

Annual Report 2025 - Website Version

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Prepared for the Annual Meeting – January 18, 2025 of

Grace Church in the Mountains, Waynesville, NC

Celebrating that Christ is all and in all by

Inviting ~ Seeking ~ Belonging ~ Serving ~ Reverencing God's Creation

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Senior Warden Report – Mary Lockey

There is a familiar expression, “we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us.” It is a paraphrase of a statement attributed to Bernard of Chartres (12th century) and Isaac Newton (1675.) Both men must have served on their respective Vestries, perhaps as Senior Warden. That sentiment describes how I have often felt over the past year as the Vestry and I seek to support the mission of Grace Church and our dear rector, Joslyn, through our effective management of resources and finances and in planning for the future.

Many of the accomplishments of this year’s Vestry were the culmination of ideas that were put forth by previous Vestries. The rain garden construction is in progress, we added a Minister of Formation and Outreach to the staff, and important maintenance projects for the church and Grace House were begun (some completed, some in progress, some to be planned.) Outreach ministries continue to thrive and strive to meet the growing needs of our community. To minister to our growing parish with efficiency and a clear focus, the Parish Programs Committee will be divided into Parish Life and Formation. The committee reports that follow offer highlights and details of all that was accomplished in 2025, so I will not summarize here what you will soon read. I’d rather offer a personal reflection with my Warden’s report.

A “light bulb” moment in my Vestry service happened last year when Michael Boss, our Treasurer, said, “A budget tells a story.” I was staring at a page of numbers in columns when I heard “story.” I perked up, thinking, “Story? Now you’re speaking my language.” Michael explained that a financial budget can tell a story by revealing priorities, values, and plans through our financial choices. From

that moment, I began to look not only at the *budget* as a story but at *all the ministries* at Grace Church - including being Senior Warden - as a story, *our story*. I wondered, "how does my story fit in?"

I've often thought that it's no accident that we are together here in this place called Grace. We've each come with our own stories. By sharing these individual stories, whether it be at a large newcomers' gathering or over coffee with just one other person, we weave them into the fabric of a larger Grace narrative, the story of the family of God.

You might also say we each offer a verse to a song. "A Chorus of Generosity" is the stewardship theme the Vestry chose this year. While the *chorus* tells the larger Grace story, each verse is the story that we contribute. What does your verse sound like or what does it say? Is it a verse about serving in outreach ministries? Is it a verse about creating art or music to be shared in worship? Is it a verse about working with children and youth? Faithful attendance and prayer on Sunday? Leading a Sunday forum? Making repairs to our buildings or taking care of our beautiful grounds? Offering comfort and support through congregational care? There are so many ways to contribute to the larger Grace story or song. Everyone belongs. Every story matters.

That changes everything about church for me. If we remember that through our ministries we are living in the story of God, if we remember that by offering our time, talents, and treasure we are adding our verses to a chorus of generosity, we affirm our belonging to each other and to the fulfilling of God's work among us.

I led a forum in September when we started talking about stewardship at Grace. I believe that stewardship is much more than just four months on our calendar. It's part of our story throughout the year. In my presentation, I borrowed from Henri Nouwen's talk, "The Vulnerable Journey" and his book "A Spirituality of Fundraising." He reminds us that God has loved us for all eternity, and that our brief life is an opportunity to say to God, "I love you, too." Nouwen says, "The great mystery is that God *wants* us to respond, *wants* us to "say yes to God's eternal love," and to announce that love in our brief lives. It is a choice we can make. How we say "yes" to God is part of our story at Grace. ***

As my Vestry service comes to an end, I feel deep gratitude and love for:

- Joslyn for supporting me with your quiet wisdom.
- Joyce, Suzy, Georgia, Jesse, Trent, Blake, and Alex for saying "yes" to God through your Vestry service.
- Betty Bradley for your support and tireless service as Junior Warden and for what I know will be exceptional leadership as Senior Warden. You're the only woman I know who can diagnose an illness as an MD, make building repairs, play the organ, farm, cook, lay out a labyrinth, sing in French, and do all the other things I may be missing. Yours is an amazing story, and I'm grateful you are sharing it with Grace.

