faith to see in death the gate of eternal life, so that in quiet confidence we may continue our course on earth, until, by your call, we are reunited with those who have gone before; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" (BCP, p. 493)

These are just a small fraction of the stories this building could tell.

Alright, back to reality. The building can't talk, but we are still all connected to its stories. What can we offer in response? We can ensure that it will be here for those who come behind us.

There are small ways in which we can signify our gratitude for the space that has served us all so well. Perhaps if we currently aren't connected to a ministry, the path leads to trying out one of the ministries that live out the mission of Grace here at 3601 Russell Road. Or maybe it is ensuring we are taking good care of the campus in small, yet collectively impactful ways, like turning off lights when we leave a room, making sure faucets are turned off, or picking up trash when we see it. It could be considering becoming a part of our junior warden's new environment committee being formed to help identify ways that our buildings and grounds can be more energy efficient and environmentally friendly. (*Find out more by checking out the bulletin or Good News at Grace this week.*) It could be as simple as emailing any facility issues you discover to the junior warden and/or the office so they can be addressed before becoming a larger problem. I am sure there are many other thoughts you may have and ways that we can help this building continue to "tell" its wonderful stories of Grace!

Music Notes from Alain



Embark on a Journey of Song: Explore the Psalms through Plainsong and Anglican Chant

By the time you read this, you'll likely have noticed a change in the way we sing the psalms. During the solemn seasons of Lent and Advent, many Episcopal churches—including ours—adopt the ancient practice of plainsong for chanting these profound texts. This simple, unaccompanied melody invites us into a space of contemplation and reflection, marking these periods of anticipation with a unique soundscape.

Here's how it works: the choir offers each verse of the psalm in plainsong, while the congregation responds with a recurring chant called an antiphon. This allows everyone to participate actively, with the choir leading the prayer on behalf of the community.

After Easter, we'll transition to the vibrant harmonies of Anglican Chant. This tradition, born from the Reformation, draws inspiration from plainsong but uses four-part harmonies sung by the choir, often accompanied by the organ for added richness. While the choir sings, I encourage you to engage with the words, allowing them to resonate within your heart as the choir expresses our collective prayers.

Festive Prelude on Easter Sunday at 10:00 am!



There will be a festive prelude with a professional brass quintet and organ starting at 10 am on Easter morning, preceding the Choral Eucharist at 10:30 am. The closing voluntary will feature an organ and brass arrangement of the famous Toccata from Symphony no. 5 of French organist-composer Charles-Marie Widor. All are welcome to come early to enjoy the festive music!

**GRACE
CHURCH
CHORISTERS**

Do you enjoy singing?
Are you curious about music?
Do you want to be a leader during church?

Become a chorister!

Ages 8 and up.
If interested, contact Dr. Truche or scan QR code!

Time Commitments:
Weekly Rehearsals on Thursdays from 4:30-5:30PM
Sing on Sundays at the 10:30AM Choral Eucharist approximately twice per month

Grace Episcopal Church is relaunching a Chorister Program for young singers eight years old to twelfth grade for girls and up to voice change for boys.

As a step-up to a full Royal School of Church Music Voice for Life program that will start in the fall, we will have rehearsals from 4:30 - 5:30 pm on Thursdays starting on March 7. The Choristers will be expected to sing about twice a month at the 10:30 am Choral Eucharist.

If your child enjoys singing and/or is curious about music, don't miss this chance to create experiences and build skills they will remember for a lifetime.

- We teach more than just music skills; our training can be an essential part of the whole formation of a child.
- Each boy and girl receives significant individual attention in a stimulating, challenging, yet fun environment.
- Leadership skills are an important part of our program.
- The wide range of ages (eight to fourteen for boys, eight to eighteen for girls) encourages teamwork—younger children learn from older choristers.

If you are interested, please contact Dr. Truche at alain.truche@gracealex.org.



Grace Episcopal School



**PATTI CULBRETH,
HEAD OF SCHOOL**

Grace students love to be thinkers! Not a day goes by without one of our students asking me for a riddle, joke, or story. Yes, they love their classes and curriculum, but they really love to stretch their minds and tickle their funny bones. They also love to consider Mother Emma's "I wonder ..." statements.

The month of March begins our third trimester of the school year when our learning coalesces into meaningful relationships and skills. Our school is filled with excited new readers who delight in chapter books, clever scientists who can create a watershed topography map, talented artists who can draw using perspective to a single point on the horizon, historians who can tell you about Native American tribes in the US, and musicians who plan to create their own Eras Tour for the Spring Program.



