

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2023

# Newsletter



## The Radical Welcome of God's Love

On October 29th, 2023, the members of Spirit of Grace voted to adopt our new Welcome Statement and become an official Open & Affirming congregation through our denominational programs: Reconciling in Christ (ELCA) and Reconciling Ministries Network (UMC). This is the culmination of over a year of intentional learning and discernment as a congregation, led by our Welcoming Church Team. We are overjoyed to proclaim this welcome loud and proud, and are excited to see how the Spirit will use this commitment to spur us into living out God's love in this time and this place.

Read our full welcome statement and learn more about RIC and RMN on pages 5 + 6.

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# Pastor's Letter

## Beloved Siblings in Christ,

At the end of October, we gathered for an important congregational meeting, during which we made commitments that will set the course for our ministry for the next year – and likely beyond that as well. It is particularly fitting that the date of this meeting was October 29th, the Sunday on which we celebrate our shared history and tradition of the Reformation, and remember our calling to always be reformers of God's church on earth.

Our meeting began with a vote to adopt our new Welcome Statement that we have been preparing for throughout the last year. After months of discussion, education, and dreaming together of the kind of community we long to be and become, our Welcoming Church Team created a statement that articulates the explicit welcome that we as a faith community promise to extend to all of God's beloved children, and especially to those who have been historically marginalized by the Church. I am thrilled to say that the statement was adopted and approved with an overwhelming and enthusiastic "yes!" from our congregation! However, this is not the end of our journey; it is only the beginning. To be a Reconciling church is an ongoing commitment – a promise we have made to one another, to God, and to our surrounding neighbors and community. In the coming year, there will be many new opportunities to participate in and live out this commitment in community with one another. It is my hope and prayer that we will all honor this covenant we have made with God, and continue this sacred work of reconciling relationships with all of God's children.



# Pastor's Letter

This decision was a huge milestone in our ministry together – but we didn't stop there! Our UMC District Superintendent, Tim Overton-Harris, led us in a presentation of the Greater Northwest Area's new ministry initiative, called "The M.I.L.E.", and led us in discerning commitments we were willing to make for each of the four identified areas. They are as follows:

**Ministry that Matters:** We commit to becoming more connected with the groups that use the FISH community room, and encouraging members of our community to volunteer/participate with these groups.

***Debby Chenoweth* has volunteered to be the lay leader for this commitment.**

**Itinerancy & Location:** We commit to identifying a lay member representative to service on the GEM Board, in order to deepen our connection with our partners in ecumenical and interfaith ministry throughout the Columbia Gorge.

**No one has yet volunteered to be the lay leader for this commitment.**

**Lay Leadership:** We commit to each pray about and send to Pastor Miranda the names of 1 or 2 members of our congregation who we think the Spirit may be calling to ministry in some way, shape, or form. Pastor Miranda will then convene with the leadership team to identify one individual who we will all, as a community, commit to praying for in the coming year.

***Everyone* in the congregation is called to participate in this commitment.**

**Eliminating Racism:** We commit to forming more relationships and connections with our Latinx and Indigenous neighbors, and sharing these stories with one another on a regular basis.

**No one has yet volunteered to be the lay leader for this commitment.**





# Pastor's Letter

A central part of this ministry initiative is that each of these commitments be shepherded by a lay leader from the congregation. If you have not already, I am inviting you to spend some time in discernment as this year draws to a close, considering if you have the capacity to help shepherd and steward one of these commitments – and, if you do not have the capacity, how you **will** commit to contributing to these ministry commitments in the coming year. If you feel the Spirit moving you to help lead or support any of these ministry initiatives, please reach out to Pastor Miranda to set up a time to talk.