Deacon's Report - The Rev. Carter A. Smith

This past year has been deeply and personally satisfying for me in my role as your deacon. A significant portion of my time has been devoted to administering the Clergy Discretionary Fund. Through the generosity of Grace Church members, we have been able to assist more than 150 individuals with needs such as rent, utilities, and recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene. It is truly gratifying to witness the compassion and commitment of this congregation made tangible through these gifts.

Once again, Grace Church was selected to support the discernment process of a person seeking ordination to the diaconate. I was grateful for the opportunity to spend meaningful time with Mary Guercio as she explored more deeply what it means to live into a diaconal vocation.

As in past years, I have continued to manage the parish prayer list, train and license new Eucharistic Visitors, and serve actively on the Congregational Care Team. I have participated regularly in the liturgy at both Sunday services and most Wednesdays. I have also been blessed to preach on a regular basis, which I believe is among the most important aspects of my ministry.

One of my most significant and life-giving ministries continues to be our work with Bethel House. Each Wednesday we offer a devotion for the staff and clients there, and I can say with complete honesty that a part of my heart lives in that place.

I am profoundly grateful to serve as your deacon at Grace Church in the Mountains.

Blessings,

Carter

Rector's Report - The Rev. Joslyn Ogden Schaefer

Dear Beloved Ones of Grace:

I marvel as I look back at this year...how God has invited us and equipped us to live into the vision your Vestry faithfully discerned in 2024. And I offer thanks especially to our outgoing Vestry members, Mary Lockey, Joyce Brooks, & Suzy LeClaire. We have an incredible, Christ-centered staff and assisting clergy. I thank God for his generous provision of co-ministers, lay and ordained!

Below I lay out the vision and offer my reflections on how that is being realized among us:

Enhance our Outreach - *By serving and “being with” others in need through deeper collaboration with outreach partners.* Our deepening ministry with Bethel House (which offers space for warmth, hospitality, friendship and support for unsheltered people, sojourners, people living with active addiction and/or mental illness) has been a blessing both for Grace and for Bethel House. I am seeing genuine friendships form across class, educational, economic differences that are so beautiful.

Another development in Outreach is the Food Ministries ad hoc Task Force. Your Vestry commissioned a thoughtful group of Grace members to make recommendations to the Vestry about how best to utilize our resources of space, volunteer capacity, community connections to address the changing food and nutrition needs of our local community. The charitable landscape in downtown Waynesville has changed significantly since Grace boldly opened the first food pantry in the county in the 1980's. What is most needed now and how can we faithfully respond to the current needs? I look forward to their report, which the Vestry anticipates receiving later this month.

Welcome all Families and Individuals - *Through additional opportunities for hospitality and fellowship.* With the addition of our new Minister for Formation & Outreach, we've been able to welcome children and young adults more effectively in our community. We've shifted to a Children's Chapel model during the 10:30 liturgy and resurrected our acolyte ministry that engages children and youth. Will has hosted a couple of young adult gatherings and hopes to do more to build up that part of our community. We also tried out a "Summer Service" at 9:15, a deliberately less formal service to explore a different worship style. And our Bluegrass Mass was so well-received by the broader community...and it was awesome to watch so many of you find ways to help! Thank you!

Grow Spiritually - *by providing more Bible Studies, retreats, small groups, and formation programs.* This year we had over 60 people participate in the year-long parishwide book study *We Make the Road by Walking*. Since Will arrived, we've offered a couple of Sunday Night formation series (one on Luke's Gospel, another on the First Christmas). The annual men's and women's retreats were well-received, and the women's retreat was entirely led by lay-leaders.

As we move into 2026, I am looking forward to the completion of our Rain Garden (a project approved in 2020, but delayed due to the floods of 2021 and 2024) and how our buildings and grounds can continue to provide refuge for all species and education for humans of all ages! I'm so curious to see how our outreach and food ministries, in particular, may grow and change. And I've got my eyes and heart set on 2028...that will be our parish's 150 anniversary! Already, the Vestry has been developing a plan to preserve and steward the assets we have and to wonder how we can prepare for what God would have us do, who God would have us become over the next 150 years.