March is a big month at Grace. Our fourth and fifth graders will host a STREAM Extravaganza on March 7 for Grace families as well as families in the community. This hands-on experience is student-led with lots of inquiry and

imagination. Students in our Running Club will run a 5K together in mid-March at Episcopal High School. Our families will enjoy a week of Spring Break, March 18-22. Many Grace students will have the exciting experience of attending a Grace sleepover and spend the night in tents in Merrow Hall Auditorium.



Yes, we are busy-but we always have time for fun. Our Grace students wanted to share with you these fun jokes and riddles shared in our Grace Cafe:

- Knock, Knock! - Who's there? - Cow - Cow Who? - Cows MOO not who!*
- What can go through a window without breaking it? Light!*
- How many tickles does it take to make an octopus laugh? Ten-tickles!*



With love and learning, we wish our Grace community a blessed Lenten season.



Photo Credit: Grace School Archives

Vestry View



MARY LEWIS HIX,
SENIOR WARDEN

It is an honor and very humbling to be Grace's new Senior Warden. My older son, always witty and provocative, prompted my thinking about this article. During a recent FaceTime, I told my three children that I was to be Senior Warden. My son had several responses. "Why is it called warden? I thought wardens had oversight of prisons." His comment sent me to the dictionary, where I found the following definition of a warden: a person responsible for the supervision of a particular place or thing or for ensuring that regulations associated with it are obeyed. This definition is helpful but not complete. While I hope to be responsible about "regulations," it is more important that, with God's help, I assist Grace to continue to live into our mission to Love, Proclaim, Serve. Our charge is to make manifest this mission as we worship, as we address the needs of others, and as we live in community.

The second question my son asked is why I agreed to be Senior Warden. The answer is multi-faceted. It is because I love the Church (capital C) and am devoted to this parish. It is out of admiration for all who have served as wardens and vestry members in the past. It is especially out of gratitude for Bill Malone, and his guidance of Grace's journey in the past year. It is because the people of Grace have chosen the current vestry, and this vestry is committed to responsible service and discernment. It is because I trust God to love and guide us into the future. All we know for certain about the future is that God's love is overwhelming and merciful. As we wander in this Lenten season, we, the people of Grace, have opportunity and responsibility to discern God's will and to be faithful. By God's grace and with the commitment of caring parishioners, we will continue to live Grace's mission. In his December Grace Notes article, Bill described Grace and the parishioners as "virtuous, kind, joyful." How true this is, and may we also be prayerful and trusting.

In peace,

Mary Lewis Hix



Campus Matters

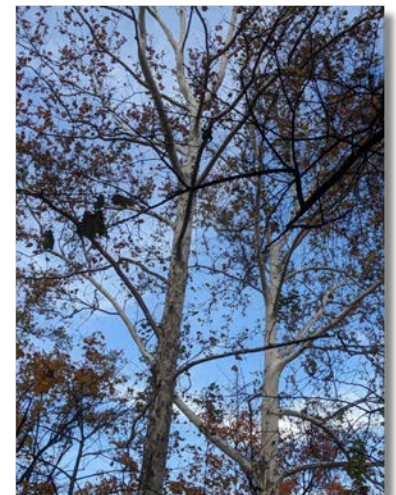
ERIC WASKOWICZ,
JUNIOR WARDEN



I recently met with Robby Schrum and Kevin Hamilton to better understand my job this year as your Junior Warden. Required reading for me is the 150-page study of long-term challenges and improvements to our "campus" that we need to work on. I also attended a Saturday discussion at the Virginia Theological Seminary on taking care of our grounds in a way that benefits the plants, insects, and birds that live here.

Here's a photo of the two beautiful sycamore trees on our grounds that you can see from the Malm Narthex entrance. Winter is a great time to see the bones of our landscape without all those leaves in the way!

Please email me at junior.warden@gracealex.org with any questions you have about the building or grounds.





Vagando por el desierto para aprender a amar

Father Santi reflects on how wandering in the wilderness can teach us how to love.

FATHER SANTI RODRIGUEZ, ASSOCIATE RECTOR

Este mes estamos celebrando la imagen o la temática del desierto. La Cuaresma es una invitación a vagar por el desierto. El itinerario cuaresmal nos permite apartarnos a un espacio espiritual para disfrutar de la compañía del Dios de la vida. El desierto es un lugar al que Jesús acude para encontrarse más plenamente con el Espíritu de Dios. Sabemos que en los reportes bíblicos en los evangelios sinópticos (Marcos, Mateo, y Lucas) después de su bautismo, Jesús es conducido por el Espíritu de Dios al desierto. Es allí donde él es tentado tres veces.

