



GRACE NOTES

The Season of Advent

Anticipation and Hope: “Coming Soon”

Advent, the four-week period leading up to Christmas, is a time of reflection, preparation, and joyful anticipation for Christians around the world. At Grace Covenant, the church community has embraced the theme “Coming Soon” as a guiding light, leading them through this sacred season with a renewed sense of hope and purpose.

The phrase “Coming Soon” carries a profound sense of anticipation. It serves as a reminder not only of the historical significance of the birth of Jesus but also of the promise of his return. This dual focus prompts the congregation to reflect on the past, celebrating the arrival of the Messiah, while also looking to the future with hope for the promised second coming.

Throughout the church, symbols of this theme are displayed prominently. Advent wreaths adorned with candles, each representing a different aspect of the season – hope, peace, joy, and love – stand as visual reminders of the anticipation that fills the hearts of believers. The atmosphere within Grace Covenant is charged with a sense of excitement, as members eagerly await the celebration of Christ’s birth.

As the season of Advent unfolds, the theme “Coming Soon” at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church serves as a beacon of hope, guiding the congregation through a time of reflection, anticipation, and celebration. The church community, united in purpose and faith, eagerly awaits the coming of Christ – a celebration that transcends time and connects believers to the timeless message of hope, love, and redemption.

Join us for these worship services.

More details on the Music page.

A Christmas Exclamation!, Sunday, December 3, 6pm

The Longest Night Service (Blue Christmas), Sunday, December 17, 7pm

Christmas Eve Worship Services, December 24

Christmas Eve Children and Family Service, 5:00pm

Christmas Eve Traditional Service, 7:45pm Prelude Music; 8:00pm Worship

Visit the [Advent Page on our website](#) to learn about the events of Advent.



God gathers us in a welcoming community, with our curiosity and questions, to worship creatively, learn from God’s word, share our gifts, and deepen our faith.

With grateful hearts and a spirit of adventure, we go to serve Christ in the world, sharing kindness with everyone, and working for justice rooted in God’s love.

11100 College Blvd.
Overland Park, KS 66210
913-345-1256
office@gcpc.org
gcpc.org

In-Person Worship and Online Worship every Sunday on Facebook and Zoom.

Visit gcpc.org/online for links!

THE SEASONS OF ADVENT and CHRISTMAS IN WORSHIP



“A Christmas Exclamation!”

Sunday, December 3rd at 6pm

Hear our 4-year-olds through adults sing & ring Christmas favorites then join in with the congregation to sing Christmas carols & songs.

We'll also have as our special guest choir “Act II” from EncoreKC Chorus joining our program. Add in some fun videos & treats for the kids and this fun holiday program is a “don't miss event!”



As a part of the Advent Season The Music Ministry will present

“Songs of the Season”

will be presented the following Sundays at 9:30am

December 3rd – HOPE, 1st Sunday of Advent

songs will be shared in worship by
Praise Team, Carrie DeVries, director

“Make Room” ~ Mark Hall, Matt Maher

“Light of the World” ~ We The Kingdom

“God With Us” ~ Jason Ingram & Leslie Jordan

“O Come, Divine Messiah,” Traditional Advent Hymn

Featuring Jennie Lee Riddle ~ Robbie Seay Band

“Waiting Here for You” ~ Chris Tomlin

Here's a playlist of Praise Team's songs so you can
familiarize yourself with them. [Grace PT Dec 3 2023](#)

December 10th – PEACE, 2nd Sunday of Advent

songs will be shared in worship by
GCPC Wind Ensemble, Pam Smith Kelly, director

“Adeste Fidelis” (“O Come, All Ye Faithful”)

arr. Troy Armstrong with Congregation

“Sing We Now at Christmastide”

arr. Troy Armstrong ~ World Premiere
with Chancel & Exaltation! Singers

“Meditation on ‘All is Calm’” arr. Robert W. Smith

Finale from “Rhapsody on Christmas Carols”
by Claude T. Smith, arr. Joseph Benjamin Earp