Though our congregation is small, none of these commitments are beyond our reach. As Christians, we proclaim that we are called to be the body of Christ in God's creation, and to work together to bring about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth for all people. Each of these ministry commitments will help us live out this mission that we believe God has entrusted to us. However, none of these ministries will be possible if we are not willing to each step up and do our part. If we believe that we are called to be God's church on earth, then our actions need to reflect this belief. If all we are willing to do is wait for someone else to answer God's call, then we will find ourselves, like the unwise bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-13) left out of the celebration when God's Kingdom does become manifest on earth. God's promised Kingdom will always find a way to break through among us – the question before us, then, is this: are we willing to be a part of it? Are we willing to say an enthusiastic "Yes" to the God who created us all?

I pray that you ponder this question as the year draws to a close. My heart and prayers are with you all as we enter the Advent season and await the coming of the Christ child, born in human flesh among us.


In Peace,  
*Pastor Miranda BG*







# *Our Welcome Statement*



At Spirit of Grace, we believe that the love of God knows no bounds; that every person is beloved by God, bearing the image of the Divine.

We affirm the inherent goodness of all of God's children, many of whom have so often been prohibited from being their whole, authentic selves in God's church on earth. We welcome persons of any and every race, ethnicity, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

We lament the harm that the greater Church has committed against marginalized communities, and are working to take intentional steps towards repair and reconciliation with these communities. Our faith moves us to commit ourselves to the work of racial equity and anti-racism, as we strive to create a world that more closely resembles God's promised Kingdom. We long to be a community of people from all walks of life, made up of every age, race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, marital status, physical and mental ability, education, and faith history. We will not tolerate views that promote hatred or exclusion, nor will we allow conflict over differences to divide us. We believe that we are all growing into the fullness of who God wants us to become, and strive to practice grace with one another as we learn and grow.

We believe that God calls us all to be one in Christ, united in our uniqueness and diversity. Whoever you are, and wherever you are in your journey of faith, you are loved by God and welcome here at Spirit of Grace.

# Living Out Our Welcome

If you have not done so already, please take a moment to reach out to the members of our Welcoming Church Team to thank them for the extraordinary work they have done in this congregation over the last year! Without the hard work, faith, and commitment of **Alicia Bermes, Linda Boris, Debby Chenoweth, Sharon Poynter, and Michelle Sibley**, this journey would not have been possible. We are enormously grateful for the dedication and leadership of this team!

Now that we have adopted our Welcome Statement, we are officially part of the Open & Affirming network of churches through our denominations. In the ELCA, this program is known as Reconciling in Christ - in the UMC, this program is known as Reconciling Ministries Network. Both organizations have directories of Open & Affirming churches, which we will now be listed in. These organizations will also be available to us as a resource as we continue living into this journey of embodying God's radical welcome of all people in this time and this place.

Learn more at [reconcilingworks.org](http://reconcilingworks.org) and [rmnetwork.org](http://rmnetwork.org).

Speaking of living out this welcome, many of you are probably wonder what is next for us in this journey. **On the first Sunday in February**, we will have a **celebratory worship service** to honor this commitment and lift up the diverse voices of God's children, each of whom bear the image of the Divine. That afternoon, we will then gather with thee other Open & Affirming congregations in our area (Riverside and Bethel UCC) for a **celebratory potluck we are calling the Agape Feast!** We will come together as partners in ministry to support one another and discuss ways that we can collaborate in this work together. More information will be available after Christmas!

If you have any questions about our commitment as a Welcoming Church and what this means for us, you are always encouraged to reach out to Pastor Miranda to set up a time to chat.



RECONCILING IN CHRIST



Spirit of Grace Lutheran–Methodist Church invites you to join us for

# Advent Midweek Gathering

Meal – Discussion – Worship

## Dates

*December 6th*

*December 13th*

*December 20st*

## Schedule

**5:15pm**

*Soup Supper  
& Discussion*

**6:15pm**

*Evening Worship*

On Wednesday evenings in Advent, come and gather at Spirit of Grace for a simple soup supper and discussion on artistic depictions of the stories of Advent, followed by a simple evening prayer worship service.

All are welcome, regardless of religious tradition or faith practice.

