

JULY/AUGUST 2023

Newsletter



Let Our Prayers Rise Up

On Pentecost Sunday, we offered up our dreams for God's Church on earth, articulating our hopes and visions for the future. As disciples of Christ, we are tasked with not only doing the work of God in this world, but also with being dreamers who hold onto hope for a better future to come.

Here are some of the dreams that were offered up:

"I dream of a Church that fully accepts our trans brothers and sisters."

"Joining what God is doing in the world beyond the walls of any church, especially as this relates to interfaith partnership and ministry."

"May the Spirit reach all hearts and bring compassion to all, ending war and violence."

"May the flame of the Spirit ignite the hearts of all, but especially our young, to spread good, caring Love into our world."

"The church will become the bridge to connect people who are now divided. The church will be the facilitator of peace and compassion."

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Pastor's Letter

Beloved Siblings in Christ,

It has been such a joy this summer to enter the next phase of our journey towards becoming a Reconciling in Christ/Reconciling Ministries Network congregation by engaging in study and education with you all! It has warmed my heart to see so many of you engage with Emmy Kegler's One Coin Found, and come away from it with new wonderings or questions, or feeling affirmed in part of your own faith journey and experience of religion or scripture.

Likewise, at our training on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, I watched as those who chose to participate assumed a posture of openness and humility as we listened to Aubrey Thonvold from ReconcilingWorks teach us about the many and varied identities that fall on the spectrums of both gender and sexuality, and helped us get curious about how to step outside of the binaries that we have been taught to perceive as "normal."

In July and August, we will continue this learning journey with Austen Hartke's book, Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians. Austen Hartke is a transgender person of faith, with a passion for helping trans people see themselves reflected in the stories of Scripture. Now more than ever, as the rights of transgender people are being targeted across the country with hundreds of anti-trans bills being introduced into state and federal legislature, it is crucial that people of faith understand the importance and sacredness of transgender people – not only for their sake, but for ours as well. Through his book, Hartke teaches Christians of faith not only to tolerate or accept trans and gender expansive people, but to read scripture from their perspective and see how our stories of faith affirm the holiness of people who exist outside of norms and binaries time and time again.



Pastor's Letter

There are many reasons why our commitment to becoming an Open and Affirming Church with an intentional welcome to marginalized communities is so important. Most importantly, the Church has played a central role in the harm that has been done against LGBTQIA+ people – so it is vital that we learn how to atone for that past and take steps towards making our churches the safe, nurturing, and welcoming spaces that God intends for us to be. Hartke articulates the power that affirming churches can have in the lives of LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially youth, noting that *"...although religious affiliation in families has been connected to rejection of LGBT children, faith can also be one of the largest contributors to well-being in youth if their religious community supports them."* However, this is not the only outcome and objective of this journey. As Christians, we know that we encounter God in this world through one another – and thus, the more divided we are from one another, the more separated we become from God. The more we commit ourselves to not only being "seen" as welcoming, but to learning how to see scripture and faith in a more expansive and wonder-filled way, the more we will see just how much of God's story we have been missing by viewing it through our own narrow lens of experience. As Hartke observes towards the end of his book, *"...when transgender Christians are accepted and celebrated in Christian communities, the Good Shepherd's flock is put back together, and we once again become more than the sum of our parts."*

Remember to take time this summer to read *Transforming*, and consider how God is inviting you not only to extend an expansive welcome to others, but also how God is inviting you to extend that same expansive welcome to yourself as you allow your own faith to grow, change, and transform.

In Peace,
Pastor Miranda BG



Welcoming Church Team

The Welcoming Church Team wants to thank everyone who took the time to participate in our SOGIE Training at the end of June! This was an enlightening, engaging experience for everyone involved - here are some of the take-aways participants shared with each other at the end of the training:

What did you learn in this training that you plan to share with others?