Las tentaciones no son solamente los ataques espirituales del diablo a Jesús, sino también son ventanas a los tipos de tentaciones humanas que cada uno de nosotros experimenta en la vida. Es importante que recordemos y nos demos cuenta que en el desierto afrontamos nuestra fragilidad, debilidades y miedos. También encontramos, de alguna forma, todo lo que es inconsistente en nuestros corazones, en nuestras mentes, y en nuestras vidas. Por ende, ir al desierto es ir a ese lugar en el que nos podemos encontrar plenamente con Dios para dejar a un lado nuestras excusas y pretextos para no seguir el mensaje del evangelio. En el desierto, Dios nos enseña a entender el mensaje de Dios y a confiar en Él más plenamente.

El desierto es ese lugar en el que Dios purifica nuestras vidas a través del silencio y la purificación de nuestros sentidos. En el espacio vacío y solitario del desierto, Dios se manifiesta de manera especial en nuestras agonías y sufrimientos.

El desierto también es ese lugar en el que el espíritu de Dios se manifiesta en nuestras vidas de una nueva forma. Dios nos lleva a vagar por el desierto para enseñarnos a amar más plena y profundamente. Nosotros no nos apartamos para estar completamente solos y nunca más tener contacto con los demás. Nos apartamos de nuestras vidas cotidianas y vagamos por el desierto para que Dios nos transforme y nos prepare para regresar al mundo. El desierto no es solo por nuestro bien personal. En nuestros desiertos físicos, emocionales y espirituales, Dios nos prepara para vivir en comunidad con otros. El deseo más grande que Dios tiene es que estemos en comunidad y en comunión con otros. Y en comunión con Él y con toda su creación.

Es importante que utilicemos este tiempo de Cuaresma para dejar que el Señor prepare nuestros corazones para amar más plenamente. En estos momentos de 'desierto', escogemos momentos de silencio, momentos en que dejamos a un lado la tecnología y las distracciones. Ponemos a un lado todas las cosas que nos dan seguridad y que llenan nuestros espacios. Nos desconectamos de todo lo que nos impide amar, escogemos crecer en conexión con los demás y en conexión con Dios.

En el desierto, Jesús se prepara para su ministerio. Lo primero que él hace después del desierto es llamar discípulos para así proclamar el Reino. Jesús se sirve de su soledad en el desierto para crecer en su capacidad de celebrar y crecer su comunidad. Lo mismo debe ser cierto para cada uno de nosotros. Todos estamos llamados a encontrar a Dios en el desierto. Allí, Dios nos invita a una comunión más profunda con todo y con todos. En esta temporada litúrgica de Cuaresma pidámosle a Dios que nos ayude a ver cómo él quiere utilizar los momentos de desierto, la soledad, el ayuno, la oración, y otras prácticas espirituales para preparar nuestros corazones para amar más plenamente. Reflexionemos en cómo quiere el Señor preparar nuestros corazones para amar a nuestras familias, a los miembros de nuestra comunidad, a los pobres, a las personas que nos caen mal, a las personas que trabajan con nosotros, a todos a nuestro alrededor. Que sea el Señor el que utilice esta temporada cuaresmal para enseñarnos a amar más plenamente. Pidámosle al Señor que remueva de nuestras vidas los obstáculos, los pretextos y las excusas para no amar y servir. Que su amor sea el mejor motivo para amar y servir. Que su amor sea el que nos guíe mientras vagamos por el desierto.



Opinion: Youth Perspective

By Annie Eason

Satire and a Plea: Buy Your Kid a Bunny for Easter!

Bunnies have long been a symbol for Easter with their ominous figures looming over little children every year. Why not bring a symbol like that into your household? According to [ABC10](#), rabbits are terrible pets for children, making it a great choice for your child to learn how to learn about the cruelties of daily life.

Bunnies bought at Easter often come from bunny mills, where bunnies, according to [Animal Justice](#), are bred in uncomfortable and cruel conditions, and where baby bunnies are taken away from their mothers far too soon. The Easter Bunny, CEO of a very popular bunny mill said, when told about these cruel conditions, "Well, animal cruelty is one of our founding values, as well as freedom and meritocracy."

However, according to [Animal Justice](#), many of these bunnies, when kept in these conditions, can suffer from boredom and depression and the need to roam. They are also hard to take care of, as they live for eight to twelve years, just like any normal pet. The Easter Bunny said, "It does make the business more profitable. What's wrong with that?"

But seriously, please don't buy your kid an Easter bunny this year. According to [National Geographic](#), medical care for these loving creatures is very expensive, and it requires training for them to learn how to use a litterbox. To keep bunnies in a humane way, they should be cage-free and be treated with patience, which most kids don't have. (But that doesn't mean they're bad people--they're just young!)



People can still buy Easter bunnies, but they should purchase them from shelters instead of bunny mills where they are bred in terrible conditions. As long as the responsibilities of taking care of bunnies are known and respected, it's perfectly fine. While bunnies may not go to heaven, bunnies are still creatures with thoughts and feelings that need to be respected, not to be exploited or given arbitrarily.

