February worship and preaching
8:30 and 10:00 a.m.
FEBRUARY 2 - Rev. Amy McCullough
FEBRUARY 9 - Rev. Amy McCullough
FEBRUARY 16 - Rev. Mark Smiley
Rev. Smiley is a pastor in the Baltimore-Washington Conference, having served at Hiss United Methodist Church in Parkville and as a regional guide on the conference staff. Following graduate studies at Loyola University, Rev. Smiley now works as a therapist in private practice.
FEBRUARY 23 - Gospel Music Sunday
Music of the African-American heritage, directed by our bass soloist Robert Cantrell, plus a series of reflections offered by the congregation

ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26
Two worship services:
12 noon and 7:00 p.m.

Join us in prayer
“Change can be accomplished most of all through the power of prayer, because with God all things are possible.” - Wilferd Peterson

Church Staff meetings begin with a mention of prayer concerns for members of our church family and a prayer. But would there be a way we could be of more help? The staff decided that each Tuesday at noon, those who could would gather in the sanctuary for a brief time of prayer – to pray for those in need, for our country, our denomination, the larger world and ourselves. You are invited to join us, whether here in person or in spirit as you can.

Update on Pastor Dane
Pastor Dane Wood has been diagnosed with stage 2 cancer. He had surgery in mid-November to remove the tumor and recovered very well from that. He began chemotherapy on January 7th and will undergo three cycles, lasting 9 weeks. The cure rate is very high for this particular type and the doctors are confident. Contact with him may be limited, so please copy any important emails to Rev. Amy (amy@graceunitedmethodist.org) and Diane Cole (admin@graceunitedmethodist.org). You may continue to direct any cards, gifts or questions to the Church office. He and Megan are very grateful for all the love Grace Church has and will continue to show.

ASH WEDNESDAY

Additional ways to “Stay in touch with Grace”
If you are not already receiving the weekly E-Notes, email Diane Lesman with your email to get on the list:
comm@graceunitedmethodist.org

Like our Facebook page:
Facebook.com/gracechurchbaltimore for quick updates

Check out our website:
www.graceunitedmethodist.org

FELLOWSHIP TIME HOSTS
On Sunday, February 23, our Gospel Service morning, the Children’s Ministry will be hosting our weekly Fellowship Time.

Thanks to them and to all the others who have signed up to provide refreshments for this time of greeting one another following worship. There are still a few openings to be filled. Please contact the church office.
News about the United Methodist Church
“Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace through Separation”

On Friday, January 3, the United Methodist Church made headlines throughout the world when a “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation” was released, offering a plan for the denomination’s future. A group of key leaders, representing multiple interest groups across the spectrum of the denomination, released the plan following several months of professionally mediated negotiations.

The plan provides for the section of the denomination known as the “Traditionalists” to separate from the denomination, and for those who remain to continue as the United Methodist Church. The expectation is that following this separation, space will be made for the remaining body to reverse the decisions of the 2019 Special General Conference and remove the discriminatory language and practices concerning LGBTQ members within our current Book of Discipline. This proposed protocol, along with other proposals, will be presented to the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, which is our denominational’s legislative body. General Conference meets on May 5-15, 2020.

It is never easy to talk about a separation, particularly a separation within the body of Christ. And yet, there is much hope offered in this recently released proposal. It is a proposal worked out by a collective who represent the various interest groups within the church, who came together to find a way to move the denomination beyond the impasse that has paralyzed us for decades and caused harms within our midst. It has the potential to set us free from the harmful place of asking some members of our church to settle for less than full status, and to allow those who wish to move in a different direction and begin a separate stream of Methodists to do so. Even amid the separation it provides for a continuity of the Methodist movement with diverse theological positions, all grounded in the love of God and a passion for caring for a world in need. One piece of the protocol states this well in saying, “The undersigned propose restructuring The United Methodist Church by separation as the best means to resolve our differences, allowing each part of the Church to remain true to its theological understanding, while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity and respect of every person.”

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, the Baltimore-Washington Conference Bishop, was a member of the coalition that created the protocol. In a recent public letter she wrote, “While it may seem contradictory, the new Protocol on Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation, now before the denomination, is the best and strongest way we can move toward honoring the Gospel and our call to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Crafted in the spirit of mutual respect, it lifts us out of the quagmire we’ve been stuck in for decades and sets us all, with integrity, on a path that brings honor and glory to God.” In the same letter she announced that, “As a result of The Protocol and my belief in the possibilities it holds, I will not be processing any charges pursuant to the new paragraphs of the Book of Discipline, which went into effect on January 1, 2020. There was unanimous consent among the mediation team, including the traditionalist voices at the table, that new rounds of charges and trials would not be helpful at this juncture. Rather, all such charges will be held in abeyance until after General Conference.”

