



*Celebrating
30 Years
of Ministry*



GRACE CELEBRATION
LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Story of Grace Celebration Lutheran Church

30 Years of Ministry

The Grace Celebration Family gathers today, August 27, 2023, to rejoice in our first 30 years of Church formation and growth. The following pages share some of the historical facts and pictorial highlights surrounding our Blessed Church. All the people pictured were involved and are an important part of our Church. We pray that each one might tell others of the love we share in Jesus Christ.

Grace Celebration Church had its beginnings when Pastor Roger Theimer was called to our Mid-South District for Mission Development in May 1992. He was installed in September of that same year at Faith Lutheran Church in Collierville, TN. Sunday night prayer meetings then began in October in leased space in Cordova.

Our unique founding group of “church planting” young people included Alex and Sue Knowles, Matthew Johnson and Jeffrey Ivey. Some of the group had recently graduated from Concordia College in Bronxville, NY and had voluntarily relocated to the Memphis, TN, area. With Pastor Roger, they began spreading The Word.

In February 1993, our group’s first service was held at the Mid-South District Office on Massey Road in Memphis. The Educational Building at Charter Lakeside became our first Sunday Morning “lease facility” in April and our official Charter Sunday was held on June 6, 1993. In October of that same year, our members held a “phonathon” through which many volunteer members from our sister congregations helped place thousands of phone calls to residents of the area making them aware of our new Church.

Our Church continued to grow and by March 1995 we moved to a new worship location at the Pickering Center in Germantown, TN. Later in August, Pastor Theimer accepted a call to Omaha, NE. Our worship services continued with assistance from guest pastors and a committed group of lay leaders.

It was in June 1996 that Pastor Mark Brunette from California accepted a call to lead our congregation. Our Sunday Services moved to the Shelby Place Banquet Arena. In March 1998, we then expanded to the auditorium of Evangelical Christian School (ECS). For the first time, we did not have to set up chairs for worship on Sundays. In July 1999, we held the “ground-breaking” ceremony at our site on Trinity Road and began construction of our Church.

In June 2000, our dedication service was held with hearts full of JOY and PRAISE. The children sang, “The Church is not a building...the Church is the people.” Our Open Arms Center opened later. We have been blessed to have many seeking Jesus over the last 30 years.

Through all these 30 years, Grace Celebration has seen steady growth even through the usual hardships. But through these times and numerous outreach efforts it has always moved forward in its mission to spread the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ to our neighbors and beyond. From Mission trips to Mexico and Tanzania and attendance at National Youth Gatherings, to food distributions and prayer walks for those in need in our neighborhood, and support of our local VBS and YMCA Youth Programs, Grace Celebration has set an example of Christ’s love for others. We shall tell these stories through narratives and pictures for you to see and remember.



Pastors of Grace Celebration Lutheran Church

Pastor Roger Theimer

Sept. 1992 - Aug. 1995

Pastor Mark Brunette

June 1996 - 2005

Pastor Steve Schneider

2005 - 2014

Pastor Ken Kreuger

June 2015 - Dec. 2016

Pastor Shawn Hunze

Sept. 2017 - Dec. 2017

Pastor Jim Belles

Mar. 2018 - Present

Pastor Terry Tieman

Aug. 2018 - Present

Grace's First Pastor: Rev. Roger Theimer

Pastor Theimer led us through the establishment of Grace Celebration following his installation in September of 1992. He led our first service in February, 1993. He served Grace Celebration until August of 1995 when he accepted a Call to King of Kings Lutheran Church in Omaha, NE, where he now serves as Pastor/Director of Kids Kount Publishing. His specialty is children's and family ministry, leadership and personal spiritual health. He consults and presents at conferences in the U.S. and abroad.



Grace's Current Pastors:

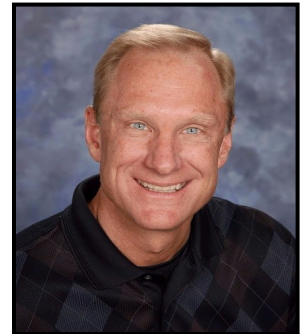
Rev. Dr. Terry Tieman

Terry Tieman began his career in ministry as a pastor in Michigan and Arkansas. He then served for 13 years as Mission Executive of the Mid-South District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS).