Get Social with Grace!

Instagram



@graceepisalexva

facebook



facebook.com/
GraceEpiscopalChurchAlexandriaVa

Facebook Group



Grace Episcopal Church:
Members and Friends
(Alexandria, Virginia)

YouTube



Search for Grace Episcopal Church
Alexandria Virginia on YouTube.

X



@graceepisalexva
(Formerly Twitter)



Altar Guild Stories: The Wandering of the Flowers

By Eleanor Reed and Lorna Worley

We are in a no-flower season, but normally we bring that great gift of the wilderness—flowers—into our church for a time and then, send it back out into the world.

When it is flower season, a couple of buckets of flowers are delivered to Grace on Friday afternoons. Some arrangers might come on Friday to arrange or, as Chad Eckles has recently demonstrated, to “condition” the flowers. **ALTAR GUILD TIP OF THE MONTH:** You can replicate this at home by taking off all the wrappings, clipping the bottom inch of the stems, and putting the flowers in room-temperature water. Take the guard petals off the roses; those are the outer petals that might be blemished. By doing this the flowers have time to rest and come to room temperature. It also will help your roses open up.

Saturday, the arranger does the High Altar flowers and smaller arrangements for Little Church and Children’s Chapel. Because we believe in transparency (and you can tell by looking closely anyway), you should know that, since the pandemic, we often have silk arrangements at the Lady Altar. Occasionally, Lucy-Lee Reed can’t take it anymore, and we will get fresh white flowers in there!

On Monday or Tuesday, the next step in the journey of the flowers happens when a member of the Altar Guild comes in to do the flower breakdown. Most of the people who do the flower breakdowns are not the ones who arrange the High Altar flowers. That’s a separate, special skill. But both tasks are done with love for the members of the parish. It takes at least an hour, sometimes longer, to make three or four smaller arrangements from the High Altar flowers. The flower arrangements go to people that the clergy designates; we often do not know why the clergy has singled them out to receive flowers that week. But we do know that somewhere there are people who need to know that the parish remembers them and cares for them in their time of need, whatever that need might be. A crew of intrepid deliverers, headed by John Boris, delivers the flowers to the designated members of the congregation wherever they may live. It’s another labor of love.

Any leftover flowers are placed around the church—often in the St. Mark’s lobby, in the Commons, or in the church office.

Eventually, it is time for the remnants of this process to return to the wilderness. All the clippings and extra greens are put into a bin under the counter in the sacristy. That bin is taken out the Narthex doors, past the traffic circle, into the woods, and is dumped with previous greens to rejoin with Nature, to dissolve into the soil, and to begin the journey again another day.

Chili Bowl 2024

By Robby Schrum



This year, Grace gathered for the annual Chili Bowl on Sunday, February 4. Thanks to all those who attended—we could scarcely stock enough chili cups and spoons!

For those who are not familiar with this longtime Grace tradition, the Chili Bowl is a chili cook-off. Parishioners and friends volunteer to staff booths where they serve samples of chili to hungry parishioners—and to a panel of discerning judges.

In some cases, those booths represent church program areas, like the Altar Guild or the Journey to Adulthood class. In other cases, an ad hoc group comes together just to compete for Chili Bowl glory!

Attendees can vote for their favorite chilis with their dollars, and all those donations go to support the church. The Chili Bowl is Grace's biggest fundraiser—this year, we had quite a turnout. Merrow Hall was buzzing!

The judges honored three meat and three vegetarian chilis. In the meat category, Dan Pattarini's chili for the Pastoral Care Team took top honors. Blanca Barrera's chili from La Gracia placed second, and Julie Rodriguez's chili for the Evangelism Team was third. In the vegetarian category, the EYC grabbed the golden spoon. The Acolytes' veggie chili took second place, and the Outreach and Justice/Asylum Seekers Team snagged third.



A new entrant to this year's Chili Bowl—a group of Kentucky Derby aficionados, led by Anne Berry—ran away with the prize for Best Theme.

Finally, the people were very generous with their dollars this year to support their favorite chilis! The Altar Guild's minimalist entry—no chili, but a bag of Fritos, as part of a statement on work-life balance—was the winner of the prestigious People's Choice Award, attracting a whopping \$1,015 in donations.

Kentucky Derby Chili, the Acolytes, La Gracia, and Pastoral Care rounded out the top five fundraisers. **All told, the Chili Bowl raised \$4,639.37 to support the work of the church. Thank you!**

And a special thanks to our judges—Father Santi Rodriguez, Rich Kelly, and Connor Murphy—as well as to all those who worked so hard to cook chili, decorate booths, set up and clean up Merrow Hall, and generally make sure that this year's Chili Bowl was a success!