- *When someone shares their pronouns or identity with you, thank them for sharing and trusting you!*
- *The difference between sexual orientation and relationship structuring*
- *The concept of fluidity in regards to gender identity*
- *Put people over definitions*
- *New terms, such as skoliosexual, and neo-pronouns such as xe/xir*
- *Sex assigned at birth, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sexual Orientation are all separate but related components to consider when understanding one's sexual orientation and gender identity - and many of these components are fluid (changing over time) and/or exist on a spectrum.*

If you missed the training in June, there are still other opportunities for you to register for a SOGIE Training! ReconcilingWorks offers this training to the public about once per month. **The next training is September 7th** - learn more and register at their website: www.reconcilingworks.org/trainings/talksogie/

These educational opportunities are meant to serve as a starting point, sparking questions and curiosities that we can dig into together with more focused trainings and presentations this fall. As new wonderings rise up in you this summer, reach out to the members of our Welcoming Church Team to let them know, so that we can all continue learning and growing together!

The Welcoming Church Team
Alicia Bermes, Sharon Poynter, Michelle Sibley
Linda Boris, and Debby Cenoweth

SPIRIT OF GRACE INVITES YOU
TO JOIN IN OUR

WELCOMING CHURCH SUMMER READING

July & August

"Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians" by Austen Hartke

By introducing transgender issues and language and providing stories of both biblical characters and real-life narratives from transgender Christians living today, *Transforming* helps readers visualize a more inclusive Christianity, equipping them with the confidence and tools to change both the church and the world.

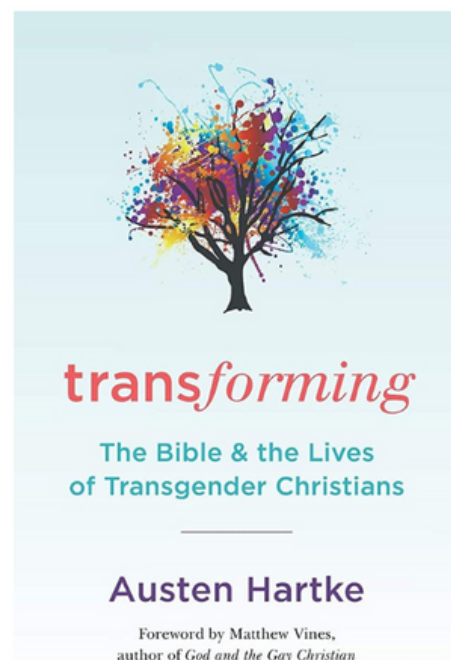
Discussion Groups hosted by Spirit of Grace:

Sunday, August 20th -- 11:15am

in-person in Fellowship Room

Wednesday, August 23rd -- 5:30pm

online via Zoom



**Book Copies available for purchase from
the church office for \$15 per copy.**

August Sermon Series



To enhance and build upon the learning we are doing this summer with the Welcoming Church Team, Pastor Miranda will be offering a special Sermon Series in the month of August, based on Austen Hartke's book, Transforming.

This Sermon Series will be on "The Expansive God," inviting us to expand our understanding of God and of God's hopes for us as a Christian Community. If you know someone who is struggling to reconcile the relationship between God and the LGBTQIA+ community, consider inviting them to this sermon series as a way of helping them see how liberating it can be for our own faith for us to understand God in a more open and expansive way.

