



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | GRACE IN THE DESERT | FEBRUARY 2021

OUR FINANCIAL STATUS AT GRACE IN THE DESERT

Times have been tough for everyone this last year, and Grace in the Desert is no exception – here's a snapshot of our financial standing as of January 1, 2021

We are not generally comfortable talking about money because our belief is that the primary mission of the Church is just that – mission. But, the fact remains that we still have expenses that need to be paid each month, quarter, or year, depending on the cycle for billing for each expense. Pastor Ceri has not taken a paycheck from Grace in the Desert since November 2020. Prior to that, her monthly income from GTD was \$1,050 per month. Broken down, that includes \$700 for salary, \$300 for housing allowance, and \$50 for website and Newsletter creation. She is currently seeking employment that will allow her to continue making GTD a priority while still being able to pay her bills and be financially responsible. Last year, our expenses, outside of Pastor

Ceri's salary, were \$3173.78. Our only expenditure for rent was for the month of January. Otherwise, our expenses were for music and video licenses, insurance, website/domain name, and some miscellaneous. While she has not calculated for 2020, in 2019, Pastor Ceri also spent a little over \$3800 of her own money on church business. Beginning January 1, our balance in checking is \$987.46 and savings is \$289.68.

The bottom line is that even though we are worshipping on-line, we still have expenses that need to be paid and the work that needs to be done for each service is the same. It's just a different way of delivering the Word. Please consider making a gift to GTD so that we can continue to do the work we are doing to reach the World for Jesus.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

I didn't want this thank you to get lost in the above article – we want to thank all of you who are contributing and have contributed in any way to the ministry of Grace in the Desert. Time, talent, and treasure are all important to make this ministry happen. So, if you have contributed (or are now contributing) your time and talent, we greatly appreciate you and your service. If you have been contributing financially, we greatly appreciate you and your contributions. Everyone and everything working together is helping us to move forward in our mission and vision of reaching people for Jesus. 😊

Church Events

- † February 7 – Worship at 9:00
 - “What Will Heaven Be Like?”
- † February 9 – Bible Study at 6:30
 - “What Will Heaven Be Like?”
- † February 14 – Worship at 9:00
 - “Beloved”
- † February 16 – Bible Study at 6:30
 - “Beloved”
- † February 17 – Worship at 7:00
 - Ash Wednesday – “Redemptive Love”
- † February 21 – Worship at 9:00
 - Lent 1 – “Compassionate Love”
- † February 23 – Bible Study at 6:30
 - “Compassionate Love”
- † February 28 – Worship at 9:00
 - Lent 2 – “Steadfast Love”
- † March 2 – Bible Study at 6:30
 - “Steadfast Love”

Of Lent and Love

While Lent and Love may not seem, at first glance, to go together, it could be argued that the greatest Act of Love in human history happened on that first Good Friday as Jesus died on the Cross for the sins of humankind

February is the month in our calendar when we talk a lot about the “L” word – Love. We acknowledge that God is Love. We strive to live into the agape love that God shows us as He loves us unconditionally in spite of our sins, faults, failures, and shortcomings. It is how we are called to love each other. Even, Jesus said, our enemies as He tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

As hard as this is, we just need to remember the words of Jesus from the Cross – “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” That is agape love in action. Jesus didn’t just pour out His blood because of Love for those who we believe are worthy – He poured out His blood for the entire world. Take a good look at John 3:16 – For God so loved the **world** – that means everybody. And I would argue that’s where the connection between Lent and Love is really apparent. God

so loved the world with a Love that we can’t imagine and don’t deserve – to the point that He came to earth as a human and died an awful death so that we could gain salvation and not have to suffer the consequences of our sin.

How many of us love like that? How many of us would even think to sacrifice our life for the life of someone else – even someone we totally love? Valentine’s Day is a day to show those we love how much we love them – but what if we were more like God and showed them every day of the year? What if every day was like Valentine’s Day? What if we were more like God and how He loves to everyone in our lives and our community? In the words of Louis Armstrong, “What a wonderful world it would be.”

1 John 4:8
Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

One of the most beautiful Truths in Scripture is that “God is Love.” He is the role model for Love ... He loved us enough to come down to Earth and die for us so that we could be reconciled to Him. He wants us to love others like He loves us ... with His Spirit living inside us, that is possible, but, unlike God, we have to work at it to make it happen. ☺

Lenten Love

Each worship service during Lent and Holy Week will look at a different facet of God’s amazing Love for us.