Finally, I've become clearer and clearer about the deep spiritual mission of the church to be an agent of Christ's reconciling work in the world. I view part of my role as tending to this—from a human perspective—fragile container where people who view partisan politics differently can come together genuinely for worship and service, and even friendship sometimes! This commitment to reconciliation feels very counter-cultural in these divided times. But I trust that my human perspective about the fragility of the container is partial at best...and likely completely wrong. My faith, our faith, is in Jesus Christ, who is strong precisely in our weakness. I'd like to close with these verses from Ephesians:

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us, abolishing the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create

in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. (2:14 - 18)

Pax et bonum - Joslyn+

~~~ Worship & Music ~~~

Average Sunday Attendance ~ 170

Gathering to worship the Triune God is the FOUNDATION of our common life. We do this communally weekly on Sundays and Wednesdays. Special thanks to Jesse Nelson, our Vestry liaison for worship. Here are a few highlights:

Holy Seasons

- *Advent* (in 2025) – Communion & Conversation on Friday Mornings with poetry of Ann Weems; Liturgy of the Longest Night
- *Epiphany* – Pageant & Burning of the Christmas Tree
- *Lent* – Communion & Conversation Friday mornings with Thomas Merton
Wednesday evenings “Dinner Eucharist” followed by a program featuring Mary Oliver’s Poetry
Quiet Morning
- *Holy Week* - Chaplet of Divine Mercy on Good Friday
Easter Vigil held on the labyrinth

Honoring the Generations

- *Senior Recognition* – High School Seniors shared their faith during the 10:30 service
- *Backpack Blessing*
- *Children’s Chapel* – Begun in August as we shifted away from a children’s sermon
- *All Saints* – A Beautiful celebration complete with pictures of Grace’s Great Cloud of Witnesses

Worship Beyond our Parish

- *Helene Anniversary Eucharist* at Lake Logan with Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe
- *Pride Eucharist at St. John’s Sylva*

Lay Leadership

- *Altar Guild* – Welcoming several new members over the couple of last year Kelly McCarter, Ann Owen, Sheila Stagier and Kathryn Church
- *Lay Eucharistic Ministers & Lectors* – Scheduled by Natalie Bayless
- *Acolytes / Crucifers* – We have built up a core intergenerational team of acolytes and even now have an 8:00 am crucifer!

- *Ushers – Coordinated by Daniel Atterholt*
- *Taizé – This has become a thriving monthly service.*

Trying new things

- *Bluegrass Mass*
- *Moving the large altar and reintroducing original altar table*
- *Creating a “chapel” in the Narthex*
- *Compline – Vigil of All Saints*

Report from our Music Director, Sean Coughlin

It has been a joy and privilege to work with our music ministry at Grace for another year. We had several guest instrumentalists join us for Sunday services (oboe, violin, trombone, clarinet) and several members from the Cider Ridge Band support our musical offerings during the inaugural Bluegrass Mass. One of the things that makes our music program successful at Grace is diversity – on any given Sunday you could encounter music from the Renaissance or the 21st century...mandolins, djembes, or tubas – all are welcome.

Our chime choir added a new member this year & continued developing musicianship skills as they worked on more advanced music. We also expanded our low and high range of chimes so we can take on more complex repertoire. Some of our chime choir members also took on the role of percussionist throughout the year to aid in our musical offerings for offertory anthems.

Our chancel choir also added new members and learned 41 anthems throughout the year – wow! Generally, the choir rehearses a piece 5 or 6 weeks ahead of the Sunday it is used in the liturgy. This can only be done with a group that is both talented and dedicated. Most choirs do 100% of their work in rehearsal – but both our chancel & chime choirs routinely take music home with them to put in extra time. This is a director of music’s dream and I do not take it for granted!

Our “summer service” took place at 9:15 and offered some musical variety from our typical 10:30 Eucharist. We had regular volunteers to play piano, guitar, autoharp, tin whistle, etc. with little to no rehearsal time. Thanks to all who helped elevate that service with their musical offerings.

Our Taizé musicians are also extremely dedicated with our primary cantor David Ferguson and primary accompanist Michael Lodico anchoring the music for our monthly service.

In 2025 we added 12 new hymns and 4 new Taizé chants to our supplement binders! I always love hearing about the music that speaks to you – let me know if we have not sung your favorite hymn in a long time or if you have a recommendation for music that has had an impact on your spiritual journey.

Our piano on the chancel is starting to show its age and needed to be tuned 4 times last year to keep it in check (2 tunings per year is standard). The organ continues to thrive even with the power supply on

borrowed time. The organist may not thrive, but survives! I continued taking some private lessons throughout 2025 and look forward to continuing to tackle organ pedagogy in 2026. Last year was a wonderful year of discovery as I became more acquainted with the instrument's vast repertoire.

As always, if you are interested in participating musically in any context at Grace – please reach out, I would love to chat with you about it. To God be the glory!