Sermon Series: The Expansive God

August 6th - In the Beginning

Focus Scripture: Genesis 1:1-27

August 13th - A God Who Changes

Focus Scripture: Isaiah 56:1-8

August 20th - Celebrating the Upside-Down Kingdom

Focus Scripture: Matthew 19:1-12

August 27th - Living as One

Focus Scripture: Galatians 3:26-28

Ministry Teams Update

In an effort to create a sustainable ministry model for our congregation, we are restructuring the Ministry Teams proposed by Pastor Miranda last year. We currently have a separate ministry team for each of the ministry areas that we want to prioritize: **Building and Grounds, Community Outreach, Hospitality and Special Events, Lifelong Learning, Prayer and Visitation, Welcoming Church, and Worship Planning**. While these are all important areas of our shared life of faith, we are also a small congregation with limited energy and resources. Rather than spreading ourselves out in this way in the hopes that new members will come and fill in the gaps, we have decided to **concentrate our efforts on creating two robust ministry teams that can work collaboratively to build strong lay leadership and involvement in these areas!**

In the fall, we will establish our two primary ministry teams - the Outreach Ministry Team and the In-reach Ministry Team:

The Outreach Ministry Team will focus on reaching out to the surrounding community - this will include finding ways to engage with our surrounding neighbors and community, planning events and educational opportunities that are relevant to our community, helping our congregation grow in our understanding of welcome and hospitality, etc.

The In-Reach Ministry Team will focus on reaching out to members within our congregation - this will include planning educational events for all ages, being aware of prayer and visitation needs, offering times for fellowship with one another, planning events that allow us to engage with one another outside of worship, etc.

We will still have some supplementary teams, such as building and grounds and worship planning, that will continue focusing on their specific tasks. The Welcoming Church Team will continue to function as its own ministry team until our Welcoming Statement is approved, at which time their work will shift to the Outreach Ministry Team.

Need for Lay Leadership

A crucial step in making these ministry teams successful will be lay leadership. In order for the future of our church to be sustainable and lead to growth, the bulk of our ministry needs to be led by lay members of our community, rather than just by the pastor. To that end, **we are looking for two people willing to be co-leaders of each of these teams (four leaders altogether)**. These team leaders would work collaboratively with Pastor Miranda to form these teams and establish their goals and responsibilities.

The Leadership Team of Spirit of Grace would like to encourage you all to take some time in the next couple of months to consider whether you have the time, capacity, and calling to take on this roll and help Spirit of Grace live into our collective mission, vision, and guiding values. If you want to know more about what one of these co-leader positions would entail, reach out to Pastor Miranda to set up a time to chat.



Lifelong Learning

Women's Bible Study

Fourth Tuesday of the Month

July 23rd & August 27th

On the 4th Tuesday of each month at 2pm, women of Spirit of Grace and our surrounding community are invited to gather at the church building for a time of study and fellowship with one another. This group is led by lay members, using the Bible Study from the ELCA magazine, "Gather," which is currently offering a four-session study of the 10 commandments, written by ELCA pastor and author Christa von Zychlin, to help us see how these commandments are more than they may appear at first glance.



Living [in the] Word

Third Sunday of the Month

July 16th

On the third Sunday each month, Pastor Miranda leads a Bible Study after worship, during which we dig into a scripture text from the lectionary in the last month that we didn't have time to address during worship. This is a chance to engage with scripture as the Living Word of God. We ask questions of the text that help us better understand the history and context of the story, as well as consider how the text has changed over time and what meaning it has in our lives today.



Lifelong Learning

New Fall/Winter Book Study

This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories That Make Us

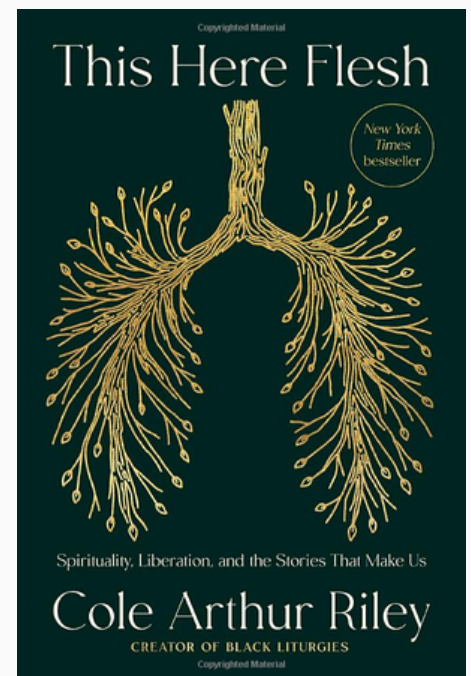
"From the womb, we must repeat with regularity that to love ourselves is to survive. I believe that is what my father wanted for me and knew I would so desperately need: a tool for survival, the truth of my dignity named like a mercy new each morning."