1140 Tucker Rd. Hood River, OR

*Spirit of Grace is an Open & Affirming Congregation.*

*Read our welcome statement at [hoodriverchurch.com](http://hoodriverchurch.com)*







# *Spirit of Grace*

LUTHERAN - METHODIST CHURCH

Invites you to join us in  
celebration this  
Christmas Season!

## *Christmas Eve Worship*

A CANDLELIT SERVICE OF  
LESSONS AND CAROLS

7:00 PM

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24TH

In the event of bad weather, worship will move  
online, via Zoom. This decision will be announced via  
our website, and the link to worship will be available  
there as well.

1140 TUCKER ROAD  
HOOD RIVER, OR

Spirit of Grace is an Open & Affirming Congregation.

Read our Welcome Statement at:

[WWW.HOODRIVERCHURCH.COM](http://WWW.HOODRIVERCHURCH.COM)

# Advent & Christmas

## Sundays in Advent & Christmas Eve

Advent begins on **Sunday, December 3rd** this year. Join us in worship as we begin our Advent journey this year, then stay afterwards for a time of fellowship as we decorate our Christmas Tree together! **Thank you to Alan Yenne & Craig Terry** for donating and setting up our tree for us again!

The final Sunday in Advent falls on Christmas Eve this year, making it the shortest possible Advent season! **We will celebrate the final Sunday in Advent with a shortened service of Word & Prayer in the morning, followed by our candlelit service of Lessons & Carols in the evening at 7pm.** While we are planning on these services being in-person, we know that the weather doesn't always cooperate! Please check your email and the church website in the event of bad weather to see if worship has been moved to Zoom.



## Advent Midweek Gatherings

Our Advent Midweek Gatherings return this year, beginning on **December 6th!** Join us in the fellowship room at **5:15 for a simple meal of soup and bread** as we engage in fellowship and discussion with one another. This year, we will be reflecting on different artistic depictions of the stories and characters of the Advent season, and pondering together how these works of art tell the sacred story and bring it to life anew.

At **6:15, we will gather in the sanctuary for our evening prayer service.** This year we will once again be using the vespers service by Ray Makeever, called "Joyous Light," as we pause to ponder and prepare for the coming Christ child this Advent season.

**Our friends from St. Mark's Episcopal Church have been invited to join us this year, and will be helping us host on December 13th by providing the meal that week!**

# Leadership Team Discernment

As the end of the year quickly approaches, we are once again faced with the task of thanking our leaders who have served their terms on the leadership team faithfully and are now ready to step aside and make room for new leaders and different voices! We extend our utmost gratitude to **Shelley Oates and Gordon Leigh**, who have both served two consecutive terms on the Church Board and will be stepping down at the end of the year.

As we look ahead to the new year, we are looking for congregation members who are willing and able to step into various roles on the Spirit of Grace Leadership Team. This year, we are looking to fill the following positions:

- **Board Members (2 positions)**
  - Involves: quarterly board meetings, tending to business matters of the church, and collaborating with Pastor Miranda and the leadership team to discern the future ministry of our congregation.
- **ELCA Voting Representatives (2 positions)**
  - Involves: attending the Oregon Synod Assembly via Zoom, May 2024
- **UMC Voting Representative (1 position)**
  - Involves: attending the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference in Portland, June 20-23, 2024
- **GEM Board Lay Member Representative (1 position)**
  - Involves: attending GEM Board quarterly meetings and GEM monthly meetings (as possible).

Our Nomination Team will be reaching out to invite individuals to discern whether they are called to one of these positions in the coming year - but if you feel the Spirit moving in your heart about any of these opportunities, you are **highly encouraged** to reach out to Pastor Miranda to set up a time to talk!





# Life of the Spirit

## There's A Place For You

This fall, two youth of our congregation, Piper & Summer Sibley, joined Pastor Miranda for a Communion Class to learn about the sacred significance of the sacramental ritual we partake in during worship together. We read stories, sang songs, talked about what the love of Christ means to us, and baked communion bread together, remembering that there is a place for you, me, and all of God's beloved children at Christ's table!