During this season of Lent and the week that we call Holy, we will be involved in the following aspects of God’s Love:

Ash Wednesday (Feb 17) – God’s Redemptive Love
First Sunday in Lent (Feb 21) – God’s Compassionate Love
Second Sunday in Lent (Feb 28) – God’s Steadfast Love
Third Sunday in Lent (Mar 7) – God’s Enriching Love
Fourth Sunday in Lent (Mar 14) – God’s Living Love

Fifth Sunday in Lent (Mar 21) – God’s Holy Love
Palm Sunday (Mar 28) – God’s Saving Love
Maundy Thursday (Apr 1) – God’s Selfless Love
Good Friday (Apr 2) – God’s Sacrificial Love
Easter Sunday (Apr 4) – God’s Joyous Love
We talk a lot about God’s Love – this is a great opportunity to explore it in depth – and live into it in our own lives.

Alpha Helpers Needed

Have you ever been through an Alpha Course? Are you wondering what you can do to help GTD get the word out about Jesus? Do you have friends, family, co-workers who don’t know your Jesus yet? We are in the process of getting ready for Alpha. I know we’ve talked about this before, but we are putting the rubber to the road and need to get this started. It is not a one-person adventure -- we could use a couple more people (at least) to help with leading our sessions and making this happen at GTD. It’s time to stop talking about it and JUST DO IT! Please let us know how you can help. We’d love to have you on-board. ☺_

Our Lenten Journey

Our Lenten and Holy Week journey this year of 2021 – “God’s Love is Shown” -- delves into the rich and diverse aspects of our Lord’s love for us shown most clearly in the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Each service focuses specifically on a meaningful descriptor of God’s love and applies that description to the words and actions of our Lord who is God’s love incarnate come down to save us. Beginning with Ash Wednesday and moving through until Easter Sunday, we will explore God’s Love for us and how it is shown in the Person of Jesus Christ – and how we can best reflect that Love to the World as we live out the Christian Life.



Pastor Ceri's Corner

What are you giving up for Lent – or are you adding something as a sacrifice?

Every year around this time, we hear the same question around Christendom – “What are you giving up for Lent?” I always used to give up something I really liked – chocolate or some other food or beverage – but a few years ago, I had a thought. It seems that no matter what we give up, we are counting down until the time when we can have that thing again. So ... how far does our sacrifice really go? If we don't plan on giving something up permanently, then how serious are we about making an actual sacrifice? It struck me that adding something is just as much of a sacrifice as giving something up. And, that addition could well become a habit. – what a concept, huh?

So, I have begun the practice of adding something during Lent – a sacrifice of time. I add an additional devotion to the ones that I already do each year. This year, I will be adding a devotional entitled “By His Wounds We are Healed.” I also have a couple more – hopefully, I'll do at least one of them. It is my prayer as I do this each year that this additional devotion will become a habit and that I will continue to keep doing an “extra” devotion each day. I am human and a sinner and I don't always accomplish this but, like many, I will try and hope that, this year, I will succeed in my grand plan. 😊

Maybe we could add something to our daily routine that would be pleasing to God – maybe not daily, but weekly messages to an assisted living facility, long term care facility, or hospital. Perhaps, after COVID is over, this could turn into a ministry of sorts – visiting the sick and hurting is always pleasing to God. Maybe making a plan to spend more quality time with family or friends – or both. That doesn't have to be expensive and it doesn't even have to be in person – maybe scheduled Zoom visits or game nights – or date nights with our spouse ... all ideas that can become habits by adding them during Lent and continuing to practice them after that season has passed. Maybe we could combine our daily prayer with a walk around the block or around the community. It's good for the soul and the body – and you never know who you will meet on the way – maybe someone you could invite to church (whether in person or virtual).

Back to the giving something up for Lent, perhaps that, too, can be an opportunity to give up something that really is not good for us and to have that become a habit moving forward. Maybe there's a food (or a food group) that is keeping us from being as healthy as we could be. Or perhaps there's a beverage (or two or three) that, if absent from our lives, would help us to be healthier. Our bodies are God's temple, so we do need to take care of them. So ... you get the idea ... sacrifice is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor and it doesn't always mean giving up, sometimes it can mean adding to. I think the whole concept is to find ways during Lent that we can honor God and draw closer to Him as we remember His Sacrifice for us on the Cross. No matter how we do that, God will be pleased. 😊

In His Abundant Grace and Love,

Pastor Ceri 😊



Some Hard Truths ... and Lots of Hope

With many churches closing their doors, God isn't done with Grace in the Desert

As I write this, more and more churches are closing their doors because of lack of money. That's the bottom line. It's a fact of life in this pandemic that some people don't have the money to give to church – it becomes a low priority. And I also think that for some, the perception is that if a church is strictly on-line, expenses must be less, too. But that is not the case. We still have to have liability insurance, we still need to keep our music and video licenses up. While I am not currently drawing a salary, I am putting in the same amount of work each week and month to make sure that we have a service, the website is updated, and the Newsletter goes out.