So writes Cole Arthur Riley in her unforgettable book of stories and reflections on discovering the sacred in her skin. In these deeply transporting pages, Arthur Riley reflects on the stories of her grandmother and father, and how they revealed to her an embodied, dignity-affirming spirituality, not only in what they believed but in the act of living itself. Writing memorably of her own childhood and coming to self, Arthur Riley boldly explores some of the most urgent questions of life and faith: How can spirituality not silence the body, but instead allow it to come alive? How do we honor, lament, and heal from the stories we inherit? How can we find peace in a world overtaken with dislocation, noise, and unrest? In this indelible work of contemplative storytelling, Arthur Riley invites us to descend into our own stories, examine our capacity to rest, wonder, joy, rage, and repair, and find that our humanity is not an enemy to faith but evidence of it.

At once a compelling spiritual meditation, a powerful intergenerational account, and a tender coming-of-age narrative, This Here Flesh speaks potently to anyone who suspects that our stories might have something to say to us.

This September, our Book Study Groups will resume meeting on **Sunday mornings at 8:30am** and **Thursday evenings at 6:30pm** to discuss this enlightening text! This book has 15 chapters, which we will begin to discuss over ten weeks in September-November, and will conclude in 5 weeks in January and February, with a pause in the middle for Advent.

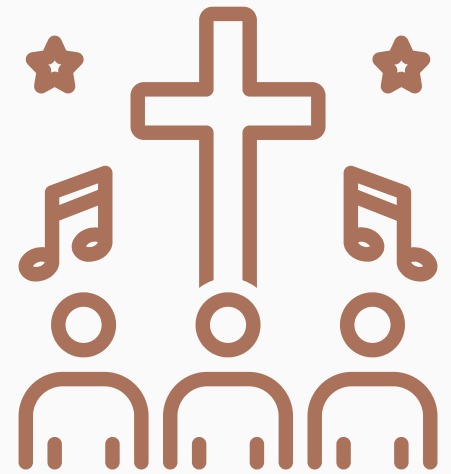
Study groups will resume the week of September 10th - keep an eye out for more information in the coming months!



Worship

Hymn Sing Worship Fifth Sunday of the Month July 30th

On the 5th Sunday of July, join us for a worship service dedicated to honoring the importance of music in our worship and faith lives! We will sing our favorite, classic hymns and listen to readings and reflections on the power of music to shape our spirituality and relationship with the Divine. We hope you'll join us for this musical worship experience!



Fifth Sunday Giving July 30th

Our special offertory for the 5th Sunday of the month will be going to support camp and outdoor ministry in our denominations. All offering designated as 5th Sunday Special Giving will be split between Camp Lutherwood (ELCA) and Camp and Retreat Ministries of Oregon and Idaho (UMC).



Season of Creation

September 1st - October 4th

This fall we will once again be celebrating the Season of Creation with ecumenical partners around the world! The theme this year is "Let Justice and Peace Flow," which is symbolized by a Mighty River. Join us in worship throughout September, concluding the first Sunday in October, to hear sermons focused on care of creation, engage in creative prayer practices, and learn about what creation has to teach us about the Christian values of peace and justice.



Church Updates

FISH June Distribution

Thank you to everyone who volunteered for distribution during our dates in June! There were **132 requests** that week, and **320 individuals** were served. In recent weeks,

FISH has hit record numbers of families served per day. Thank you for supporting this increasingly important resource in our community!