In January 2009, Terry became the Executive Director of Transforming Churches Network (TCN), which helps churches become more effective in reaching their communities with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. TCN's transformation process—which is based on Biblical principles and was developed through worldwide research on effective mission movements and pilot projects—has successfully changed hundreds of churches from the inside out.

Terry continues to gain front-line experience as Pastor at Grace Celebration Lutheran Church in Memphis, Tennessee, where he began serving August 1, 2018. He is also the author of several books, including *Hinges: Opening Your Church's Doors to the Community*, *Catching Vision*, *Skill Builders*, and *People of Passion*. Terry's most recent work has led to the development of Seasons of Discovery, a step-wise church transformation process.

Terry and his wife Becky, have three sons and four grandchildren. Becky teaches English Second Language classes at Newberry Elementary in Memphis.

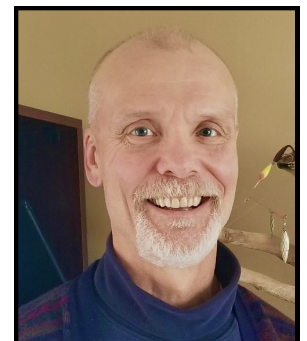


Rev. Jim Belles

Pastor Jim's path into ministry took an unconventional path. As a meteorologist with the National Weather Service (NWS) for thirty-one years before retiring, Jim predicted tornadoes, blizzards and floods from North Dakota to Mississippi. During the last sixteen years of his experience he served as Meteorologist in Charge of the NWS office in Memphis, Tennessee.

In the midst of that vocation, God led Pastor Jim into ministry. For years he served youth, engaged in jail ministry, helped deliver the Gospel with the Gideons International and as a lay deacon with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, where Pastor Jim has served at Grace Celebration and surrounding LCMS churches as the need arose. In 2018, Jim was ordained, through the LCMS specific ministry colloquy program.

It's easy to connect with Pastor Jim; just strike up a conversation about weather or fishing and you are on your way to discussing God's wonderful creation. Jim is married to Jean and they are blessed with four sons.

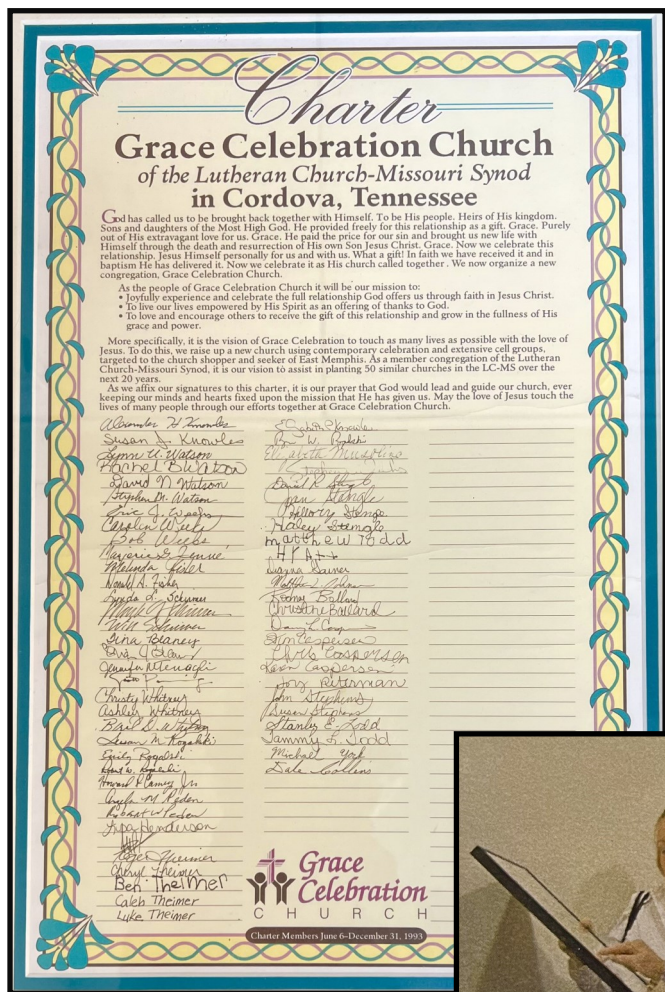


New Beginnings
Ground Breaking

— July 26, 1998 —

"For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with you."