~~~Congregational Care~~~

Purpose: To offer Christ's love and compassion to our parishioners especially in times of transition and/or crisis and seeks to invite other members of Grace to join them in the ministry of care. We do this through prayer, connection, listening, pragmatic support and sacramental ministry.

Congregational Care is often a quiet, behind-the-scenes ministry that makes a huge difference in our members' lives. The ministry includes: visits and assistance, led by Pat Robinson; prayers & cards led by Maureen Hunt; Eucharistic Visits, coordinated by Deacon Carter (49 visits); Grief Ministry Team coordinated by Rector Joslyn (7 households currently served); and Medical Loan Closet led by Jim Dohms and Stephanie Semones.

We continued with the monthly fellowship lunches following our mid-week Wednesday service with gratitude to all who offered food and under the coordination of Linda Miville.

Our Medical Loan Closet is filled to capacity and is used regularly by members and friends of members and is accessible via email medicalloan closet@gracewayneville.com.

The Caregivers Support Group is also serving a grief support group after care receivers transition to eternal life. This group under the leadership of Maureen Hunt meets monthly, the last Friday of the month at 11 am.

We continued our Celebration Circles, facilitated by Liza Ely to honor and say goodbye to parishioners who are moving away. This year we celebrated Ann-Cherie & David Dye

We continued a grief ministry team that offers to meet one-on-one with parishioners for the first year after a significant loss and ministers with cards and grief education booklets. This group planned the All Saints forum and assisted with creating a meaningful All Saints worship. They also offered a couple of grief education forums.

We started a telephone ministry facilitated by parishioner Elaine Wood. We hope to develop this more in 2026.

~~From the Minister of Outreach & Formation, Will Arledge ~~

At the root of my calling to ministry is a conviction that this thing we call “church” is all the proof we need that God loves us and wants us to live in fellowship together as Christ’s body. The beautiful people at Grace Church continue to amaze me with kindness, commitment, empathy and a particular kind of worship that transcends Sunday mornings. Indeed, Grace is a manifestation of Christ’s hands and feet—anytime, anywhere—and I’m blessed to be a part of it.

I was asked to help Grace Church grow “further and deeper.” Results may be pending after just 5 months, but speaking for myself I can say that I have personally grown “further and deeper” than I thought was possible when your rector and vestry were kind enough to bring me aboard in August.

I was introduced to the dynamism and power of Parish Programs early on during the planning and flawless execution of the Bluegrass Mass. I’m grateful to this committee for managing so many spinning plates effortlessly as our church year moved from Ordinary Time to Advent. My early focus has been on creating spaces for our growing demographics to begin to build their identities here and find their place. Children. Youth. Young Adults. Parents. These groups have so much to offer us and we *must* continue to provide programming that is welcoming and affirming and intergenerational in a way that only church can offer. Another important focus has been on creating more space and time for hospitality and fellowship on Sunday mornings. Although strategies for coffee hour, community time, potlucks, deck discussions, and summer small groups may continue to change, the purpose remains: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I with them.” (Matt 18:20)

Christian formation has been particularly joyful for me. I have been delighted by Grace’s curiosity and eagerness to learn, to pray, to walk “the way” together. The Sunday Forums elegantly combine traditional Christian formation (“Sunday School”) approaches with outside invitations to community leaders to speak and empower the parish with connections to the wider community. Sunday nights have recently become an opportunity to dive deeper into the biblical texts and stories that shape us. I’m grateful for the patience of those who attended my Luke and Advent studies—I am brand new at this “teaching” thing—and the safe and supportive space to practice this craft has been exhilarating and rewarding. I am very much looking forward to continuing formation opportunities in February confirmation classes and Lenten forums and Wednesday night gatherings.