As one of your pastors, I continue to remain informed about this unfolding process. I am always available for conversation, and I welcome your questions, thoughts, and concerns. As we await the General Conference in May, I invite you to read this proposal and its supporting documents yourself, all of which can be found at www.bwcumc.org. I also invite you to pray for the 800+ delegates who will attend General Conference, and the future of our denomination. I can assure you that in the midst of this time of discernment, the ministries of Grace continue. We are a vibrant local church that worships weekly, serves others, shares the stories of our faith with young persons, and offers the grace of God to each other. We are followers of Jesus, together, and this will not change.

Rev. Amy McCullough
Lead Pastor

WITHIN THE FAMILY AT GRACE

DEATH

Frances Ann (Mrs. Karl) Eger
December 7, 2019
STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

“Love God. Do Good. Grow in Grace”

As of January 10, 2020, Grace has received 109 pledges, totaling $347,410 for the 2020 Operating Budget. We thank all those who have made a commitment to the ministries of God through Grace Church, adding the following names to the previously published list:

- Mr & Mrs Joseph Aikins-Afful
- Patsy Andrews
- Linda & Dennis Cameron
- Nancy Cornbrooks
- Betty Dempster
- Todd English
- Mr & Mrs Angus Everton
- Mr & Mrs David Farace
- Mark & Sheldon Gruber-Lebowitz
- Diane Lesman
- Tom Moore
- Mr & Mrs Tim Phelps
- Carol Polk
- Mr & Mrs Robert Scott, Jr.
- Eeva Simard
- Christine Von Klencke

It is not too late to make a pledge for 2020. Your giving enables Grace to offer transformative worship, classes that form persons in the Christian faith for all ages, provide pastoral support and care in times of need, and reach out to those who have yet to know the saving power of Jesus. A pledge can be made by contacting George Kahl in the church office, or at george@graceunitedmethodist.org.

Altar Flowers

The current schedule for donors of Altar flowers is as follows:

FEBRUARY 2 Chris Schroeder (1 or 2) and ..........  
FEBRUARY 9 Kathy Cosgrove (1) and .............  
FEBRUARY 16 Lynne Sharpe (1) and ..............  
FEBRUARY 23 Jeanene Wingate (1) and ..........  

MARCH 1 Lee Gough (1 or 2) and ......  
MARCH 8 .................. and .............  
MARCH 15 Tom Lynn* (1) and .............  
MARCH 22 Carolyn Benfer (1) and ............  
MARCH 29 Tom Gordon (1 or 2) and ..........  

Please contact Claire Greenhouse if you are interested in remembering someone by sponsoring an altar flower arrangement: 410-337-7407 or aschoolrn@verizon.net.

Happy Birthday!

Birthday greetings to those of the Grace family celebrating in February

1 Grayson Gilbert, Patricia Volker
2 Emily Bruce, Brendan Millon, Caroline Grace Thomas, Marian Yanega
6 Sarah Atwood-Starkey
7 Morgan Scott
8 Bonnie Caster, Kelly Jackson
11 Kelly Painter
12 Jennifer Gillis-White, Constance Mech
14 Sue Stein
15 Valerie Pasquale, John Strahan
16 Alicia Metz
17 Laura Getschel
18 Carter Benson-Williams, Cole Benson-Williams, Elliott DeFilippis, Nicholas DeMetrick, Elinor Old, Steven Paylor
19 Allen Kessell
21 Eric Benfer, Jesse Siegel
23 Esi Yarney
24 John Honeycutt, Kendi Irwin, Barbara Jackson
25 Bob Smith, Paige Stevens
26 Karl Schillinger
27 Molly Farrugia, Bob Volker
28 Curtis Adams, Alec Rowley, Robert Schaefer
29 Jody Wiseman

Special Gifts

We acknowledge with gratitude the following special gifts
in memory of Eleanor Megraw by Stuart and Alice Bockman
Edwin and Mary Davisson, Jr.

to Mission-Outreach
in honor of M. Lee Starkey by Virginia F. Starkey

(Christmas memorials received after the deadline)

Pew Candle Torches
in memory of Emory Brown, brother of Bonnie Caster by Claire and Walter Greenhouse

Christmas Music
in honor of Janet Ander by Beth, Thurston and Weston

in memory of our Parents by Angus and Lydia Everton
The feast of the Epiphany celebrates the light that came into world through the person of Jesus, a star that reveals Jesus as God’s son. With such a message it makes sense to begin today's sermon with a few facts about stars. National Geographic reminds us that stars are “luminous gigantic balls of gas, in which hydrogen converts into helium to produce light and heat.” In the Milky Way galaxy alone there are approximately 300 billion stars. As one of our children correctly identified, stars come in various colors. They can be white, yellow, orange, red, or even brown. Large stars live shorter lives than small ones - there is a gospel message in that for us - because larger ones burn through fuel faster than their smaller counterparts. Did you know stars don’t actually twinkle? Instead, what we experience as “twinkling” is the star’s light encountering the turbulence of Earth’s atmosphere as its rays journey to Earth. And lastly, while it is common knowledge that star are light years away and travel for years upon years before their radiance reaches us, have you ever considered that when you go looking into the night sky you are, in fact, looking back in time?