Collecting Care Kits

The women of Spirit of Grace have decided to collect items throughout the year that will be used to make up Baby Care Kits and Personal Care Kit. These kits are being collected by Lutheran World Relief, , and will be sent to places all over the world where there is need.

We will be collecting items for these kits through May 1st, 2024. There will be two large plastic containers in the church narthex where donations can be placed. We hope that all will participate in donating materials as they are able. Monetary donations are also accepted - be sure to indicate on the check or giving envelope that the donation is for "LWR Care Kits."

For information on donation guidelines, pick up an instructional sheet in the narthex, or visit www.lwr.org/kits.

If you have any further questions, reach out to Dottie Gilbertson (dottieg@gorge.net).



Church Directory Update

Thank you all for your patience with the delays in getting out a new and updated church directory! We are planning to make one last attempt to get an accurate count of our current membership and make sure that everyone's contact information has been updated.

In August, we will be sending out a Membership Audit letter, with a brief form to fill out and return indicating your membership status and current contact information.

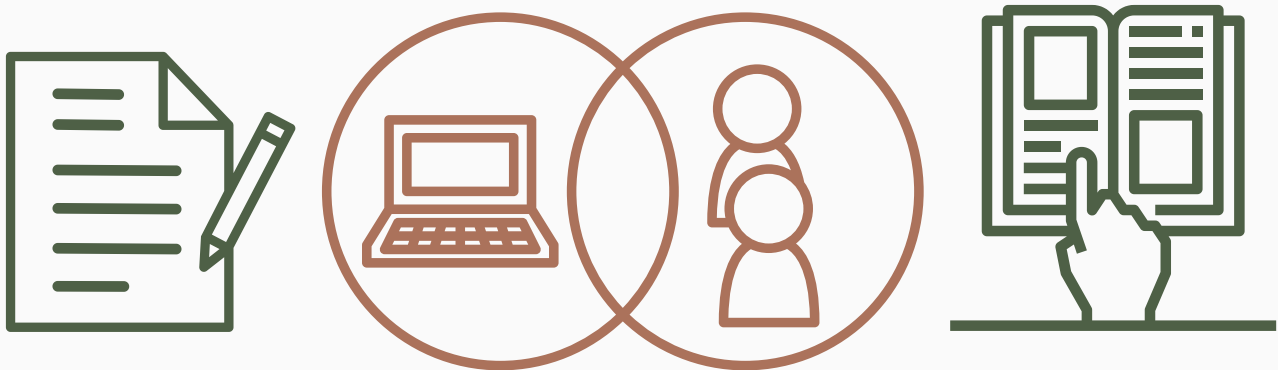
How can I help?

Great question! You can help by returning your Membership Audit form as soon as possible - and encouraging others you know to mail theirs in promptly as well!

We will also need **volunteers to help stuff and address envelopes**. Keep an eye out in Notes-n-News for an opportunity to help with this in August!

When can I expect the new directory?

In September and October, we will work on compiling our membership information into a new directory. This directory will be published through an **online membership directory program**, which will enable us to update the directory much more frequently and easily. Church members will be given a password to use to access the directory online - however, **printed copies of the directory will still be made available upon request!**



ELCA/UMC Updates

At the 2023 Annual Conference, Bishop Cedrick D. Bridgeforth offered a series of sermons focused on the Annual Conference Theme, "Go and Do Likewise." In his installation sermon, the bishop encouraged United Methodists across the GNW to "pray with our feet" and "get to neighboring" among many other topics. The other four sermons encouraged us to go the "M.I.L.E" with each sermon focusing on a different letter. M for "Ministry that Matters," I for "Itineration (and Location)," L for "Lay Ministry Enhancement," and E for "Eliminating Racism."

Watch all of these powerful sermons at this link:
<https://greaternw.org/m-i-l-e-2023-annual-conference-sermons/>

Annual Conference Reports can be accessed here:
<https://www.umi.org/acreports>



"An element in our country wants to legislate that the United States is a Christian nation where Christianity should be privileged and only Christians should hold office. This is Christian Nationalism, which is neither Christian nor patriotic."