The Outreach committee is doing the yeoman’s work of serving the many needs of our community. From child literacy to foster care support to warm clothing (including the hundreds of

hand-made hats from our Marthas!), this committee is improving lives on a daily basis. Our “being with” ministries at Pathways and Bethel House continue to be praised by staff and volunteers at those organizations, to say nothing of the benefit to the clients. I help to lead a Bible study at Bethel House every Wednesday and I am completely convinced that the more we can break down class barriers and simply walk alongside neighbors our community—the healthier our church will become—and we’ll inch a little closer to God’s dream for our community. Most recently I have been very involved in food ministries. The ad hoc food ministries subcommittee hopes to have recommendations to the vestry in January for a reimaging of Grace’s unique contribution to alleviating the crisis of food insecurity and hunger in Haywood County.

And as recently as December I was introduced to a Creation Care team that has accomplished major milestones in the last year and is enthusiastic about attracting new energy to this critical ministry that combines almost all of the ministries at Grace into a sacred advocacy for a living, breathing planet. New goals and opportunities await us in 2026. Stay tuned!

Finally, it has been my distinct honor to occasionally lead worship at Wednesday Eucharists and to preach on Sundays. As a newly confirmed Episcopalian I find myself on an exciting journey of my own. The beauty of the liturgy and the commitment to excellence in worship confirms my decision to follow this path. I can’t believe that I get to work in a church that is experiencing growing pains in the “upward” direction—how wonderful is that? I’m excited to work with staff this year in discerning new ways to add worship opportunities for a growing parish—including streaming online!