December 17th – LOVE, 3rd Sunday of Advent

Advent & Christmas anthems will be shared
in worship by Chancel & Exaltation! Singers &
Instrumentalists, Rebecca Prater, director

“Christmas Gloria” arr. Lloyd Larson

Chancel Brass ~ Percussion, Linda Dover, organ

“E'en So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come,” by Paul Manz

“Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day”

arr. Howard Helvey

Linda Dover & Edwin Fukunaga, piano four-hands

“Where Shepherds Lately Knelt” by Kyle S. Haugen

“Go, Tell It On the Mountain” arr. Stacey V. Gibbs

December 24th ~ JOY, the 4th Sunday of Advent

Music will be led by Praise Team ~ Carrie DeVries

December 31st ~ First Sunday after Christmas Day

Music will be led by Praise Team ~ Carrie DeVries

Sunday School Notice

There will be no Sunday school classes on
December 24 or December 31.

We'll see you next year on January 7, 2024.

Christmas Eve Services

Christ is Come!

Join us for candlelight and carols
as we celebrate Jesus' birth.

5:00pm Worship

This family friendly service will feature our children and youth as they take us to the manger with Joseph and Mary and their newborn son. The youngest worshippers will join in lighting their own glow stick candle with the congregation to sing "Silent Night."

Music will include Joy! Singers, Celebration! Choir, A Christmas Eve Handbell Ensemble with ringers Andrew Alka, Elizabeth Bures, Lindsay Callender, and Kat Mason, and Christopher Callender, guitar, will lead "Silent Night."

7:45pm Prelude Music

Including music by Andrea Dover, violin ~ Bob Dover, clarinet ~ Darryl Prater, trumpet ~ and Linda Dover, organ

8:00pm Worship

This beautiful, traditional service of lessons and carols will celebrate the tenderness and joy of Jesus' birth. The telling of the story will culminate with the lighting of candles as we sing "Silent Night."

Music will be provided by Chancel and Exaltation! Singers and instrumentalists.



The Longest Night (Blue Christmas)

Sunday, December 17, 7pm

Led by Rev. Karen Wright, Praise Team Members

The Christmas season is often marked by expressions of joy, excitement, and happiness. It's a time for family to gather and for churches to worship pointing to the hope that is found in the coming of the Christ child. However, this time of joy and expectation can often overshadow the pain and hurt many experience during this season, when the world's merriment puts their grief and sorrow in stark relief.

One of the greatest acts of pastoral care in the Advent season is to offer a service known as a Service of the Longest Night or a Blue Christmas Service. It's a worship service scheduled around the winter solstice (the longest night of the calendar year) and it just happens to fall on or around December 21st every year. There's a connection between the long nights just before Christmas, and the struggle with darkness and grief faced by those living with loss. This service is not only for those of us grieving the loss of a loved one, but also for those people facing the challenges of illnesses, troubles with relationships or work situations, or any other difficulty that makes it hard to be joyful.

Including this service amid the hustle and bustle of your other Christmas services, rituals, parties, and obligations is a tremendous witness to those who are struggling in our community. It's a witness to them that the Christ child comes as a sign of hope in the face of despair. And it's a witness that their church is intentional about upholding members of the community in whatever season of life they may find them.

View from the Bridge

Hello new friends at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church!

I have enjoyed meeting many of you and getting to know you all as individuals and as a congregation in the past few weeks. I am excited to be on this journey with you for the coming months. The transition process between ministers is never quick or easy, but it is a time of growth for the congregation. It is a time to find out what activities and traditions you value and begin looking for where the Holy Spirit is moving.

I see in your current Session strong and capable leadership. In the staff, I see talented and loving people with a heart for ministry in this place. I see so many gifted members who give of themselves and their talents. And I see a congregation that needs to do some dreaming of the future and to check in with the reality of where things stand. This liminal time is a great time to open up all the cupboards and closets and clean them out. Let's face it, churches are really good at stashing things away, forgetting about them, and then complaining because there is no storage space.