Spring Adult Formation Series

By Julia McClung

Please join Anne Clift Boris and me as we gather for a six-week adult formation series this spring to grow and learn together, share our faith experience, and build community.

We are offering two formats for meeting each week for a multi-hour session:

In-person at Grace: Monday nights: 4/15, 4/22, 4/29, 5/6, 5/13, and 5/20

Virtual via Zoom: Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons during the same weeks as above

For the Monday evening sessions, we will open at 6:30 pm for those who want to bring their own dinner and socialize, and then engage from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm.

The exact time for both formats, and the settled day of week for the virtual format, will be mutually agreed upon by the participants.

Activities will include:

- Light reading that can be done the night before the session
- Exploration of biblical traditions journeying with God and Jesus from the Old Testament, the New Testament, psalms, hymns, and spiritual practices (*prayers, meditations, movements*)
- Sharing our stories about journeying
- Exploration of how our personal journeys can both test and build our faith, help us grow spiritually, and regain strength and courage to face our fears and live into our joys

There are no fees or books to buy.

We'll be looking for at least six participants for the in-person series and at least three for the virtual series. Please reach out to Anne Clift Boris (anne.boris@gracealex.org) or me (julia.mcclung@gracealex.org) no later than April 7, 2024, to sign up.

Thanks so much. Can't wait to see you there!

Sunday Morning Adult Forum Schedule

We meet in person in the St. Mark Room on the second floor, from 9:40-10:15, or virtually via Zoom (use the link to Adult Forum in the Sunday morning email). Feel free to arrive at 9:30 for informal chatting before the forum. Coffee and tea will be available just outside the St. Mark room.

March 3: Creation Care led by Bill Eckel

March 10: Books Worth Rereading by parishioners, moderated by Mary Stewart

March 17: Unexpected Graces by parishioners, moderated by Mother Jenny

March 24: Palm Sunday Intergenerational Event (no separate adult forum)

March 31: Easter NO ADULT FORUM





Barbara Morris

An Occasional WORD

Planet Earth

Last week, with both joy and sadness, I watched David Attenborough's latest documentary on his survey of plant and animal life on earth. At age ninety-three, his long, intense look at our planet is breathtakingly beautiful, but also disturbing as he foretells the destruction of our planet if humans continue to abuse it. Attenborough ends his documentary in his charming, avuncular manner with advice on how to avert total tragedy. Ultimately, it reminded me of our responsibility to planet earth.

Attenborough's gorgeously photographed tale not only entertained and educated me, but it also reminded me of how God has blessed me with a life of exciting travel. I'd like to briefly share one of those experiences with you—a trip my husband, Ward, and I made to one of the most perilous, wind-whipped patches of ocean on planet earth: Cape Horn, the passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans at the tip of South America.

It was six in the morning, in high seas in the area known as the "graveyard of sailing ships," when, with a mighty heave, Ward shouldered open the solid wooden door to the deck of our cruise ship—and was immediately beaten back against the bulkhead by a fifty mile-an-hour sleet storm that blew horizontally, as fine and biting as sea salt. We were experiencing exactly what Charles Darwin felt when, in 1832, he wrote in his journal that Cape Horn sent "gales of wind directly in our teeth, great black clouds rolled across the heavens, and squalls of rain and hail swept us with extreme violence."

The change from the day before was amazing. Then we had sailed through the Beagle Channel in water so calm there was scarcely a ripple. Now the wind scooped huge hollows in sixteen-foot swells and flung out spumes of spray. The waves heaved, collapsed, collided, and tumbled in long, rolling swells. Their frothy ridges trailed like wind-torn feather boas.



Photo Credit: Canva.com

Above the roar of the wind I heard the crash of water and felt the pounding as, time and time again, thunderous waves broke against our bow. My blood pounded, and I strained to see the tip of Cape Horn in the distance. But there was only a chill, grey mist.

Then, suddenly, the sun briefly emerged. In its light the swells took on the pale green translucency of celadon porcelain. Rainbows shot through the mist. Whitecaps gleamed like thick cream on the sea that was as mottled as watered silk. And in the distance, I saw it—Cape Horn! Shaped like a crouching lion, its brown-black face, plunging to the sea, appeared as if scraped down by a giant fork whose tines left jagged, vertical scarring down its face. Then, just as suddenly, the mist closed in again.

Our ship drove on. We remained on deck, silent, stunned and, fortunately, fully aware that we had just been granted one of life's deepest spiritual experiences.

I'm grateful for Attenborough's documentary that triggered my memory of Cape Horn and its reminder of our responsibility to protect our miraculous planet.

Why Grace?

