

# The Covenant Contact

December 2018

## Grace in Giving

It could come as no surprise that we've been thinking about giving. We're in the middle of the season of giving and we've just been thanking God for many blessings. The push of our culture in this last part of the year is to sweep us up in a frenzy of giving, to our families, to friends, and to charitable causes (many of them worthy of our support).



What I've been thinking, though, is that giving probably shouldn't be seasonal. I've been thinking of the grace God has shown us, grace demonstrated by the gift of Jesus. That gift, that grace, is decidedly NOT seasonal.

Grace is unmerited favor. God loves us because he has chosen to love us, not because of anything we have done to deserve his love. We can't earn it. We can't say to God, "Well, I've done this and this and this for you, so you owe me something." (Think of the book of Job.) We can only receive it and, in gratitude, share it with the world, as he has told us to do.

What does God's grace look like? Paul says, in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

Think of this: The God who created the universe ("In the beginning was the Word") gave up unimaginable power and glory and chose to become a single cell, growing into a baby, needing to breathe and cry and receive love from a mother, learning to walk and talk and reason, experiencing hunger and thirst and tiredness, being pressured by circumstances and busy-ness and the needs of others. Knowing the physical agony and humiliation that was before him (anticipating that final moment when God would turn

away from him as he paid the price of sin that it would kill us to pay for ourselves, and fervently wishing that it could be done some other way), Jesus chose to follow through with the plan and die for our sins. It was the only way sinful people can come near and be in fellowship with the holy and mighty God. We are folded up inside the grace of the willing sacrifice of Jesus and are made compatible with the unimaginable purity of God by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is a gift beyond any we can give.

God's gift can be accepted or rejected. He has made it possible for us to be in close and loving fellowship with him, to be his children. And for those who accept this wondrous gift, what he wants from his children is for us to love him with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We know from the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 that our neighbors are not just those who look like us, behave like us or think like us. No, our neighbors include the hungry, the poor, the persecuted, those who are in prison and their families, and all who suffer close to home and far away.

Those needs know no season. I realize that nothing in the list above specifically says that we are to give our money, but, over and over, Jesus stresses that our things are not to own us. God's priorities are supposed to be our priorities. God has given us a clear directive: we are to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with him (Micah 6:8). Timothy Keller, former pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, says that, as a guide, we are to give sacrificially, to give until it makes a difference in our standard of living. That might mean going without something we want in order to give money to a need God shows us. It might mean re-arranging our time to work on something for someone. It might mean committing some regular time to an ongoing ministry or project.

And the grace in giving part? That means that we are to give because God has tugged on our heart and brought a need to our attention, a need that seems worthy of our time and money, or even a need that might seem to us undeserving. I know I don't always measure up to this standard. But I am working on it, and I know God loves me, regardless. Thanks be to God for his indescribable love!

*In Christ, Ruth Johnson*

## December Calendar

12/2	11:15 am	Potluck Fellowship Brunch after worship
12/2		Quarterly Business Meeting after the potluck. Election of Boards and Committees for 2019, Trustees updates.
12/8	1:00 pm	Angel Tree Party
12/13	7:00 pm	Alpha Celebration
12/16	4:00 pm	Sunday School Pageant and Cold Potluck (bring sandwiches and salads)
12/23	10:00 am	Choir Cantata during worship.
12/24	4:00 pm	Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
12/25	6:30 am	<i>Julotta</i> service, followed by continental breakfast.*

**Please Note:** The **continental breakfast after Julotta** is a long-standing tradition for us, but someone needs to host it, plan and prepare the food, and serve it. This has been a labor of love for many in the church who cherish the Julotta tradition. If you believe that this is your time to give this gift as a family or with some friends, please contact Ruth Johnson (860 605-8040 or [cmouse@covchurchthomaston.org](mailto:cmouse@covchurchthomaston.org)) to let her know.

## Christian Education

**Pageant:** The Sunday School Christmas Program is Sunday, December 16 at 4 p.m. A cold potluck will follow and parents are asked to bring sandwiches and salads. Dessert will be provided.

**Alpha:** You are invited to attend the Alpha celebration on Thursday, December 13, at 7 p.m. in the Fellowship Room. Come and see what Alpha is all about and join us for some delicious holiday desserts! Please invite a friend or family member to join you. You will hear encouraging testimonies and watch a short video about Alpha. It's sure to be a wonderful evening. If you have any questions contact Pastor Tim, Pastor Ann or Mary Butkevich. Hope to see you there!