- Matthew 18:20



Charter Members of Grace Celebration Lutheran Church

Pastor Roger & Cheryl Theimer

Benjamin, Caleb & Luke Theimer

Alex & Susan Knowles

Matthew Johnson

Jeffrey Ivey

Susan & John Stephens

Robert & Angie Peden

Joy Peterman

Rob & Sue Rogalski

Ryan & Emily Rogalski

Steve Carney

Mark & Linda Schirmer

Will Schirmer

Scott Panning

Bob & Carolen Weeks

Eric & Stephen Weeks

Marj Jenne

Dan & Joan Stengle

Hillory, Haley & Hyatt Stengle

Michael York

Steve & Lynn Watson

Rachel & David Watson

Lisa Henderson

Burl & Christy Whitney

Ashley Whitney

Jennifer Tenaglia

Pat & Susie Culley

Dale & Marianne Collins

Christy Grever

Jeff & Theresa Brunner

Rodney & Chris Ballard

Elizabeth Knowles

Don & Mindy Fisher

Stan & Sammy Todd

Ann Sands

Brian & Tina Blaney



Grace Celebration's *crosses*

The Cross on Trinity Boulevard –

Grace Celebration's cross on Trinity Boulevard was built by brothers Irvin and Len Hill. The two had constructed their first cross at Len's home congregation of Christ Lutheran in Little Rock. That church had a unique connection to Grace Celebration's second pastor, Mark Brunette: Christ Lutheran's pastor was his father and Len Hill was his wife's father! This close tie gave Pastor Brunette and his wife, Michelle, opportunity to see the church's beautiful cross—and a vision to have one built for Grace Celebration. But there were a few challenges along the way.

The first challenge was brother Irvin's health. After building the first cross, Irvin required a pacemaker to keep his heart in check. His doctor said no more electric welding for him. That didn't sit well with Irvin, so he made himself a steel vest from industrial hardware cloth and welded it up—and the vest worked. So Irvin and Len got to work!

The two worked with North American Marine Jet (NAMJ) in Benton, Arkansas to acquire the steel for Grace Celebration's cross. It was then fabricated by Irvin and painted by Len in Irvin's shop behind his home. Len and Irvin then loaded the cross onto NAMJ's trailer. The cross was well over 8 feet wide so it had to be stood on its side and secured to the trailer in that position, creating another big challenge. By their measurements, the highest point was a bit over 13 feet from the ground, which might create clearance issues as the cross traveled from Arkansas to Tennessee. But Irvin and Len figured "it is what it is," and took off from Benton, Arkansas, across the state to Cordova, Tennessee. Along the way, they did encounter an underpass in Memphis with a sign saying, "Caution, 13-Foot Clearance." Not wanting to stop in the heavy interstate traffic, they just slowed down as much as possible and waited for some terrible noise. Thankfully, there was no noise: they made it through! No one knows by how much the cross cleared that underpass. As for the rest of the trip, Irvin and Len don't recall much about it or erecting the cross where it stands now, except that it is anchored at least 8 feet in the ground. Despite the various obstacles, both men felt truly blessed to be a part of the cross at Grace Celebration. Our church is truly blessed by their gift.



The Altar Cross –

David Borchardt is the master craftsman, designer and builder of the beautiful cross behind our altar. The idea for the cross began with a conversation with Pastor Steve Schneider. At the time, we had a cross but it was relatively short, kind of "boxy" looking and leaned slightly. David offered to build a replacement and Pastor Steve helped him measure from the floor to the bottom of the overhead screen. From that measurement, they estimated the cross-beam width.

The inspiration for our current cross came from one David's Dad built for Immanuel Lutheran Church outside Merrill, Wisconsin. His was larger and mounted to the wall. David used red oak because it is a hardwood and has a nice, consistent grain he knew would be durable. All of the angles on the cross are 10 degrees—10 being the Biblical number of completion (Jesus completed his atoning work for us on a cross). The base was made from scraps of the cross itself. He used a mahogany stain to give it some "depth" and "richness," then finished it with two coats of satin polyurethane. A job well done, Good and Faithful Servant!



Children's Daycare at Grace Celebration

In 2000, Grace Celebration's child daycare program began as Open Arms. The program was later renamed and became a pre-school program, with an average enrollment of 80-85 children. Grace Celebration's daycare and pre-school programs provided a wonderful ministry to the surrounding community.