As we turn toward Advent and to Christmas, we all wait for the coming of Christ. There is anticipation and excitement and I hope Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church can hold onto that same hope and anticipation of what is to come as you undertake the process of seeking an Interim and then a new called and installed pastor. I am here to help in the meantime and to help you see the gifts you bring to the Kingdom of God and to Overland Park and the Greater Kansas City Metro. The path for Mary and Joseph took time and the Magi had a longer road. As the road stretches before you, walk together and hold onto the hope that Christ is coming again!

Grace and Peace,
—Pastor Karen

Clerk's Corner

Session held our November meeting one week early to accommodate Thanksgiving schedules.

We started with a robust review of our financial status, records, and procedures presented by Beth Lillian, our new Finance Team moderator. It was a significant time investment, but the entire Session has a better understanding of our Finances (including restricted accounts) and how we operate now. HUGE THANKS to Beth for taking the time to organize and present this information to us.

We also had a discussion around the Arab Christian Fellowship, led by Amgad Megally. They have been using our building more frequently in the last year and we want to make sure that we have a shared understanding of our relationship. Session will probably be liaising with the ACF in the coming months and developing a written agreement; if you have an interest in being part of this discussion, please let Melanie Townsend know so we can coordinate the right people.

In other news, we got an update on the pledge drive, heard that the Facilities team has selected a new fire sprinkler system and vendor, and welcomed Joe Schendel back into active membership. It has been a delight to have Joe and his son Wyatt back in worship this year. The Interim Pastor Nominating Committee is frustrated by the new matching system, but continues to work through it.

As always, if you have questions or concerns about what's happening at Session or the decisions being made, feel free to join us for a meeting or talk to any member of the Session. Our next meeting will be at 7 PM on December 18.

—Melanie Townsend, Clerk of Session



SAVE THE DATE!

The Care and Connections Team will be hosting a
BINGO AND PIZZA NIGHT
on Friday, January 26, 2024, 5:30–7:30pm.

You won't want to miss this fun intergenerational event!
Please mark the date down in your calendars!

Children's Team



The GCPC Children's Team would like to wish our GCPC families a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



SERVICE - MUSIC - ARTS - SPORTS - HANG-OUT

In November, our SMASH event centered around sharing as we heard the story of the young boy who shared his basket of five loaves and two fish. We enjoyed sharing ice cream and toppings with one another and played our own version of the Stone Soup European folktale.

Join us on December 17th from 4pm - 6pm for our next SMASH event. This month we will meet at Aberdeen Village at 4pm for a round of Christmas caroling with residents at Aberdeen Village. We ask parents to help escort their children to/from Aberdeen Village. We will return to GCPC after caroling for the rest of our SMASH time. We will continue our studies of children of the Bible. We will talk about what the Bible shares with us about Jesus as a child and we'll celebrate his birthday together too. Parents are welcome to stay for our celebration. RSVP via our GCPC Children's group Facebook event or email gpcchildren@gmail.com.

Children's Events at a Glance

Dec 3 - Awakening to Worship(ATW), Sunday School will be a full hour of Music and join us for "A Christmas Exclamation" (see music notes for further details)

Dec 10 - ATW, Music & Sunday School

Dec 17 - ATW, Music & Sunday School and Smash

Dec 24 - No ATW or Sunday School

Dec 31 - No ATW Sunday School

Bible Workshop

Our 3rd grade students and a parent attended our Bible workshop this past month. The children learned a little history of the Bible, how the Bible is organized and they discussed how to study and learn from its stories. They were given new Bibles to take home with them and will recognize these students with a special gift during worship in the New Year. Thank you again to Melanie Townsend and Cheryl Johnson for making this event possible for our families.



Thank You Church Family!

I want to thank all of you who have sent get well cards to me during my recent illness. I appreciate the cards and prayers and look forward to returning to health soon. —Shirley Faulwell

Dear GCPC Crafters and Care and Connections Team: Thank you for the fall colors prayer shawl. The included poem is perfect for my cancer diagnosis. I can picture me curled up on a cold winter night in the shawl. At the time or even just looking at it will remind of God's love but also all ours at GCPC. I hope to find peace as I undergo treatments!
—Dennis Patton

Make some NOISE!!