Read more about what ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton has to say about resisting Christian Nationalism and what it means to be an American in the most recent Living Lutheran column:

www.livinglutheran.org/2023/06/who-is-a-real-american/

Prayer

For What Shall We Pray?



"For What Shall We Pray?" is a weekly post through ELCA Worship inviting individuals, groups, and congregations to lift up our world in prayer. See more like this at blogs.elca.org/worship

For peace in Palestine, Ukraine, Yemen, and Syria...
For all victims of gun violence, especially in Philadelphia, PA; Washington D.C.; Fort Worth, TX; Salisbury, MD; and Hayward, CA...
For students and for higher education professionals as they respond to and adapt to new legislative actions...
For police protests in France and for all who advocate for racial justice around the world...
For safety and relief in areas of the United States experiencing extreme heat...
For those suffering heavy rains, flooding, and heat waves in China and the Asia Pacific region...
For areas still struggling with compromised air quality due to fires and pollution...
For the ongoing effects of climate change and for increased compassion for our earth...
For protection and mercy upon all who travel, out of necessity or for pleasure...

This month we also ask that you take time to offer a special prayer for everyone impacted by the Tunnel 5 Fire, and for the firefighting crews putting themselves in harms way to keep our communities safe.



If you have prayer requests that you would like to be lifted up by our prayer chain and in Sunday morning worship, please email Carol Kyger (cckyger@gmail.com), who will pass your request along to our prayer chain.

If you are interested in being a part of our prayer chain that receives prayer request emails as they come in, please email Carol Kyger to be added to that list.

If you have a prayer request that you would like to be kept **confidential**, please email Pastor Miranda. These prayer needs will not be shared publicly unless expressly mentioned.

Weekly Reflections



July 2nd – Psalm 89:1

How do you tell the story of how God's faithfulness has shown up in your life? How do the stories of others influence the way you notice God's faithfulness?

July 9th – Matthew 11:28

Think of a time when you were experiencing weariness of heart, soul, or faith. How did you bring this weariness to God? What rest did you receive?

July 16th – Romans 8:5

It is easy to get caught up in the particulars of life and lose sight of the greater purpose to which God calls us. How do you make time to set your heart on the Spirit each day?

July 23rd – Psalm 86:17

What are signs of God's love and presence that you have noticed in your day to day life recently?

July 30th – Matthew 13:31-32

What do you imagine the Kingdom of Heaven to be like? How did you come to imagine it in this way?

August 6th – Matthew 14:17

God has the power to take what little we have and turn it into more than we could imagine. Where do you feel scarcity in your life? How might God transform that into abundance?

August 13th – Matthew 14:31

Doubt is a natural part of faith. Think of a time when you doubted God's work or presence in your life. How did that experience bring you closer to or further from God?

August 20th – Matthew 15:26-28

Do you feel comfortable pushing back against scripture or "talking back" to God? If not, why do you think that is? If so, how has this changed your faith?

August 27th – Matthew 16:16

Who do you say that Jesus is? What influences (scripture, stories, people, etc.) contributed to your understanding of who Jesus is?

July Church Calendar

Spirit of Grace Church Calendar

Jul 2023 (Pacific Time - Los Angeles)