Directors of the Daycare Center prior to YMCA:

- Barbara Witt • Tangine Hayworth • Susan Woolley
- Lindsey Johnson • Pam Johnson



Annie Carney, Susan Woolley, & Gail Schneider

YMCA Early Learning Center

In the Fall of 2018, there was much discussion about the future of the Grace Children's Daycare Center, due to declining enrollment and rising costs. The church entered into a 30-day period of Prayer and Fasting with the intention of making a final decision in regard to continuing its Early Childhood Ministry. Almost immediately, we were contacted by the YMCA of Memphis about using our facility for their Summer Camp. This discussion expanded to consideration of transitioning the management and operation of the entire Daycare Center to the YMCA. This transition officially occurred on February 1, 2019.



Since then, we have been able to provide the love of Jesus to hundreds of children and their parents and share the Gospel message in the classroom, during chapel, at special events, and through daily connections. We continue to partner with the YMCA and again expect over 100 children to be enrolled in the Early Learning Center this Fall (2023) and another 60+ to attend Summer Camp.

God has richly blessed our partnership with the YMCA by providing a mission field on our own campus as well as financial resources that have allowed us to upgrade our facilities and add ministry staff. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!



Grace Celebration's *Praise Team*

The Grace Celebration Praise Team has been an integral part of worship at Grace Celebration Lutheran Church. We began with a keyboardist, a couple of guitarists, vocalists and a desire to lead worship. Over the years, the praise team evolved to include drummers, bassists, electric and acoustic guitarists, violinists, brass instruments and children's choirs at Christmas and Easter, as well as many vocalists. Our praise team is involved in worship planning, creative worship ideas, such as skits, dramatic readings, themed

services, and audiovisual elements to enhance the worship experience. There is no way to list all the previous members of the Grace Celebration Praise Team, but they were certainly valued members of our team. Our current praise team includes Barb Podawiltz (keyboardist/vocalist), Dave Borchardt (bassist/vocalist), Shawn Weiser (drums/vocalist), Kellan Weiser (guitarist/vocalist), Ashley Lesmes (violinist), Merrick Phillips (guitarist/vocalist), Michelle Weiser (vocalist), Lorna Miller (vocalist), Emma Tieman (vocalist), and Andrew Cornell-Laird (vocalist). The Praise Team is supported by sound and audiovisual technicians who run our sound board, streaming services, and the projector presentation which enhances our worship service. This dedicated team has also seen changes over the years and currently includes Steve Podawiltz and McKenzie Cornell.

We are proud to say that Grace Celebration has welcomed an additional praise band, "Water's Edge," who has been a tremendous blessing to the music ministry. Their members include Vickie Brown (vocalist), Michael Brown (guitarist), Hollie Brown (bassist), Pat Reese (keyboardist), Merrick Phillips (guitarist/vocalist) and Blake Braught (guitarist/keyboardist/vocalist). Water's Edge has led our worship during Saturday evening services, Advent and Lent services, and we are grateful to have them fill in on Sunday mornings as well.



The Weekly *Children's Message*

Among the many hats Shawn Weiser so masterfully wears is delivering clever, meaningful messages to the youngsters during a Sunday service. They are always original and captivating. On many occasions his close friend "Luther" the puppet will assist him in these endeavors. And you never know how Luther will be attired! He has a suitcase full of delightful ensembles. We adults enjoy Shawn's messages as much as the children.



Women's Ministry at Grace Celebration

The women of Grace Celebration have demonstrated their gifts and talents in numerous ways through the years. They have made beautiful wall hangings which have graced the sanctuary walls. They cross-stitched nearly 200 Chrismons which adorned the Christmas tree on the altar for many years and have added more decorative features in recent years. But most importantly are the numerous outreach ministries they have done for the community and beyond to share the Love of Jesus.

On a trip to Juarez, Mexico in November of 2000, our ladies of Grace Celebration partnered with Christ Church in Aurora, CO. Our second Medical Mission trip to Juarez was April 7-10, 2002. The ladies have also enjoyed numerous Women's Retreats.