Those aren't sleigh bells you hear, it's time for Noisy Offering! On December 10, we'll collect our last Noisy Offering of 2023. The funds will go to the Renewed Hope Food Pantry, which is also where we send the food donations collected in the Weekday Entrance. Donations to Renewed Hope have sadly fallen off in recent months, so bring your loose change to help all our neighbors eat well this holiday season.



Jerel and Kathy Williams, Paul and Linda Bruns, Pat and Ray Kowalczewski, Nelson and Melanie Townsend

The Fall Session of Dinners for 7 or 8 finished in November.

We had five groups sharing meals in homes and three groups dining out. The winter session will begin in January. If you would like to participate in either the dinners in homes or dining out, please contact Kathy Williams at kathykaskewilliams@gmail.com or call 913-485-1776. Make your request by December 10 so the groups can be informed and schedule their January dinners. If you have never participated before, it is a great way to get to know some members of your church family.

Do you need gift-giving ideas?

Is there someone on your list who's impossible to buy for? Consider an alternative gift!

Alternative Gifts help our brothers and sisters around the world gain the basic resources needed to live and create sustainable livelihoods for their families. Check out the interesting and unique gifts available through the Presbyterian Giving Catalog (<https://presbyteriangifts.pcusa.org/gifts/>). You can give gifts related to education, water, agriculture/livestock, or aid kits; prices start at just \$25.

Another great source of alternative gifts is Heifer International (<https://www.heifer.org/>). Heifer offers gifts related to animals, women's empowerment, and caring for the earth. Prices start at \$20; Heifer does offer a gift card option, so that the recipient can choose the gift most meaningful to them.

Both Presbyterian Giving and Heifer offer methods of giving a gift in honor of someone else. On Heifer's site, look for "Create an Honor Card"; on presbyteriangifts.com, look for information about sending an e-card in the checkout process. Happy Alternative Shopping!

Celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus by helping babies!

Grace Covenant has generously supported **Argentine Baby Closet** for the past 30 years; ABC will again be our December donation partner and Communion Offering recipient. ABC is a ministry of Argentine United Presbyterian Church, now in its 37th year serving families in their community. The year their most-needed items include:

- diapers and wipes, especially sizes 4&5
- blanket sleepers — sizes 9 mos.–3T
- shoes — sizes 2–6
- socks
- new or gently used clothing, sizes 9 mos.–2T.

Put your donations in the weekday entrance bin anytime during the month of December, or if you like, give a financial donation. Be sure to mark it as Communion Offering — online or in the offering plate any Sunday in December.

Thanks as always for GCPC's generous support of our donation partners and Communion Offering recipients in 2023. Your support is especially appreciated during this year that has been difficult for many!

What the Future Holds *Update* 2024 Pledge Drive

Our theme for the pledge drive is **What the Future Holds**. We are basing our campaign on this scripture from Jeremiah 29:11 *"I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."*

Can you stand with your fellow Grace Covenant community and affirm this future and hope by making a 2024 pledge commitment? We also welcome any pledges from non-members! Pledge Sunday was November 5, 2023, and we received 67 pledges totaling \$362,056.40. Our goal is \$675,000. Your Session is working very diligently with Finance and Generosity teams to avoid approving a 2024 deficit budget. We will be locking in our final pledge numbers in early December. **Please, if you haven't filled out a pledge card or gone online, you can call Tara Hyder at ext. 121 and leave a voicemail with your name and pledge amount.** You can also see our progress by stopping by the Generosity Bulletin Board. Please turn in your pledge and join us in creating an amazing future in 2024!