In worship on October 1st, we celebrated this milestone in the faith of Piper and Summer, and watched with joy as they helped Pastor Miranda serve communion to the congregation!





# Life of the Spirit

## River of Grace

During the Season of Creation that we celebrated throughout the month of September, all were encouraged to bring their prayers for Creation to the interactive prayer piece in the sanctuary, called "The River of Grace." Each week, the river filled more and more with colorful fish holding the prayers of our congregation, until the river was overflowing with life at the end of the season! Thank you to all who participated in this community prayer practice. May the Spirit move us to respond to the prayers of our hearts.





# Life of the Spirit

## All Saints' Sunday

On the first Sunday in November, we observed All Saints' Sunday; the day on which we honor the saints of our lives who are now at rest with God. We honored our ancestors in the faith with our Remembrance of Saints Litany, read aloud the names of the dearly departed from the past year, and lit candles and brought mementos to the altar in memory of all those who have touched our lives.





# Church Updates

## FISH December Distribution

Our next dates to serve for Food Distribution will be **December 18, 20, and 22.**

This week before Christmas will be an incredibly busy and important week at the food bank, and it is our honor to serve during this important time! Please contact Bette Lou Yenne (541-386-5031 or [abyenne@gorge.net](mailto:abyenne@gorge.net)) to get signed up to volunteer.



## Collecting Care Kits

The women of Spirit of Grace are collecting 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.

Donations can be brought to the display in the Narthex. 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](http://www.lwr.org/kits).

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



# New Staff Member

## New FISH Community Room Manager: Celeste Peralta

In the last few years, it has been our joy to watch this community resource be utilized well amongst our neighbors, serving not only as a meeting space for non-profits, but a place of celebration and learning as well, with classes offered throughout the week, and birthdays, baptisms, and baby showers occupying the room on most weekends! Since the departure of our previous Office Manager, Jennifer Fowler, in Summer of 2022, the management of the FISH Community Room has been shared between Pastor Miranda and Debby Chenoweth. However, in order to properly care for and steward such an important community resource, it became clear that this would only be a hold-over solution, and a designated staff person would need to be hired to take on these responsibilities.

Not long after posting the Community Room Manager job position this fall, Celeste Peralta reached out to us with an interest in the position. After a wonderful interview, it was clear that Celeste was the perfect candidate for the position, and we were thrilled when she accepted the offer! Celeste works fulltime for The Next Door, and is eager for another opportunity to become engaged and connected with the community. In addition to being comfortable and confident with technology, Celeste is also fluent in both Spanish and English, which will be enormously helpful for the clientele of the FISH Community Room!

Celeste has been working with Debby Chenoweth this past month to get trained in, and will meet with Pastor Miranda and Debby in December to flesh out the details of this position. **Beginning in the new year, Celeste will be the primary contact for matters relating to the FISH Community Room.** We can't wait to see how the use of this room will flourish under her stewardship!

We hope to have Celeste join us for fellowship sometime in the near future so she can get to know the people of our community!

**Additionally, the next time you see Debby Chenoweth, be sure to express your gratitude for the immense, unpaid work she has graciously given to the congregation to ensure the Community Room remained operational!**



# 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](https://blogs.elca.org/worship)

*For peace among nations and for military de-escalation...*

*For safe return of hostages and for attentiveness to humanitarian needs in Palestine and Israel...*

*For residents of Iceland and New Guinea, as volcanic activity increases...*

*For continued rescue operations following a tunnel collapse in northern India...*

*For all victims of gun violence and for their loved ones, especially in Beavercreek, OH; Custer County, CO;*

*For cleanup efforts following the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico...*

*For families and friends who gather this holiday season, especially those whose relationships are strained...*

*In thanksgiving for all of God's gifts...*



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](mailto: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



## **November 5th: Revelation 7:17**

*When you imagine God as our comforter, what image comes to your mind? How do you experience comfort through the Divine?*