Women's Bible Studies

Grace Celebration has been blessed with several women who have led Bible studies over the last 30 years including Jo Baker, Leslie Lynd, Barb Podawiltz, Jean Belles, Carmen Weiser and a host of those willing to be a step-in leader when one of them was unable to be there. We have covered books from both Old and New Testaments as well as topical studies relevant to living in our world today. We have provided meals and a "Secret Santa" for the child care center teachers, backpacks for school children, showers for new babies, and other outreach to our community. We did not let the inability to meet in person during Covid stop us as we continued to meet online through Zoom and were able to have women from other churches in several other states join us, as well. The women of Grace truly are "women of grace" as they are always willing to use the gifts they have each been given to give back to both the Church community and the community surrounding us.



Grace Celebration's *Food Ministry*

Holy Smokers/Smoked by Grace was formed as a BBQ team and competed at the U of M spring game on April 22, 2022. God planted the seed for this as a ministry on July 12, 2022. Little did we know He had been working in our hearts since early February of 2022. He gave a mission for a mobile food ministry to feed the hungry and hurting people of our community, using BBQ as a vehicle.



Lori Bost, Steve Carney and Pastor Terry were all on board the from the beginning. This is not just a food ministry, it is also a music and prayer ministry. We were off and running with no money and no Smoker, but where God takes you, God will provide! In mid August, 2022 we had a smoker donated from some friends in Springdale, AR. A year later we have had over \$20,000 in contributions and grants through the Grace of God. We have had some modifications made to the smoker by Moore Tech Welding as a class project. We still have more welding and modifications to be done.

Since we began, we have done approximately 20 separate cooking sessions which have fed over 3,000 servings. Some of these sessions have been fundraisers for our Spanish ministry, our benevolence fund and the Holy Smokers. While the smoker was being worked on, we began our Meal of Love program that prepares frozen meals for those in need at no cost to them. We have made and given away approximately 1,176 servings through this ministry.

Included in the total is over 50 meals we have delivered to the homeless and we have prayed with those individuals. We also delivered 75 meals to the communities of Covington, TN and Wynne, AR for first responders after tornadoes struck both communities. None of this could be done without the support of so many of our family of Grace Celebration Lutheran Church.

It is amazing to think that we have over \$15,000 remaining in our fund! We are planning more modifications to the smoker/cooker, a PA system, tables and chairs, and either a box truck or a 16' trailer to store and transport all we need to carry out the ministry at the highest level. Your continued support is greatly appreciated, whether it is financial, prayer or physical participation. This is not our ministry: this is God's Ministry.

What has been done so far could not have been accomplished without the dedication of Ivan and Lori Bost, Steve and Annie Carney, Tim and Britney Belles and a list of other volunteers too numerous to mention and their financial support. We are prayerfully grateful.

And the best is yet to come!





Youth Group at Grace Celebration

In the early history of our church, Shawn and Michelle Weiser led the Youth Group, with Leslie Lynd and Leanne Chasteen leading the youth together from 2005-2010. Shawn Weiser joined them for the National Youth Gathering trips (2) and Darian Chasteen on mission trips (3) and winter retreats (2). Shawn also taught Sunday School. The group took a number of trips while also holding weekly meetings and Bible studies.

The kids christened their group High Voltage with the chosen scripture of John 8:12. The following young people were the founding members of High Voltage and paved the way for all the future groups. They hold a very special place in the hearts of their leaders:

Ian Drake
Ashley Chasteen
Cameron Bradley

Kelsey Ullrich
Natalie Mitchell
Leslie Lynd

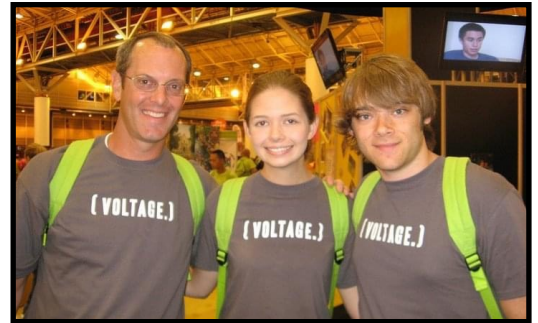
Maddie Ullrich
Caroline Lynd
Leanne Chasteen

Spencer Chasteen
Katie Campbell
Darian Chasteen

High Voltage also held a yearly fundraiser, a formal Valentines Dinner and a silent auction. The kids helped with decorating and setting up and they also served the guests. They worked diligently, resulting in very successful fundraisers. Each year, the proceeds went toward the cost of a group trip in the summer. High Voltage, along with FROGS (elementary age group) put on a full length Good Friday play, "A Handful of Nails," showing their dedication and talents. It was said of this group that they supported and loved each other better than many adults.

