



CROSS OF GRACE NEWS

November 2023



Love Your Enemies and Pray for Them – Thoughts on Hamas, Israel, and Gaza
Dread continues to simmer within me as the War in Gaza is about to enter into its third week, and the ground invasion is set to begin within days, if not hours. Hamas has clearly attacked Israel, killed thousands and kidnapped over a hundred Israeli citizens.

Israel is retaliating on Hamas right now with plans to escalate. When all parties involved have both been wronged' and have 'done wrong,' what are we called to do as followers of Christ?

While I want simple answers, the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is incredibly complex and convoluted. So rather than offering pithy 'answers' (which do not actually exist), I would like to offer some advice for how we can 'pray for' and 'react to' the War in Gaza:

1. Pray for Every Victim, Regardless – When Christ came to preach, heal, and teach, Jesus did so even with Samaritans, an ancient people that hold a different religion, lived on the same land, and refuse to leave (this sounds very similar to how Palestinians are oft portrayed). When it comes to wars and battles, we are frequently made to choose a side, but Jesus chose not to play into this, often finding a third or even fourth way that was not immediately apparent. So to, rather than rushing to wholeheartedly support one side or the other, let us start from a place of compassion, by mourning the victims and taking the time to pray for them and their loved ones.

2. Listen to Individuals Directly Impacted by the War – If we only listen to American voices, it is easy to conclude that many (or most) American Christians support Israeli's

right to defend itself and retaliate against Hamas and Gaza. However, there are Palestinian Christians on the ground in Gaza, many of whom have suffered and died from the recent Israeli bombings. (Have you heard much coverage over the past two weeks about Christian institutions in Gaza that have been bombed, like St. Porphyrios Orthodox Church, the third oldest church building in the world, ¹ and al-Alhi Hospital, run by the Anglican Church. ²) While it is impossible to get unbiased news, I find that people that are directly impacted by tragedies are often the best to speak to. Therefore, I would urge you to follow the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land on Facebook or bookmark their website: <https://www.elcjh.org>. While they have only been offering statements once every several days, their statements are theologically rich and bare informed by the community of faith that they serve in Palestine and Israel.

3. Take Up the Cross Daily – When I studied under Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright, one of his favorite phrases was: “Christ reigns from a tree” (a paraphrase of a line from the Psalms). This simple phrase has countless layers of depth, but I think the heart of it is that Jesus’ throne is the cross itself. Compared to the countless powers and principalities of the earth that rule from ornate seats of power, Jesus’ reign is from the cross, a throne of utter powerlessness.

All of this is to say: when the empires of the world turn to their weapons of war, as they have for millennia, let us never forget that our Lord’s modus operandi is not the sword but rather the cross, and we are called to do likewise. The harsh reality of war is that no side is justified or blameless, and we are still called to act as Christ would. So, may we as followers of the Prince of Peace, embody another way to live in a world entrenched in fear and war.

Grace and Peace,
-Pr. Darick J. Biondi

1 <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/two-young-palestinian-women-died-in-a-gaza-church-treated-like-human-animals/ar-AA1iChkd>

2 <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/canterbury-mourns-appalling-loss-after-anglican-hospital-hit-in-gaza/ar-AA1ioaiu>



From the Desk of the
Vice President

It is hard for me to believe that we have almost completed another year as Cross of Grace Lutheran Church - the little congregation that doesn't have a building, but has an energy that I have not felt before in any congregation that I have been a part of.

I see new faces in chairs on Sundays and the number of people involved in our book studies has grown significantly. What once required 4 or 5 books has now exceeded 20 in our latest book study. In addition, we have a handful of people currently involved in a study of Luther's Small Catechism on Tuesday nights in order to learn more about our Lutheran beliefs.

Now that Covid 19 is essentially over, the Rock Ministry meal has resumed on a monthly basis.

We have continued to support the Community Cupboard like we have in the past. We continue to work our assigned dates in June, as well as continuing to bring in Jiffy corn muffin mix and other foods for the cupboard.

We hosted another appreciation picnic for the staff at the Hampton Inn which they greatly appreciated. With this event we were able to spend a little time with them and allowed us to know them better. They are a group of hard working people that most of us never see.

I see a congregation that is looking outward and seeing our neighbors and trying to figure out how best to love them. When we heard of a single mother in need, a hasty "baby shower" was put together to help bridge a need for things like diapers, clothes, and other baby supplies and a space was obtained for the shower.

As we look forward, it is hard for me to say what will be next for Cross of Grace. What talents will we be called to use? How will we be called to serve our neighbor? What I do know is that we have a group of talented people that have an awesome set of skills and a can do attitude.

As we move into the New Church Year with Advent, please pray for our congregation to continue to see our neighbors' needs, the wisdom to provide for those needs in a constructive way, and the courage and faith to step out of the safety of our boat and walk with Jesus.

PRAYER CHAIN



Cross of Grace has a prayer chain. This is a group of people that have volunteered to add people's prayer requests to their routine prayers.