By Mike Jones



I met my wife Halina at a school district in Delaware where we both worked. Halina was a school counselor and I was the project director of a remedial reading program. After Halina and I developed our relationship, we decided to get married. Halina grew up in California, and she wanted to return. We decided that we would both apply for jobs there and move to the location where the first one got a job. I was first to get an offer as the administrative assistant to the executive director of Proteus Adult Training in Visalia, California. Proteus is a non-profit organization that provides job training for migrant and seasonal farmworkers seeking non-agricultural employment. I accepted the job and Halina and I moved to Visalia. Halina worked in retail, then with a Comprehensive Employment and Training Act program, and then as a school counselor. One of Halina's friends, who was a minister in southern California near where Halina grew up, performed our marriage ceremony on October 7, 1978.

While we were living in Visalia, Halina became involved with local community theater as an actress. A friend she met there and the friend's husband were Episcopalians. We became friends and went to their home often for visits. They were very active in their church and invited Halina and me to attend. We really enjoyed the worship services there and attended regularly. Halina was a Roman Catholic and I was a Southern Baptist. When I was a child and a teenager, my parents, my sisters, and my maternal grandparents and I were members of Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, DC. After my maternal grandfather passed away, my maternal grandmother moved in to my family home. She was very spiritual, and I credit her with my early spiritual development. When I would come home from school, she would be in our basement recreation room worshipping, praying, and studying her Bible. I joined her in these activities on a daily basis. Because of my relationship with my grandmother, I learned a lot about the Bible, and prayer became a regular and essential part of my daily life. While Halina and I were living in Visalia, we had been trying to figure out where and how we could worship together, and St. Luke's Episcopal Church seemed like the perfect place. We became Episcopalians at St. Luke's and were very active there.

At Proteus Adult Training, I was promoted several times. In April 1979, I became director of research and development, responsible for grant writing, research, planning, budgeting, and program development activities. Our principal funding agency was the US Department of Labor, and I developed a strong relationship with the Office of Special Targeted Programs. This led to my being recruited to work for that office. After they negotiated with Proteus Adult Training, I was offered a one-year paid internship that included transportation to the Washington metropolitan area, reimbursement for lodging, and a salary. So, in April 1997, I accepted the position. Because I wanted to live in Alexandria, Virginia, I rented a furnished apartment on Glebe Road.

On my first workday, I took the bus to the Braddock Road Metro station to go to the office in Washington, DC. The bus went eastbound on Glebe Road and made a right turn onto Russell Road. At that time I had been wondering, "Where am I going to find an Episcopal Church to attend?" Just then, I looked up and saw a sign that read "Grace Episcopal Church Welcomes You." Since Grace Church was within easy walking distance of my apartment, I decided to go to church there.

On Sunday, I walked from my apartment to Grace Church, entered through the narthex, got a bulletin from the usher, and sat in the third row from the back of the church by the center aisle on the Gospel side. I arrived about fifteen minutes before the start of the service. A few minutes after I sat down, a very kind and wonderful woman, Gail Rittgers, came over, introduced herself, and welcomed me to Grace Church. We had a friendly conversation before the start of the service, and she shared with me things about Grace Church. I had planned to return to my apartment right after the service, but Gail invited me to go with her to coffee hour in the auditorium. While we were there, she introduced me to several parishioners and to Father Malm.

Why Grace? Continued

Father Malm welcomed me and encouraged my involvement in Grace Church ministries. Father Malm and I had a wonderful conversation, which I credit as the start of our very wonderful relationship. As I reflected on my experience that day, it was crystal clear to me that Grace Church was a very loving community and I wanted to be a part of it. So, during my entire internship with the Department of Labor, I went to Grace Church every Sunday. Each time I came to Grace Church, Gail made sure I felt at home. Because of her hospitality, Gail and I became friends, and when I became a lay eucharistic minister, it was my privilege to take communion to her when she was not able to attend services.

I developed a wonderful relationship with the Department of Labor during my internship, and they did not want to let me go. So, at the end of my internship, I was offered a position as a GS-13 Manpower Development Specialist with the Division of Seasonal Farmworkers Programs (the agency that funds migrant and seasonal farmworker, non-agricultural farmworker training activities). I accepted. Halina and I both resigned our jobs in California, sold our house, and moved to Alexandria. I accepted my new job with the Department of Labor in March 1998, and Halina temped and got a job at the American University library. We became members of Grace Church. Halina joined the choir and I served as a eucharistic minister.