## **November 12th: Amos 5:18**

*God's justice is promised to us – it just may not look like anything we would have anticipated. How do you center your life around God's coming justice?*

## **November 19th: 1 Thessalonians 5:11**

*How do you support and uplift your siblings in Christ? How do you feel supported by your community?*

## **November 26th: end of the church year**

*Which season of the church year impacted you or taught you the most this last year? Which season are you most looking forward to in the coming year?*

## **December 3rd: Mark 13:36**

*How do you stay attentive to and aware of the presence of Christ in our world? How do you awaken yourself to the calling of the Divine?*

## **December 10th: Mark 1:6**

*Who are the prophets of our day, calling us to prepare the way and ready ourselves for the inbreaking of the Divine in this world? What barriers prevent us from hearing them?*

## **December 17th: Isaiah 61:11**

*Where do you see sprouts of justice and righteousness emerging from God's garden in creation? How are you called to nurture these emerging sprouts?*

## **December 24th: Luke 1:52**

*Mary sings a prophetic song of justice at the news that she will bear the child of God, proclaiming that he will bring down the mighty and uplift the humble. Where do you see this prophecy at work among us?*

## **December 31st: Revelation 21:2**

*God is always at work, making a new creation in and through us. What newness do you feel God calling you towards in the coming new year?*

# November Church Calendar

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

## Important Dates

November 5th: All Saints' Sunday

November 6th-8th: Pastor Miranda Out of Town - Bishop's Convocation

November 13th-16th: Pastor Miranda Out of Town - Continuing Education

November 21st: Finance Committee Meeting

November 23rd: Church Office Closed - Thanksgiving



# December Church Calendar

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
26	27	28	29	30	1	2 9am - Women's Spirituality
3 Holy Communion 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 11am - First Sunday	4 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Women's Coffee Hour	5 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Men's Coffee Group	6 9am - Church Office Open: 9am - Quilting Group @ 5:15pm - Advent Midweek 7pm - Bell Choir	7 9am - Church Office Open:	8	9
10 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 11:15am - Welcoming	11 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Women's Coffee Hour	12 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Men's Coffee Group	13 9am - Church Office Open: 5:15pm - Advent Midweek	14 9am - Church Office Open:	15	16
17 Holy Communion 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 11am - Living [in the] Word	18 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Women's Coffee Hour	19 9am - Church Office Open: 10am - Men's Coffee Group	20 9am - Church Office Open: 9am - Quilting Group @ 5:15pm - Advent Midweek	21 9am - Church Office Open:	22	23
24 Food on the 4th 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary 7pm - Christmas Eve	25 Church Office Closed	26	27	28	29	30
31 5th Sunday Special Offering 10am - Worship @ Sanctuary	1 Church Office Closed	2	3 9am - Quilting Group @	4	5	6 9am - Women's Spirituality

## Important Dates

December 3rd: Christmas Tree Decorating

December 12th: Church Board Meeting

December 24th: Christmas Eve Worship

December 25th-January 5th: Church Office Closed,

Pastor Miranda working from home

# Contact & Connect

## Sunday Worship

10:00 am

In-Person & Online

[hoodriverchurch.com](http://hoodriverchurch.com)

## Church Office Hours

9am - 1pm

Monday - Thursday

## Staff

**Pastor Miranda Bermes-Goller**

[spiritofgracepastor@gmail.com](mailto:spiritofgracepastor@gmail.com)

Available during office hours or by appointment

**Linda Boris, Pastoral Assistant**

Available Tuesdays, 10am - 1pm



1140 Tucker Road

Hood River, OR 97031

**541-386-3993**

[office@hoodriverchurch.com](mailto:office@hoodriverchurch.com)

## Leadership Team Members

### Board of Directors

*Meets quarterly*

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*)

## Connect

### with us online!

Scan the QR codes with your phone's camera app, or click on the links



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Facebook for  
Weekly Updates +  
Inspiration



Give Online  
to Support  
Our Ministry



Watch Sunday Worship  
+ Learn More  
on Our Website