Here is our giving progress shown by numbers of pledges:

Submitted Pledges (103)	April 12	May 16	June 19	August 15	September 19	October 3	November 6
0% fulfilled	32	24	22	15	14	14	12
1-25% fulfilled	33	12	10	4	5	3	2
26-50% fulfilled	29	52	50	18	10	8	7
51-75% fulfilled	0	3	8	44	49	38	14
76-100% fulfilled	7	11	13	22	25	40	68
\$527,258*	\$187,129	\$211,292	\$259,907	\$337,665	\$371,416	\$397,258	\$433,348

Rollover Pledges (27)	April 12	May 16	June 19	August 15	September 19	October 3	November 6
0% fulfilled	11	9	8	6	6	6	5
1-25% fulfilled	6	1	1	0	0	0	1
26-50% fulfilled	9	9	10	5	4	0	0
51-75% fulfilled	1	5	3	8	8	8	7
76-100% fulfilled	1	4	6	8	9	13	14
\$101,369	\$15,480	\$53,965	\$59,355	\$68,930	\$71,680	\$81,505	\$84,065

Five groupings are used to show giving progress and calendar relationship. They are 0%, 1–25%, 26–50%, 51–75%, 76–100%. Each pledge falls into one of these groups. We are very grateful for the feedback on pledge amounts.

Thank You for making our IHN Week possible!

Last week was our 79th JOCO IHN Host week. We welcomed our second support church, Shawnee Mission Unitarian Universalist Church (SMUUCH) to this rotation. Six folks attended the 4pm orientation — they were very impressed with our layout and organization for this ministry. We started the week with one single woman, added a mom and son, who then dropped out and added a second single woman. It is a very demanding and structured program that some guests have trouble adjusting to — like those 6:30am departures. Thank you so very much for supporting us with your hosting, food, and prayers this week! You are changing people's lives for good!

For Good – Living in God's Grace

Here is our pledging update as of November 2023, which is 83% of the calendar year. There's been consistent progress with 82% of submitted pledges and 83% of rollover pledges received! We requested that Tara Hyder send out gentle reminder letters to our folks who are in the lower fulfillment groups to check in and see about their pledged giving plans for 2023.

As we draw closer to the end of the 2023 year, we really value your consistent giving. As always, we greatly appreciate your generosity and commitment to Grace Covenant. Please provide feedback to our team: David Sutherland, Ryan Hussey, Bill Brown, Rick Randolph, and Jane Knoche.

Good Faith Network

Report on the 2023 Community Problems Assembly



Earlier this year, GCPC joined the Good Faith Network, an interfaith organization working on social justice issues in Johnson County. On Sunday, November 12, GCPC members of the Good Faith Network attend the 2023 Community Problems Assembly. Over **440 people** attended the Assembly, some of the **588 network members** who joined the GFN this year.

The agenda for the Assembly included updates and speakers on each of GFN's issue campaigns. Significant progress has been made in all 3 areas since GFN began advocating for solutions.

Affordable Housing - the Board of City Commissioners has started a feasibility study on an affordable housing trust fund, which would fill gaps in funding for affordable housing developers and incentivize the building of affordable housing. GFN members advocated for at a special commission meeting in late October, which resulted a decision to seek permanent funding sources for the trust fund.

Mental Health Crisis Services - GFN has built relationships with the CEOs of multiple local hospitals in support of expanding crisis care. Johnson County Mental Health will be opening a juvenile crisis center with 30 beds in Olathe in 2024. State funds will support 22 of these 30 beds. Once the juvenile crisis center opens, space will become available in an existing building at 65th and Neiman. That space will be devoted to 14 additional beds for substances abuse detoxification and observation, and 12 beds for crisis stabilization. JOCO Mental Health needs permission from the county to use the state funds that have been identified, so continuing support from GFN and other advocates is needed.

Homelessness - 250 people are homeless at any given moment in Johnson County. Thanks in part to GFN's efforts, a year-round, all-day homeless shelter will open in the next year, funded by the state. Again, permission from the county is needed to use the state funding that has been identified for homeless relief. And a supportive path out of the shelter and into housing is needed. So advocacy on these needs will continue!

The 41 GCPC members who have joined the Good Faith Network are glad to be a part of moving the needle in the right direction on these issues. If you haven't yet joined and are interested, talk to Dave Pack, Mikki Walker, Tim Hayden, or Don or Joy Wilson. And help advocate for justice for all our neighbors in need!