With deep and holy gratitude, as ever,

Will

~~~ Parish Programs ~~~

Charge: Create welcoming spaces for all people to encounter “the loving, liberating, and life giving God” through study, storytelling, fellowship, and prayer.

Standing Committee Members: Standing Committee Members: Kelly McCarter (chair) Diana Bahm, Violet Bloom, Dan Linker, Rina Steffel (through 7/2025), Marie Shaginaw. Georgia Raines, Trent Pcenicni, Blake Hadley & Suzy Leclaire served as Vestry Liaisons.

Ministry Areas: Sunday Forum, Art Ministry, Children and Youth Formation and Intergenerational programming, Coffee Hour, Men of Grace, Women of Grace, Joyful Fellowship, Special Events, Pub Theology, Daughters of the King, the Marthas, Creation Care, Taizé, and Shepherds.

Report from Georgia Raines (Vestry Liaison) & Kelly McCarter (Chair)

The Parish Programming Committee had a year rich in formation, fellowship and change. One of our many blessings this year was the hiring of Will Arledge, Minister for Formation and Outreach. Will brings many gifts in this ministry role, solidifying pastoral relationships, new energy and insight to children's programs and formation and a very blessed presence to our Rector and staff.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH FORMATION

An additional worship service was added during our summer and fall months to accommodate our growing parish not only in membership, but with a focus for children and families. Homilies were geared toward children's interpretations of the stories of the Bible with music and worship being more intimate and participatory. Father Orion Davis and Rev. Joslyn Schaefer led this service.

Will Arledge leads and coordinates our new Children's Chapel during our 10:30 service. Children process out of church with a cross after the Gospel and go into a special area of Thatcher Hall for stories, discussion and arts. They return at the Peace.

Intergenerational programs are always a focus at our festival celebrations throughout the year. Art projects and interpretative pieces are usually coordinated by our Arts Ministry.

SUNDAY FORUMS/ADULT FORMATION

Continuing the work of previous committees, a major focus of the Sunday Forum was spiritual growth, a priority clearly affirmed by the still fruitful findings of Renewal Works. During the period when we were anxiously awaiting Will's arrival, the committee nonetheless offered a particularly strong summer season of Forum programs covering a wide range of topics. Highlights included explorations of the connections between spirituality and the arts, and reflections on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Our Episcopal Church 101 classes were especially well attended, marked by thoughtful questions, lively discussion, and valuable feedback. Following Will's arrival, the need for a clearer, long-range structure for Forum seasons became both more apparent and more achievable, and under Will Arledge's leadership this new framework began to take shape.

ARTS MINISTRY

We have some very gifted artists in our parish although our arts ministry has dwindled due to normal life transitions. This ministry is seeking new members and energy to continue their focus on inclusion of arts in worship and fellowship. Suzy LeClaire remains our steadfast anchor and artist extraordinaire.

COMMUNITY COFFEE TIME

Late in 2025, a new take on Grace's traditional coffee hour began in hope of bringing more parishioners together by providing a larger, more food-oriented offering which began at 10:00 a.m., immediately after the Adult Forum. While the church embraced this new Community Coffee Time,

over the months of this year it became apparent that there were both parishioners and visitors who were unable to enjoy fellowship at 10:00 a.m., especially the choir and visitors after the 10:30 service.

As we enter 2026, the structure of Community Coffee Time will change again, with the hope that even more people will be able to enjoy Grace's unique welcome and friendliness. A lighter, simpler offering will now be available after the 8:00 a.m. service and after the 10:30 a.m. service. We will continue to offer larger, more substantial food offerings on special Feast days and other special events.

The need for hosts and cleaners still exists on most Sundays. We continue to encourage volunteers to participate and join in this ministry of hospitality.

MEN OF GRACE

Fr. Earle Pratt and Deacon Carter Smith head this ministry. Men meet the 1st Saturday of every month for breakfast and spiritual growth. The Men of Grace help with a variety of projects throughout the year, offering not only manpower but a wonderful spiritual presence in everything they do. A Men's Retreat was led by Fr. Earle Pratt in June 2025 at Lake Junaluska.

WOMEN OF GRACE

Open to women of all ages, Women of Grace are known for their outreach fundraisers. Tablescapes, a women's luncheon, auction and program were held on Aug 30, 2025 and produced amazing table arrangements and souvenirs. Monies are donated to an outreach ministry each year. This year Haywood Pathways was the recipient.

The annual Cookie Walk is a bake sale during the holiday season with hundreds of cookies baked by our parishioners. The Cookie Walk was expanded this year to include children's games and crafts, and the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus telling the Christmas stories. Our choir members also brightened our hearts with Christmas carols and songs. Proceeds from this fundraiser also benefited Haywood Pathways.

Women of Grace held a retreat at Lake Logan on September 13-14, 2025, led by spiritual director Arika Morrison, Maureen Hunt and Rev. Joslyn Schaefer. Approximately 25 women attended the retreat.

CREATION CARE (see section under Admin)

TAIZÉ

The Taizé ministry continues to hold monthly services on the first Sunday of each month. The ministry is totally lay led, organized, and structured. Attendance usually is between 15-50 people depending upon the season.

JOYFUL FELLOWSHIP

Grace's LBBTQ+ and Allies group had three gatherings in 2025. Joyful Fellowship was instrumental in hosting a Grace booth at the Haywood Pride Festival in Waynesville on June 28, 2025. Additionally, Joyful Fellowship had the second annual picnic in October 2025 at the Villages of Plott Creek pavilion with an attendance of 21 people who enjoyed a poetry reading, prayer, and fellowship.

SHEPHERDS