**Movie Night:** Save the date of Sunday night, January 13 at 4:00 p.m. We will be showing "I Can Only Imagine" in the Gathering Room. Snacks and beverages will be served (yea!) and donations will be accepted for our Campership Fund. (About \$125 was raised for Camperships at Light Up the Town.)

## Annual Meeting Reports Due

Our annual meeting will be on Sunday, January 20. After worship we will share a potluck brunch, with the meeting following at noon.

**Annual Reports:** Reports to be included in the Annual Report on January 20 that are already typed are due in the Church Office by January 4. If your report will need to be typed, please submit it no later than noon on Monday, December 31. Reports are needed from:

Pastor (including entries into the church record and membership summary)	Sunday School Supt.
Financial Secretary	Sunday School Treasurer
Treasurer/Budget Committee	CHYG Youth Group
Missions & Evangelism Chair	CHIC Fund Report
M & E Treasurer	Memorial Committee Treasurer
Diaconate Chair	Women Ministries Co-Chairs
Diaconate Treasurer	WM Treasurer
Trustee Chair	Nominating Committee (slate of officers)
Christian Education Chair	Investment Committee Chair

The Safe Church Task Force needs to present a report.

All boards and committees are reminded to meet before the Annual Meeting on January 20 to elect officers. Diaconate, Trustees, Christian Education, and Missions & Evangelism Boards must also appoint a representative to the Nominating Committee. *(If you were Chair of any Board or Committee in 2018, please convene an organizational meeting, before January 20, of that group even if you will not be serving with that group in 2019.)*

Auditors must audit all financial records before the Annual Meeting on January 20.

## Keeping Up



- Dear Church Family: Wow! Thank you<sup>7</sup> so, so much for your love, support, and generosity! Your card and gift cards blew us away. Stephen and I look forward to coming to CT for a visit – and I can't wait to introduce him to all of you. I am so grateful to be part of God's family and to have you as my sisters and brothers in Christ. Thank you again for your amazing generosity and your loving kindness!

*Love, Grace (Butkevich) and Stephen Duke*

- Ginny Guisti has a new address: 715 South Buncombe Road, Suite 231, Greer, SC 29650. She really enjoys receiving correspondence from us. Please continue to keep her in prayer.

## Prayer Focuses for December

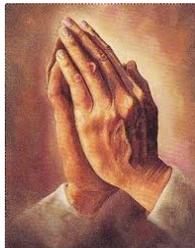
• **For our government leaders**, those in office and those who will be taking office in the new year. Pray for God to guide them regardless of whether or not you agree with their politics or policies. (1 Timothy 2:1-3: First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior.)

• **For those for whom the holidays are especially hard:** Those who have recently lost loved ones, those recently divorced and working things out; those struggling against depression or addiction.

• **That our hearts would overflow in generous gratitude for all God has done for us through Jesus:** The Bible does not hold back about urging us to demonstrate our faith with physical acts of service, kindness, and generosity. Pray for us to become aware of where God wants us to act and to be generous toward serving him there.

• **For individuals in prison and for their families.** We are connected to a few such families. How do families manage when one is in prison? What happens when the time served is over? Pray for a clear vision of how God wants us to minister.

• **For the needs of the congregation:** parents with families; our children and youth, work situations and employment conditions, marriages in trouble, persons battling cancer, addictions, other illnesses; families of those with addictions; our elderly and shut-ins;



• **For the Potter's House ministry:** Pray about committing a certain time to staff so we can be open more hours per week (must always be two persons together). Pray about training for staff and discovering and collecting referral resources that can be passed along to visitors.

• **For the Potter's House Visitors:** Pray for them to long to know God better and to keep seeking.

## Women Ministries



Women Ministries events are for all women of the church and their friends.

**Book Club** – WM's next book discussion will take place at Salem Covenant Church, Washington Depot, where we will discuss *White Picket Fences* by Amy Julia Becker. The author is a member of the Washington Depot Covenant Church and will be present to lead the discussion. The event starts at 7:30 PM. Read this thought-provoking book, which encourages us to realize the privileges in our lives and how we can overcome our prejudices, and come to learn more from the author. Lisa Olsen is driving the church van, leaving our church at 6:45, Anyone needing a ride should let her know.