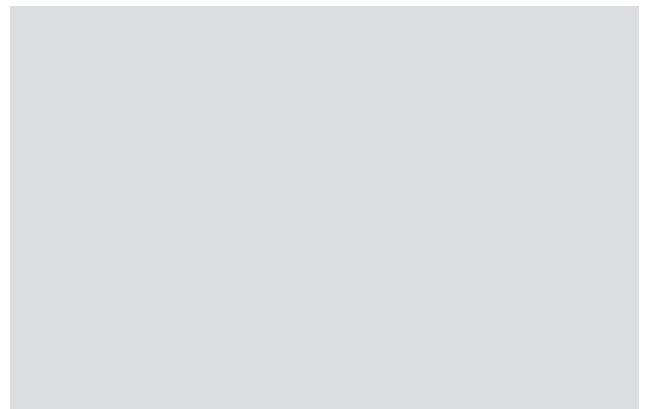
“Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.”

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Heart of America Hunger CROP Walk

Grace Covenant's Christine and Ed Caseres, Jane Knoche, and Karen and Dave Pack participated in the October 14, Heart of America Hunger CROP Walk. These five walkers raised over \$3,750. Year in and year out Jane is our "Super Walker." She raised over \$2,000!

Twenty-five percent of the funds contributed benefit local agencies – Community Assistance Council, Kansas City Community Gardens, Lazarus Ministries, Metropolitan Lutheran Ministries, and Seton Center. That means about \$940 will go to these agencies from Grace Covenant's walkers. Thank you so much for your support!





GRACE COVENANT

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Inclusive. Family Oriented. Welcoming.

11100 College Boulevard
Overland Park, KS 66210
Phone: 913-345-1256

gcpc.org

December Office Hours

The church offices will be closed
Monday and Tuesday, December
25 – 26 and January 1, 2024.

Please call ahead if you plan to
come to the church to make sure
the building is open. Thank you!



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CHURCH STAFF

Director of Music Ministries

- Office hours: Monday-Wednesday, Friday

Rebecca Prater, rebecca.prater@gcpc.org ...ext. 13

Church Administrator

- Office hours: Monday-Friday

Patrick Bell, patrick.bell@gcpc.org ext. 10

Youth CoordinatorLindsay Callender
lindsaymichelle0130@gmail.com

Finance AdministratorTara Hyder
.....finance@gcpc.org

OrganistLinda Dover

Audio/Visual Technician Jason Turner

Contemporary Music Coord. Carrie DeVries

Contemporary Music Drummer.....Jill Endaya

Child Care Coordinator.....Carolyn Chaffin

Wedding CoordinatorKristy Shaw

Funeral CoordinatorMary Sue Thomas

ELDERS

Joy Circo	Jaylee Soule
Barbara Douglas	Tom Stroud
Katie Hearn	Melanie Townsend, Session clerk
Jane Knoche	Bill Turner
Angela Krug	Michala Walker
Lara Schesser	Mary Ann Weyforth
Jake Schmidt	
Kristy Shaw	

SUPPORT STAFF

Deacon Moderator	Anne Stroud
Operating Committee.....	Angela Krug, Lara Schesser, Katie Hearn, Tom Stroud
Newsletter Editor/Marketing.....	Kim Krueger
Prayer Chain	Cheryl Johnson
Website Administrators	Kim Krueger, Patrick Bell, Christy Soule

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MINISTRY UNITS

Congregational Nurture Unit Moderators

Care and Connections....	Mary Ann Weyforth
Worship and Music.....	Kathy Bures, Katie Hearn

Education Ministry Unit Moderators

Adult	Tom Stroud
Children	Angela Krug
Youth.....	Lara Schesser

Reach Out Ministry Unit Moderators

Kairos	Rick Randolph
Mission	Mikki Walker
Welcoming	Kathy Williams

Supportive Ministry Unit Moderators

Facility	Liz Chandler
Generosity	David Sutherland
Finance.....	Beth Lillian
Personnel	Kevin Mason

Worship Schedule

9:30am Worship

In-Person, Facebook & Zoom

Visit gcpc.org/online for links

Upcoming Newsletter Article Deadlines

January 2024 issue - Deadline, December 19

February 2024 issue - Deadline, January 19