We peer back into time this morning, remembering the magi from the east who observed a new star rising in the sky, interpreting the star as a sign about the birth of a new king. For their time and place it was a logical connection: a new star, a new king. So they set out to find this new one. Perhaps they intended to simply pay a courtesy visit, akin to the president’s courtesy phone call to a new leader. But the length of their journey, their bags packed with the very best gifts, their willingness to set out for a destination undetermined are hints about the restlessness of their souls, their search for something more fulfilling than the world as it was.

Their first stop was Jerusalem. Why? Well, if you’ve ever been to Jerusalem you can attest that it is an ancient, important city where one would expect to find a king. Jerusalem had fortified walls, a temple, a throne, and important people coming in and out its gates. The wise men were different enough or distinguished enough to gain entrance to the court of King Herod, whom Matthew reminds his readers, is King of the Judea when Jesus is born.

While king was Herod’s official title, he had gained his throne not because of his loyalty to Jewish people but because of his allegiance to Rome. By the time of the wise men’s visit, King Herod was old. His years of rule had increased his jealousy, greed and fear. The magis’ seemingly innocent question – where might we find the child born a king? – landed upon him like a death sentence; the announcement of a rival’s arrival, capable of stripping him of his precarious power. Herod pretends to be interested in the wise men’s quest. He feigns eagerness to join in their adoration. The lies roll off his lips. “Be sure to come back and tell me when you find him.”

Having come to the wrong throne, the magi need other studiers of scripture to learn a new set of directions. They adjust their destination, traveling south out of Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Once they are out beyond the palace lights, the star appears again in the sky, guiding them at last to the house where Jesus is found. Have you ever stepped outside into a night filled with a thousand stars? Watched the brilliance dance across sky? Taken delight in locating the constellations: the Big Dipper, North Star, or Southern Cross? Have you ever felt the wonder of being held by this loving universe, met by the cosmic force for life? The same light shone from the Christ-child. Here is the force of the universe residing in the flesh-and-blood of a small child, the brilliance of God-with-us.

Where is the child? the wise men inquire. Where can the child be found? repeated Herod. Matthew structures the last story of Christmas around this question of Where. Where is the Messiah? He is found in Bethlehem, the royal city of David, brought into the family through Joseph. In just a few verses Jesus, Mary, and Joseph will settle in Nazareth. How do we know this is Jesus? We know because of where he is found. Matthew uses geography to do theology. Right here is Christ the king.
It is often the case that geography produces theology. Where we find ourselves situated in life shapes how we can see God. I have wandered far from home. I’m lost. God is nowhere to be seen. Or, I’ve reached the mountaintop. I’m so close to heaven I might touch the skies. God is clearly here. In Matthew’s landscape, the where also becomes a how to find the way, a template for discerning how to go in search of God. The wise men are on the move. They look up at the sky. They take a chance that there is a child worth searching for. They set off for the unknown. They are willing to travel far beyond their own country, to find the One who brings light. They take a wrong turn, winding up in front of the wrong throne. As Walter Brueggemann points out, the work of Epiphany includes acknowledging how we have looked for God in the wrong place.

But what guides their way is a star. This miraculous, God-produced light tells them where to go. Biblical scholars might hypothesize about a scientific explanation for the star, whether Halley’s comet or another new galactic event might explain a new light in the sky during the season of Jesus’s birth. But whatever limitations we have about fully grasping the interworking of hydrogen and helium fusing through the galaxy, we do know that stars don’t stagnate over one place or move in a southward direction. This star, just like Jesus’s birth, was God’s initiative; an assurance that when we ask “Where might I find you, O Christ?” God offers points of light along our way. Christian faith is a journey toward the light of Jesus. So look up, look around, be open to traveling, and resist becoming risk-averse. Be assured that on at least one occasion you will make the wrong turn, but you will not lose the star’s guiding light forever. The light will stay with you, carrying you to Jesus.

The magi, says Ellen Davis, are stargazers. They are “masters of an art that opened their minds toward a world beyond them, a world of possibility and hope.” We, Christians, are to be stargazers too, she continues, “discerning a bright point of light in the darkness and following it as we travel a long and unfamiliar road, trusting it leads to God.”

As you entered worship this morning you received a star. I invite you to pull it out, hold it, and pray about the light of Jesus you need in your life in the days ahead. Trust that as you make your journey toward Jesus, he moves toward you. Just as we see the light of Christ, we are asked to be Christ’s light for others. As you hold your star, pray also that God might direct you in your light-giving actions. May we be those who look for the light, follow the light, and carry it for the world to see. Amen.