Many members of High Voltage attended Youth Gatherings and mission trips:

- 2005 Mission trip to Kingston, TN. Partnered with Group workcamps (10)
- 2007 National Youth Gathering, Orlando, theme was Chosen (11)
- 2008 Mission trip to Phipps Passes, KY partnering with Leadertreks (14)
- 2008 Mid-winter Gathering with other churches in our District (17)
- 2009 Mission trip to Pawleys Island, SC. Partnered with Leadertreks (18)
- 2009 Winter Retreat (17)
- 2010 National Youth Gathering, New Orleans, theme was Believe (23)



Led by the next youth leader, Paul Schoenherr, the youth of Grace Celebration continued to grow and participate in activities within the District and beyond. Melissa Morrow, Eddie and Debbie Walker also helped with the youth through these years. Other helpers were Ken and Amy Krueger and, most recently, Jean Belles. In 2016-2017, the group had a mid-week Bible Study. Gatherings attended by the group included:

- 2013 National Youth Gathering in San Antonio, TX (14)
- 2016 National Youth Gathering in New Orleans, LA (9)
- 2019 National Youth Gathering in Minneapolis, MN (7)

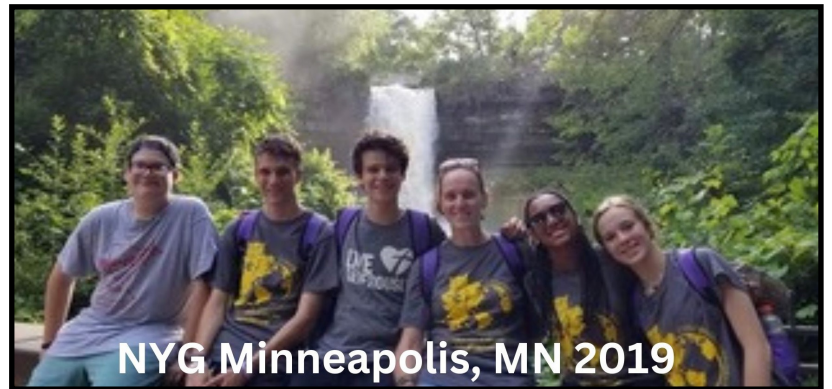




NYG, New Orleans, LA 2010



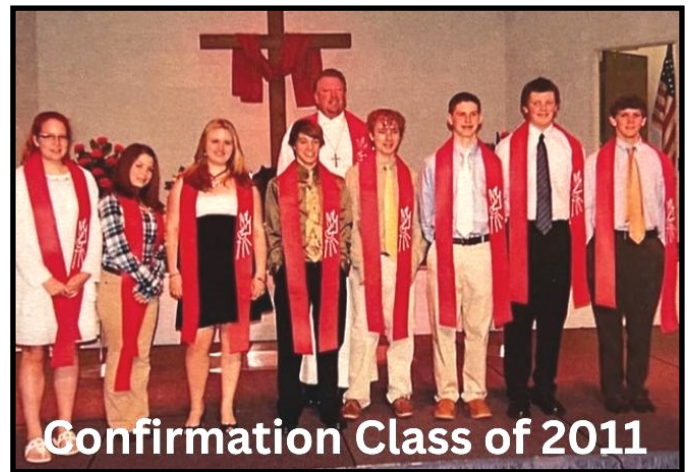
Youth serving at Valentine Dinner Fundraiser



NYG Minneapolis, MN 2019



Grace Celebration Lutheran Church
HIGH VOLTAGE
WINTER RETREAT
2009



Confirmation Class of 2011

There are two people who are shining examples of the influence of growing in faith through a strong youth group program. They are **Timothy and Britney Bost Belles**. They met at Grace Celebration, grew up in the Youth Ministry at Grace and are now married. Now expecting their first child, they are both deeply involved in ministries of Grace Celebration. Britney teaches Sunday School and Tim teaches the teen group.



Outreach at Grace Celebration

Luke2Project

The Luke2Project is a faith-based organization that aims to spread the message of Christ to reach the lost, one non-believer at a time. The concept is simple: wear a Luke2 shirt to promote the gospel and start a Christ-centered conversation.