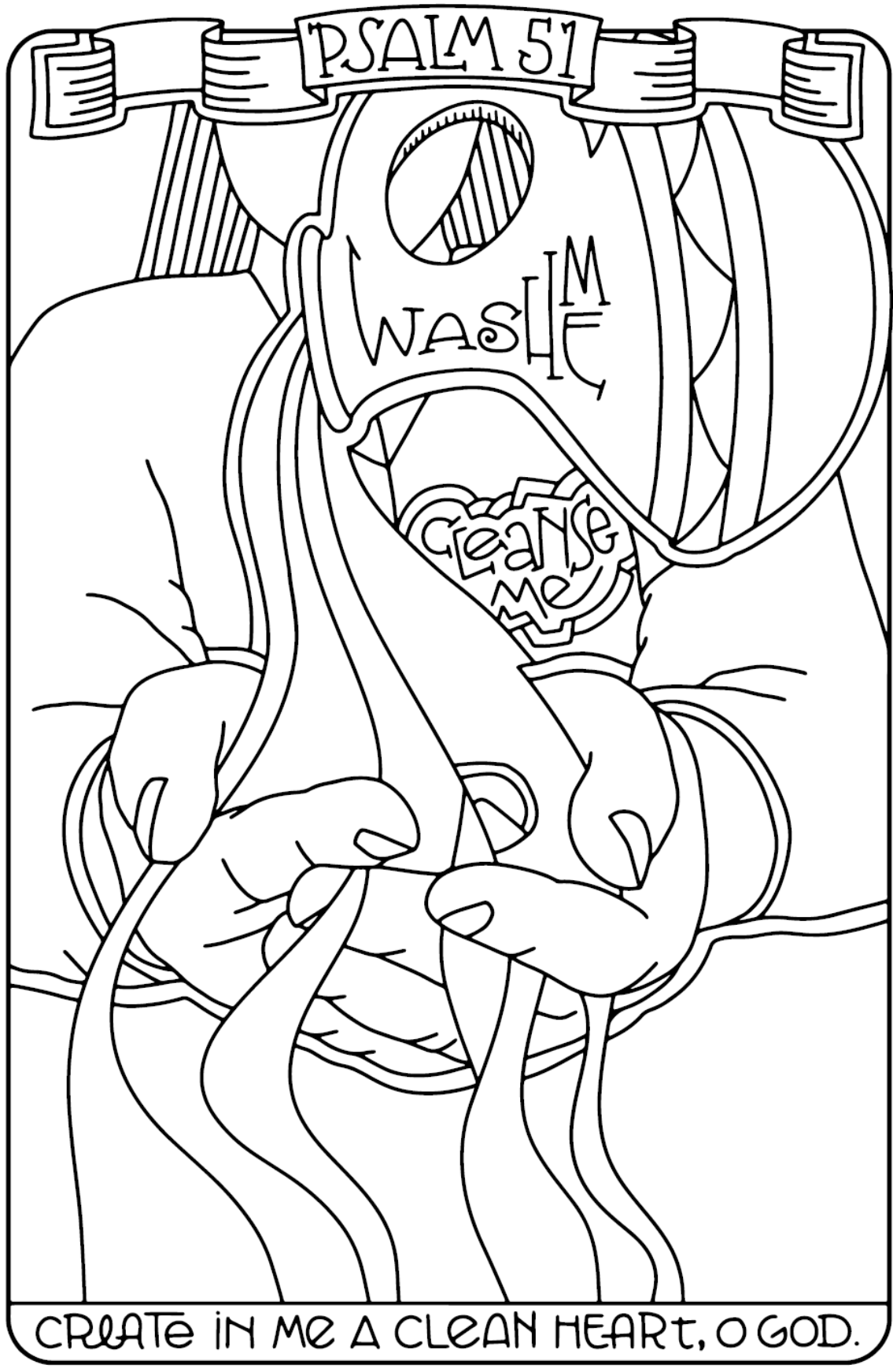
I was promoted several times at the Department of Labor, and in November 2002, I accepted a position as a GS-14, Executive Assistant for the Office of the Regional Administrator in the US Department of Labor, Philadelphia Regional Office. Halina and I left Grace Church and moved to Philadelphia, where Halina temped and later was a school counselor at a charter school.

Halina and I became members of the Memorial Church of St. Luke in Philadelphia. In addition to serving as a preacher and eucharistic minister there, I considered becoming trained and ordained as a permanent deacon. The bishop of Pennsylvania supported that plan. However, before I was able to enroll in the seminary, the Department of Labor promoted me in October 2003 to the position of Deputy Director (GS-14), Office of Grants and Contracts Management, in Washington, DC. I accepted the position and Halina and I moved back to Alexandria and rejoined Grace Episcopal Church. After we returned, Halina started working as a school counselor with Fairfax County Public Schools in January 2004.

We have lived in Alexandria ever since. I was promoted several more times to GS-14 and GS-15 positions and then finally to the Senior Executive Service before I retired. After retirement, I became a volunteer chaplain at Inova Alexandria Hospital. While this is not a Grace Church position, I credit my involvement in this activity to the relationships that I developed with Anne Caputo and June Huber, who were also volunteer chaplains there and who encouraged me to join this ministry. My work as a volunteer chaplain has strengthened my spiritual development and has provided me with the opportunity to provide spiritual care to those most in need.