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
25	26	27	28	29	30	1
2 Holy Communion 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 11am - First Sunday	3 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Women's Coffee Hour	4 Church Office Closed 10am - Men's Coffee Group	5 9am - Church Office Open: 9am - Quilting Group @	6 9am - Church Office Open:	7	8 9am - Women's Spirituality
9 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 2pm - Welcoming Church	10 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Women's Coffee Hour	11 9am - Church Office Open: 9am - Worship Team 10am - Men's Coffee Group	12 9am - Church Office Open:	13 Church Office Closed	14	15
16 Holy Communion 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 11am - Living [in the] Word	17 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Women's Coffee Hour	18 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Men's Coffee Group 6pm - Finance Committee	19 9am - Church Office Open: 9am - Quilting Group @	20 Pastor Miranda on Vacation	21	22
23 Pastor Miranda on Vacation	24	25	26	27	28	29
Food on the 4th 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 11:15am - Welcoming	10am - Women's Coffee Hour	9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Men's Coffee Group 2pm - Women's Bible Study				
30 Hymn Sing Sunday 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 2pm - Board of Directors	31 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Women's Coffee Hour	1	2	3	4	5

Important Dates

July 14th: Church Office Closed

July 18th: Finance Committee Meeting

July 20 - 29: Pastor Miranda On Vacation

July 30th: Hymn Sing Worship

July 30th: Board of Directors Meeting

August Church Calendar

Spirit of Grace Church Calendar

Aug 2023 (Pacific Time - Los Angeles)

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
30	31	1 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Men's Coffee Group	2 9am - Church Office Open: 9am - Quilting Group @	3 9am - Church Office Open:	4	5 9am - Women's Spirituality
6 Holy Communion 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 11am - First Sunday	7 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Women's Coffee Hour	8 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Men's Coffee Group	9 9am - Church Office Open:	10 9am - Church Office Open:	11	12
13 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 11am - SPRC Meeting 2pm - Welcoming Church	14 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Women's Coffee Hour	15 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Men's Coffee Group	16 9am - Church Office Open: 9am - Quilting Group @	17 9am - Church Office Open:	18	19
20 Holy Communion Newsletter Submissions Due 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 11:30am - Transforming	21 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Women's Coffee Hour	22 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Men's Coffee Group 2pm - Women's Bible Study	23 9am - Church Office Open: 5:30pm - Transforming Book	24 9am - Church Office Open:	25	26
27 Food on the 4th 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 11:15am - Welcoming	28 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Women's Coffee Hour	29 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Men's Coffee Group	30 9am - Church Office Open:	31 9am - Church Office Open:	1	2

Important Dates

Sundays in August: Sermon Series on "The Expansive God"

August 13th: SPRC Meeting

11:15am August 20th: "Transforming" Book Discussion, in-person

5:30 pm August 23rd: "Transforming" Book Discussion, via zoom

Contact & Connect

Sunday Worship

10:00 am

In-Person & Online

hoodriverchurch.com

Church Office Hours

9am - 1pm

Monday - Thursday

Staff

Pastor Miranda Bermes-Goller

spiritofgracepastor@gmail.com

Available during office hours or by appointment

Linda Boris, Pastoral Assistant

Available Tuesdays, 10am - 1pm



Spirit of Grace
Lutheran-Methodist Church

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541-386-3993

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Leadership Team Members

Board of Directors

Meets every other month

Pastor Miranda Bermes-Goller

Tom Hart, Treasurer (*end of term, 2024*)

Sharon Poynter, Secretary (*end of term, 2024*)

Shelley Oates, Chair (*end of term, 2023*)

Gordon Leigh (*end of term, 2023*)

Doug Swanson (*end of term, 2025*)

Cindy Murahashi (*end of term, 2025*)

Finance Committee

Meets quarterly

Pastor Miranda Bermes-Goller

Debby Chenoweth (*end of term, 2023*)

Dottie Gilbertson (*end of term, 2023*)

Tom Hart, Treasurer (*Treasurer & Payroll*)

Jennifer Fowler (*Financial Secretary*)

Staff Parish Relations Committee

Meets quarterly

Sharon Pantley, Chair (*end of term, 2024*)

Pat Moore (*end of term, 2024*)

Margaret Godard (*end of term, 2025*)

Lee Huckins (*end of term, 2025*)

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Watch Sunday Worship + Learn More on Our Website