**Women Ministries Christmas Gathering:** December 5, 6:15-8:30 in the Fellowship Room. Join us for a n evening of fun and fellowship with wonderful food and drink. Please bring an appetizer or cookies to help us celebrate together. The program is "Light of the World." We also are collecting hats and mittens for our mitten tree. We will end with a fun grab bag gift exchange (NTE \$10). Please come!

**Ditty Bags for New England Seafarers Mission** – NESM has been in operation since 1885, and now reaches 25,000 people per year, from 159 countries. Today the Mission continues to open its doors wide and is extending Christ's love and compassion to the workers who come into the Port of Boston. We can help. Each year our church in Thomaston, along with other Christian churches in the Northeast, generously donates bags filled with gifts to cheer the lives of the workers on ships so far from their homes and loved ones. Suggested gifts: T-shirt, knitted cap, socks, gloves, mending kit, devotional material, candy or other treats, pens and writing paper, calendar, puzzles, flashlight, nail clipper, men's toiletries. Please pick up a bag at church, place small gifts inside, and bring it back to the church by Sunday, December 16, 2018.

### Continuing Activities

1. **Stitching with Spirit:** Monday evenings at 7:00 at Karen O'Connell's (250 Reynolds Bridge, Apt. B2, Thomaston)
2. **Women's PM Study: (for women who work during the day)** Meets in the church Library every other Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. (1/8, 1/22, 2/5, 2/19, 3/5, 3/19).
3. **Women's Study:** Meets on Thursday mornings at 9:30 a.m. in the Potter's House. The book is an Old Testament survey, *Step by Step Through the Old Testament*.
4. **Women's Book Club:** See above

## Youth Groups

**Pathfinders** is for students in Grades 2-3. The group meets once a month. The leaders are Linda Hansen and Brenda Tousignant.

Watch Sunday bulletin for announcements



**Trailblazers** is for students in Grades 4-6.

Trailblazers leaders are Rachel Ewers and Christie Grabherr. If you have questions, need to register your student or want to help out, contact Rachel Ewers (203 907-7052 or [kyliejax@optonline.net](mailto:kyliejax@optonline.net)). Sessions are 5-7 p.m.



12/2 Trailblazers  
12/9 Trailblazers  
12/16 Trailblazers  
12/23 Trailblazers  
12/30 NO Trailblazers –Happy New Year!

**D/C (Discipleship/Confirmation)** is our Junior High ministry. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students have two years of Bible and teaching, with close friendships, service projects, fun activities, and a retreat. The leaders are Pastor Tim and Vic Whaley. Meetings are 5-7 p.m.

12/2 D/C Session  
12/9 D/C Session  
12/16 D/C Session  
12/23 D/C Session  
12/30 NO D/C – Happy New Year!



**CHYG (Covenant High Youth Group)** is for all students in grades 9-12. Leaders are Lisa Olsen and Nick Samela. Sessions are 5-7 p.m.

12/2 CHYG  
12/9 CHYG  
12/16 CHYG  
12/23 CHYG  
12/30 NO CHYG – Happy New Year!



1/4-6 **WinterFest** retreat at Lake Champion, NY

## Missions and Evangelism

**Angel Tree Christmas Party:** On December 8 at 1:00 p.m. the Missions & Evangelism Board will host a Christmas party to distribute Angel Tree gifts. We want as many of the church family as possible to be present to show love to these children and their families.

**Banquet of Blessing:** Please remember to keep us stocked (with good expire dates, please – we cannot give away out of date food).

**Benevolence Needs:** Some in our church community are struggling financially. If you are able to, please consider supporting others in need by making an extra donation to the Pastor's Benevolence Fund. Use the special envelopes in the pews or write Pastor's Benevolence Fund on your envelope or check.

## Potter's House



**The Potter's House** is open for coffee, conversation and prayer on **Friday nights, 7:00-10:00**, staffed by Peggy Steinis and Pastor Ann. A signup sheet is in the Potter's house for any who would like to share in staffing this (must be two people present always). Please share a Potter's House flyer or business card (in the Potter's House) with anyone who might want to come in.

## Meal Coordinator

Providing a meal to someone during a difficult time is one way to show how much we care. If you know someone who might benefit, contact Sandy Dunn (860 483-2015 or [daytondunn@mac.com](mailto:daytondunn@mac.com)).

## Pledges for Loan Payments

We still are a few dollars short of having pledges that will cover each month's payment (\$500) for 2019. Even as little as \$5 per month (\$60 for the year) would be helpful, but a pledge in any amount is most helpful. Thank you.