Since my return to Grace Church, I have served as a vestry member, junior warden, senior warden, one of Grace Church's delegates to Convention and representative to the Alexandria Region of the Diocese of Virginia, Journey to Adulthood adult sponsor, Stephen Minister, Grace Church liaison to Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement (VOICE), lector, lay eucharistic minister, lay eucharistic minister coordinator, lay preacher, deacon's mass officiant for La Gracia, worship program coordinator for Grace's Shrine Mont weekend, adult acolyte, home communion coordinator, Evening Prayer officiant, and most recently as a spoon player musician for Little Church children's and family service. In addition to my other Grace Church activities, I also completed the program of The University of the South, School of Theology, Theological Education by Extension Education for Ministry at Grace Church in May 2010.

So why Grace? For me the answer is simple: Grace Church is such a friendly, loving, and wonderful community that is welcoming to everyone! I have felt like a beloved member of the Grace Church community since the very first time I walked in the door. In addition, my membership at Grace Episcopal Church has provided me with the opportunity to expand and enhance my spiritual development. I love Grace Episcopal Church and I consider it my home.



Psalms Coloring Pages • Psalm 51:1-12 • illustratedministry.com



Family Activities Page

FAMILY LENTEN BINGO

Caregivers and children work together throughout Lent (between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday) to complete five activities in a row.

Or even better, aim to cross off as many items as you can!

Completed cards can be given to Mother Emma the Sunday after Easter in exchange for a prize!

<p>I attended a Wednesday Evening Lenten Supper & Program at Grace</p> 	<p>I read a Bible story</p> 	<p>I donated a toy to someone in need</p> 	 <p>I comforted someone when they were hurt or sad</p>	 <p>I worshipped at Grace on Easter Sunday</p>
<p>HELPING HANDS</p>  <p>I helped someone without being asked</p>	 <p>I attended a Palm Sunday Service at Grace</p>	<p>I forgave someone</p> 	 <p>I held the door for a stranger</p>	<p>I prayed for the sick, the homeless, and the needy</p> 
 <p>I was kind to someone even though I didn't want to be</p>	<p>I said "please" and "thank you"</p> 		<p>I donated food to Grace's Food Pantry</p> 	 <p>Even though I was angry, I expressed myself calmly</p>
 <p>I prayed grace before eating a meal</p>	<p>I drew a picture and gave it to a parishioner at church</p> 	 <p>I was patient</p>	<p>I attended a Sunday service at Grace during Lent</p> 	<p>I cleaned up a mess that I didn't make</p> 
<p>SORRY!</p>  <p>I apologized when I didn't make a good choice</p>	<p>I thanked God for 5 things today</p> 	 <p>I attended one of Grace's Ash Wednesday services</p>	<p>I complimented someone</p> 	 <p>I attended Sunday morning Formation Hour</p>



Parish Staff

Betsy Bamford
Jane Avery
Nursery Workers

The Rev. Emma Brice
Assistant Rector for Family Ministries & GES Chaplain
emma.brice@gracealex.org

Patti Culbreth
Head of Grace Episcopal School
pculbreth@graceschoolalex.org

Mary Cyrus
Financial Administrator
financial.admin@gracealex.org

Kevin Hamilton
Director of Operations & Communication
kevin.hamilton@gracealex.org

Pedro Hernandez
Sexton

Madeline Manaker
Finance Assistant
madeline.manaker@gracealex.org

The Rev. Dr. Jenny Montgomery
Priest Locum Tenens
jenny.montgomery@gracealex.org

Amorita Quintanilla
Sunday Sexton

The Rev. Santiago Rodriguez
Associate Rector
santiago.rodriguez@gracealex.org

Addie Tapp
Communications Support

Dr. Alain Truche
Director of Music
alain.truche@gracealex.org

2023/2024 Seminarists

Noah Aukerman
naukerman@vts.edu

Durango Jenkins
djenkins@vts.edu

The Rev. Ignacio Solano Gómez
isolanogomez@vts.edu

Vestry Class of 2024

Khacki Berry
Lauren Gustafson
Mary Hix
Dan Pattarini
Rushad Thomas

Vestry Class of 2025

Keith Davis
Eleanor Reed
Jane Rosman
Andrew Serke
Geoff Whitlock

Vestry Class of 2026

Chad Eckles
Morgan Miller
Sarah Schultz
Mary Stewart
Eric Waskowicz

Parish Team Leads

Lisa Bellantoni - *Education*
John Boris - *Pastoral Care*
Cindy MacIntyre - *Evangelism*
Jen Pease - *Outreach*
Lynn Rohrs - *Fellowship*
Erin White - *Youth*
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