A person with a prayer request contacts

Ellen Bragg who is the first contact on the prayer chain and then the need is passed down the chain with Ellen calling the next person and then that person passes the need along to the next person in the chain.

The church prayer chain is alive and well and looking for more members as well as people to pray for. If you have a prayer need please call Ellen Bragg at 304-590-0811.

She is the beginning of the prayer chain and will pass along the prayer request. If you would like to join the prayer chain please drop a note in the collection plate with your name and phone number so that she can add you to the prayer chain.

The current Prayer Chain is:

Ellen Bragg
Debbie Goff
Rose Mary Kutz
Rosa McKinney
Mary Baker

If you need to contact someone on the prayer chain please use the directory for their contact information.



COLLEGE CARE PACKAGES

The time for fall finals has once again come about for our college students!

We will collect money as well as gift cards to send to our 2 college students, Noah Peters, who attends Prescott College, and Kayleigh Goff, who is at Mount West Community and Technical College, through November 5th!

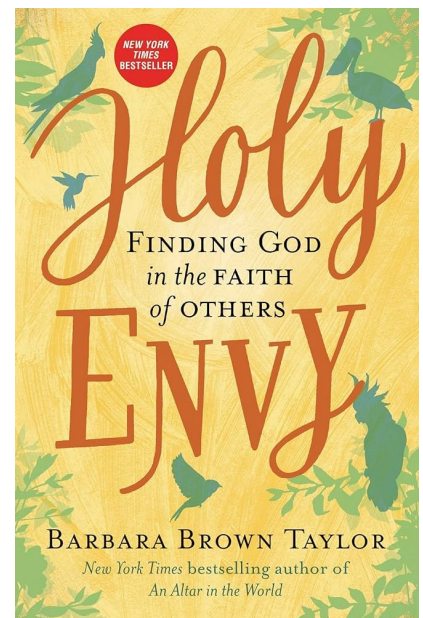


Join us on November 17th as we enjoy
“Planes, Trains and Automobiles”!

The location for movie night will be determined
and shared at a later date,

Our next book study, which will
begin on January 6, 2024,
will be on Holy Envy, by Barbara Brown Taylor.

See Mike Kutz to get on the list for book order for
this book study.





The ladies of COG will have their annual Christmas Party and Mystery gift exchange on December 2 at 11:00 AM at the Fireside Grille in Teays Valley.

All women in the congregation are invited to attend.

Everyone should bring a gift suitable for anyone for Mystery Gift Exchange.

Come and enjoy some good food, fun and games and a Christmas Craft.

Please let Ellen Bragg know if you plan on attending to ensure enough materials for the crafts are on hand.



All ladies are welcome to join in the Women's Bible Study on Wednesday, November 8th at 10:00am at Tudors on Rt. 60 in St. Albans.



Semi-Annual Congregational Meeting for Cross of Grace Lutheran Church

**November 5, 2023
Fireside Grille 439 Rt 34 Hurricane WV**

Join us for Worship at 11:00am, followed by
a Buffet Lunch and Business meeting.

The Leadership Team of Cross of Grace
Lutheran Church approved the included budget for consideration
and approval by the congregation.

All are welcome to join us!

Please sign up on the sheet in the blue folder at worship or send
an email to Lauren (crossofgracelutheran@gmail.com)
So we can ensure we have enough food for everyone.



Wednesday Advent Services will be held at St. Timothy's in the Valley Episcopal Church, church starting December 6.

This year, we will welcome a different local Lutheran pastor each week to share worship time with us.

Details are being finalized regarding the services and the potential for a meal prior to worship and will be shared when available.

How To Share Information

A stylized illustration of two people, a man and a woman, sitting at a table. The man is on the left, wearing a green shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a light blue shirt. They are both looking at a laptop on the table. The background is a solid light yellow color.

Have information about an upcoming event, a prayer request, or any other news you would like to share with the congregation?

Send it to Lauren anytime at crossofgracelutheran@gmail.com!

Bear in mind,

The deadline to have it in the weekly email is Friday morning each week.

The deadline for the newsletter is the 20th of every month.



“Magnificent Messiah”

Saturday, Dec 16

Dinner: 5:30 pm @ Saint Marks

Concert: 7:30 pm @ Clay Center

Cost: \$35 (ticket and dinner)

\$10 (dinner only)

Enjoy an evening with the West Virginia Symphony orchestra as they perform Bach’s Magnificat in D Major and Handel’s Messiah, and learn about the theology behind the music over dinner beforehand!

RSVP by November 12 by emailing pastor@saintmarkswv.org

An activity in partnership with Cross of Grace Lutheran Church



Card Ministry

We have a thriving card ministry that attempts to send a card and recognize important Anniversaries in members of our congregation's lives. If you want to be included in this ministry please return the following information by placing it in the collection plate.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____

Birthday: _____

Baptism Date: _____

Wedding Anniversary Date: _____

Phone Number: _____