The Shepherds ministry focuses on connecting with newcomers at Grace. We have two newcomer's receptions in 2025 (one in the first half of the year and one in the second half of the year). Father Orion Davis and Rev. Joslyn Schaefer lead the ministry and connect newcomers with a "shepherd", a more-seasoned parishioner who is oriented on the program and willing to meet, call, connect with new parishioners.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Mary Guercio from All Saints Episcopal Church in Franklin worked closely alongside Deacon Carter Smith to gain experience in diaconal ministry. Notably, she was the guest preacher at Grace on November 9, 2025.

Lenten Dinner Series: Lay-led facilitators and simple meals were provided by parishioners each week of Lent. The focus was the ministry of Mary Oliver.

Maundy Thursday Dinner: Members of the Parish Program Committee working with Daughters of the King assisted with the organization and food preparation for the Maundy Thursday observance at Grace.

Grace on the Lawn: Fellowship event on July 5, 2025, that consisted of parishioners bringing their own picnic lunches and lawn chairs with music provided by a parishioner-led musical group. Information about Grace and how to join was available for anyone in attendance.

Pigeon River Tubing: Intergenerational event planned by Violet Bloom and Sam Spence occurred on July 20, 2025.

Tie Dye Event: Intergenerational event planned by Trent Pcenicni. The event was well-attended with over 15 children in attendance and many adults. Music and pizza were provided as a way of back-to-school celebration and fellowship among Grace youth and adults.

Bluegrass Mass: Blue Grass Mass was held in our outdoor tent in the front lawn of the church. The event was announced in the community via flyers and social media as well as across the WNC Diocese. A special planning committee was developed in the summer to prepare for all aspects of the event that occurred on Sunday, Sept 7, 2025.

Joslyn led a Blue Grass Mass worship service with an emphasis on local culture and traditions. A welcome table was set up to greet members of Grace as well as non-members from the community to provide orientation and information about Grace. A musical group was hired for music during the picnic following the worship service.

Local cuisine was made by volunteer BBQ smokers, parishioners brought local side dishes, and ice-cream stations were available during the picnic. Additionally, story-time and children's events were planned during the celebration.

A square-dancing class was offered during the celebration by Joyce Brooks and a hand-made quilt created by the Martha's was raffled off for charity. The Haywood Arts Council had a booth to sell arts and crafts as well as to create awareness of Haywood Arts Council's mission and contribution to the local arts scene.

The event was well-attended with approximately 300 attendees.

Summer Small Groups: Summer Small Groups were held during the summer consisting of parishioners who would like to rotate a small dinner group each month of the summer. This year the groups rotated so that different people were attending different groups each month at hosts' homes or other venues. This year there were spiritually themed discussion questions to help guide conversation as needed within the groups. The event was well-attended and organized by Lorelei Yerse and Clyde Austin. The enthusiasm for summer small groups has grown over the past few years.

Bethel House Thanksgiving: Bethel House Thanksgiving dinner was organized through a joint-effort between the Parish Programs Committee and Outreach Committee showing cross-committee collaboration. The dinner at Bethel House was organized by Mary Hartman, Alex Coimbre, Kelly McCarter, Marion Klingler, Gene Sloan, Michael Lodico, Bobby Schmiel, and Sue Volgas. Over 100 people attended the dinner at Bethel House. Deacon Carter Smith gave the blessing and Father Earle Pratt also attended as representatives of Grace clergy.

Greening of the Church: The annual Greening of the Church was held on Dec 21, 2025.

PARISH PROGRAMS COMMITTEE GROWTH

One of the most notable changes in the Parish Programming Committee is the decision from the Vestry to split this committee into two new committees, Parish Life and Parish Formation Committees due to the growth of our parish and increased number of educational and formation activities, special events, and number of programmatic ministries at Grace.

In November 2025, the vestry approved charges for the 2026 Parish Life Committee and Parish Formation Committee as noted below.

Parish Life Charge: The Parish Life Committee is charged with nurturing spiritual fellowship and building relationships within the parish and community through intentional hospitality, shared experience, celebration, special events, and congregational care that embodies Christ's welcome to all people and that helps foster Grace Church in the Mountains as a true spiritual home.

Parish Formation Charge: The Parish Formation Committee exists to cultivate discipleship in all generations by keeping Christ at the center of our worship, study, and fellowship. We achieve this by providing opportunities, grounded in the Lectionary and the Liturgical Seasons, to deepen our

understanding of faith, wisdom, and tradition, enabling us to fully embody God's love in our daily lives.

Pub Theology continued to meet about once a month at Blue Ridge Beer Hub and is led by Rob Viau. Currently, they meet the third Monday of the month from 4:30 - 6:30 for fellowship and conversation centered around a topic suggested by a participant. All are welcome.

Daughters of the King (DOK) - St. Theresa of Avila Chapter

The mission of The Order of the Daughters of the King (DOK) is to extend Christ's Kingdom through Prayer, Service, and Evangelism, by committing to a Rule of Life that involves disciplined prayer, service to the church and community, and bringing others into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

In pursuing this mission in 2025, our chapter:

- Served by deep cleaning the nave, delivering Christmas flowers and Easter baskets to shut-ins, organizing the Agapé meal for Maundy Thursday, and offering funeral receptions including memorial tables
- Offered a formation program about St. Theresa during the Lent
- Installed three new members: Sandy Jamieson, Pamela Waldron & Kathryn Church
- Enjoyed fellowship including a Christmas Dinner and Tea the Balsam Mountain Inn