In light of our financial situation right now, it appears that our only option when we are able to go back to live worship is to continue to worship from our home in Buckeye. That accomplishes a couple of things – our insurance is lower and we don't have to pay rent.

As I said before, the primary goal of the Church as a whole and this congregation is mission – getting the word out about Jesus to those who do not yet know Him. The bottom line, though, is that I cannot do that alone – that is another hard truth. I am one person and, while doing Alpha online is much easier for less people to accomplish on-line, more hands would make much lighter work.

So here's the bottom line – we are struggling financially, but God is still working in and through us – and He will do powerful things with our ministry, if we will let Him. I don't believe He wants us to close the doors, but we are definitely in a period of growth and learning about what we are actually made of.

It's challenging – I know that, believe me. But it's not impossible – God is in the midst of us working in and with and through us to build His Kingdom. He has giving us all the tools we need to be active participants in a grand experience of knowing and serving Him. I believe we are up to the challenge and that brings me Hope – the Hope that only comes from the Spirit moving in and through us.

We are gaining viewers on Facebook Live. We have been boosting the service each week and have gained page likes and service likes each week. That is a great start – and Alpha can build on that foundation. There is reason to Hope ...

Our good friend Deb Goguen's verse when she was Rectora sums it all up for me – it is my prayer for all of us and my prayer for Grace in the Desert.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Romans 15:13

PLAN FOR 2021

Some of you know, all too well, that I'm a bit of a planner – I like to know what's happening so I can be prepared. Now, I'm not against being spontaneous and being surprised here and there, but when it comes to Grace in the Desert, I like to have a plan. So, I'm going to share with you our tentative plan for worship for 2021. This is not written in stone – if there is something that comes up that you all have a burning desire to delve into, then this can be changed, but for now, this is our plan for the year. 😊

- † February
 - Finish up “The God Questions” message series and Bible Study
 - Transfiguration/Jesus’ Baptism Sunday
- † February 17 - April 4
 - “God’s Love is Shown” message series and Bible Study
 - Special services for Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday
- † April 11 – May 16
 - “Father, Master, Bridegroom, King” message series and Bible Study based on Jesus’ Kingdom Parables
- † May 23 – Pentecost
- † May 30 – Holy Trinity
- † June 6 – June 27
 - Message series on the Environment (Title to be determined)
 - We are currently scheduled to be on vacation on June 13 and June 20 but will pre-record the services for those days before we leave – with COVID, this could change so we’ll keep you posted

- † July 4 – Special service for Independence Day
- † July 11 – August 1
 - “The Lord is My Shepherd” message series based on the 23rd Psalm
- † August 8 – August 29
 - Message series based on the Book of Jonah (Title to be determined)
- † September 5 – Special service for Labor Day
- † September 12 – October 24
 - Message series and Bible Study based on the Book of James (Title to be determined)
- † October 31 – Special service for Reformation
- † November 7 – Special service for All Saints’ Day
- † November 14 – Stewardship
- † November 21 – “King of Glory, King of Love” special service for Christ the King Sunday
- † November 24 – Special service for Thanksgiving (Title to be determined)
- † November 28 – December 24
 - “O Come Emmanuel” message series and Bible Study
 - Special service for Christmas Eve
- † December 26 – Special service for the New Year

Please note that between Memorial Day and Labor Day there will not be a formal Bible Study; however, if you want to gather informally during that time, that is definitely an option. 😊 There will also not be Bible Study during the time when I am on vacation, whenever that might be. 😊

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, February 14

February 14 is Valentine’s Day – it’s also Transfiguration Sunday. During worship, we will be celebrating the Love of God as shown in the Baptism and Transfiguration of Jesus – our service will focus on “Beloved.”

Wednesday, February 17

February 17 marks the beginning of the Season of Lent – the time we set aside leading up to Holy Week and Easter to ponder on the Sacrifice made by Jesus on our behalf. It is generally a time when we make a sacrifice by giving up something that is meaningful for us during these 40 days See the article above for more about this. 😊