Grace Celebration embraced this outreach by having a Prayer Tent at Bert Ferguson Park recently, with many more prayer opportunities in the future.



LifeWise Academy

This new outreach is well into the planning stages, with the much-anticipated launch through Riverwood Elementary on August 29, 2023.

LifeWise Academy is a Released Time Religious Instruction (RTRI) program which provides Bible-based character education to public school students. Under RTRI laws, students can be released from public school during the school day to attend religious classes, provided the program is off school property, privately funded and parent-permitted.

LifeWise Academy serves students by offering practical Bible-based education for the betterment of students' academic performance, character development and mental health. We believe all students can benefit from the message of the Bible and take great care to make all instruction relatable and helpful to those without a church or Christian background.



Vacation Bible School (VBS)



Working *Behind the Scenes* at Grace

We want to mention those individuals who, with their talents and dedication, create the framework for a beautiful and seamless weekly Sunday service. These tasks begin with the planning of the music to developing the Power Point for visual display and operating the sound/video booth. Each of these individuals serve Grace Celebration in so many other ways beyond these weekly duties. We so often take their work for granted.

- **Shawn Weiser** does the Power Point for every service.
- **Barb Podawiltz** and **Shawn Weiser** plan the music each week.
- **Vicki Brown** plans the music for Water's Edge.
- **Steve Podawiltz** masterfully handles the sound and video booth. We would be remiss to not mention that he is also our Maintenance Guru Extraordinaire.
- **Les Weiser** also assisted in the sound booth. We all miss Les so much!
- **Ron Lynd** is another great sound booth tech.
- **McKenzie Cornell** has become another indispensable sound booth tech.
- **Jessica Hearne**, our church secretary, creates our weekly bulletins and also serves as videographer, especially for Pastor Terry and Pastor Jim's weekly messages.
- **Ann Sands** sets up and takes down the altar each week. Additionally she sends Birthday, Get Well and other appropriate cards to our church family.
- **Kerry Weiser** is our steadfast acolyte and assists with the Communion Service.
- **Barb Podawiltz, Michelle Weiser** and **Tammy and Darin Drake** also demonstrate their creative talents on the altar for special Holidays during the year.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to name everyone in this vibrant church family who do so much and give so freely.

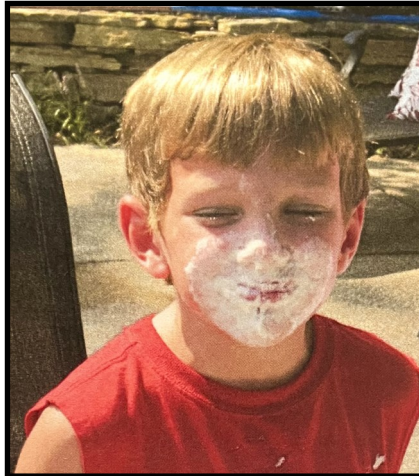


Thank You, All!

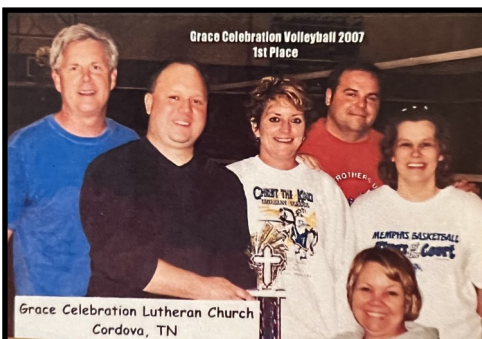
Grace Celebration Lutheran Church *Family Memories*



2011 Champions



Mike & Ann Sands
25th Anniversary, Vows renewed
Pastor Roger Theimer



Grace Celebration Volleyball 2007
1st Place

Grace Celebration Lutheran Church
Cordova, TN







*Happy 30th Anniversary,
Grace Celebration Lutheran Church!*

– OBSERVED SUNDAY, AUGUST 27, 2023 –

Acknowledgments:

Anniversary Celebration Table Decorations:

Stephanie Weiser, Michelle Weiser & Mikaela Cornell

Anniversary Celebration Catering:

Octavia Johnson

Anniversary Celebration Video:

Shawn Weiser

30th Anniversary Commemorative Book:

Stephanie Weiser, Ann Sands, Sheila Adcock,
Renaë McElwain & Jessica Hearne