CONFIRMATION CLASSES WILL BEGIN FEBRUARY 2

Confirmation is a significant step of faith, in which a person explores what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and decides either to confirm the vows taken on their behalf at baptism or to make these vows themselves. Confirmation typically occurs during adolescence, as one marker of a maturing faith, but is also open to adults joining the faith for the first time and any youth or adult who wishes to “reconfirm” their commitment to Christ.

Grace will be offering a confirmation experience for any interested persons 12 years or older, beginning in February. Classes will be held on Sundays, from 11:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. beginning February 2 and running through Sunday, March 29. The class will culminate in a Confirmation Ceremony to be held on Saturday evening, April 11 as part of the Easter Vigil Service. Easter is the celebration of Christ’s resurrection and Confirmation is the celebration of our resurrection in Christ. To sign up for confirmation or to learn more, please contact Rev. Amy McCullough.

Touching Lives

In early December, Grace hosted the New Wave Christmas Concert. During that concert, one of the singers made a personal witness before the 350 in attendance. This was a very moving personal testimony by this young lady and she has given her permission to share her remarks. It demonstrates once again just how our being a Reconciling Congregation is reaching out to those who have been rejected by the church.

I think I was about 8 years old the first time I remember my parents letting my brother and I stay up late on Christmas Eve. I felt so cool as we attended the 11:00 candlelight service with my parents - the one all adults go to. Of course, they rushed us home and put us to bed so we were ready for Santa to come.

At the service, we listened to the story of Christmas, and sang Silent Night with the lights off, holding candles. It was like magic when the lights flipped back on and Joy to the World blasted from the organ pipes. My mom looked at me and said “Merry Christmas.” It was midnight - the day had finally arrived, and we had made it! I remember feeling like I had unlocked this new secret to Christmas. I loved that service as I started to get older, I would sing with the choir. We sang Mary Did You Know before the group Pentatonix was a thing.

Then I came out and everything changed. Christmas changed. I had been told I was not welcome. I was not longer able to attend that 11:00 service.

I was raised United Methodist and today, I’m happy to stand in welcoming churches like Grace. Though, there is much work to do for all churches to be welcoming, it’s good to know there are reconciling congregations that welcome LGBTQ people. For me, this means there is a place where I can - once again - light the candle, sing Silent Night, and know when I hear the first chords of Joy to the World ring from the organ pipes, that Christmas is finally here.

Heidi Fosnaught

Upcoming Youth events

- Youth Fellowship on Sunday evening, February 23 from 5-7 p.m.
- Come Skiing for a Day - Monday, February 17 (Presidents’ Day). We’ll leave early in the morning, ski for the day at Liberty Ski Resort, and return to Grace that evening.
- Summer Youth Mission Trip - We’ll return to Youth Works in Harrisburg, PA for a week - June 21-26.

To sign up for the Youth Ski Trip or Summer Mission Trip, please contact Rev. Amy McCullough.

New Year’s Prayer

by Charlotte Anselmo

Thank you Lord for giving me
The brand new year ahead.
Help me live the way I should
As each new day I tread.

Give me gentle wisdom
That I might help a friend;
Give me strength and courage
So a shoulder I might lend.

The year ahead is empty -
Help me fill it with good things;
Each new day filled with joy
And the happiness it brings.

Please give the leaders of our world
A courage born of peace
That they might lead us gently
And all the fighting cease.

Please give to all upon this earth
A heart that’s filled with love,
A gentle happy way to live
With your blessings from above.

The New Year lies before you,
Like a spotless track of snow...
Be careful how you tread on it,
For every mark will show.

THANK YOU to all who made gifts in honor or memory of loved ones through the Christmas memorials directed to the music ministry! Your gifts allowed us to hear beautiful music from a string quartet at our 9:00 p.m. Christmas Eve service. Your continued support and patronage toward the music ministry is greatly appreciated by the music staff and all its volunteers!

GRACE BOOK CLUB

Lovers of reading are invited to the February 10 gathering of the Grace Book Club at 7:00 p.m. in the Parlor to discuss Becoming by former first lady Michelle Obama. The selection for March is The Silent Patient by Alex Michaelides.
Pre-Advent Workshop
activities kept the young ones busy making holiday decorations for home.

The winners of a Grace Gala Auction item had a ‘tree’mendous (Thanks, Chuck!) time being a part of the Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade in New York City. Chuck Starkey (tree), Barb Starkey (Christmas bulb), and Jim Fitzgerald and Andy Trofatter (elves) were stars (we saw them on TV) with Santa’s float - the much anticipated culmination of the event. Watch for this year’s Gala listing of auction items and maybe you will be the lucky bidders!