~~~ Outreach ~~~

Charge: To enable our hands to be God's hands in caring, comforting and advocating for God's people beyond our doors

Standing Committee Members: Will Arledge, Joyce Brooks (Vestry Liaison), Alex Coimbre (Vestry Liaison), DeeDee Caudill, Mary Hartman (Chair), Sue Hilson, Marion Klingler, Dale McDonald, Marcia McDonald, Linda Sexton, and Sue Volgas

Our committee has been entrusted to prayerfully be responsible for the funds budgeted for outreach. Through Grace Church's commitment to outreach the 2025 budgeted amount from operating revenue and outreach portion of endowment was \$75,451 (including the diocesan assessment of \$47,905) The important work of Grace's outreach is accomplished by the volunteers who minister to our neighbors. We are trying to live into "Doing with, not doing for."

2025 in Review:

Food , Shelter and Clothing Ministry

Bethel House

- Forty volunteers prepared and served 1,000 meals to our Bethel House Neighbors

- Forty-two volunteers prepared and served Thanksgiving dinner to 100 Bethel House Neighbors
- We participated in bowling activity with Bethel Guests

Food Pantry

- Approximately 950 households (2700 individuals) were provided with food
- 28 volunteers made this food ministry possible

Pathways:

- Nine volunteers prepared and served dinner on 2nd Sundays and 5th Mondays for approximately 50-60 people each meal.
- Contributed \$3000 for “Raise the Roof Campaign” for repairs of the roof and women’s dorm HVAC
- Contributed monthly to Pathways
- Provided dental cleaning needs
- Provided fall decorations made by parishioners

Project Dignity – Donated money to provide feminine supplies

Ministry to Children and Families

Haywood County Foster Children

- Purchased Christmas presents for five foster children
- Marthas knitted 140 hats for Christmas

Pigeon Community Multicultural Development Center

- Thirteen volunteers served as reading buddies during the summer enrichment program
- Provided tuition for two children.

Anna’s Books

- Provided money that increased the number of books for the Children’s Literacy Program
- Anna’s books provided Spanish books for the Pigeon Center

Clyde Elementary

- Gift cards were purchased in spring and fall for families experiencing post-Helene hardship.
- Many boxes of tissues and hand sanitizer were purchased

Haywood Community Learning Center

- Purchased snacks
- Explored possible future volunteer involvement

Lake Logan Bilingual Camp

- Sponsored three children
- A bi-lingual parishioner assisted with the camp

Martha's Ministry

- Supported the community with their crafted knitted and fabric creations
- Knitted blankets for our high school graduates

~~~ Administration ~~~

Vestry charge: To oversee parish wide stewardship of our resources: grounds, buildings, IT infrastructure, and finances (which includes developing and monitoring budgets and meeting reporting requirements and overseeing the endowment)

Committee members: Joslyn Schaefer, Betty Bradley, Mary Lockey, Michael Boss, Dale Yerse, Tom Steffel, Mary Beth Dorgan, Douglas Steiger

2025 brought financial growth in our operating budget and in our Endowment. Because of that growth, the Administration Committee and the Vestry made decisions that sought to steward our resources while recognizing that *“Christ is all and in all.”*

Michael Boss deserves many thanks for his hard work as Treasurer, offering wise counsel in all matters financial, shepherding the budget process, and encouraging us to consider from different perspectives the decisions that confronted us.

Due to our growth in membership and worship attendance, the Vestry - *in May 2024* - proposed and budgeted for us to take a leap of faith and increase staffing by hiring another minister. Because of the generosity of your financial commitments, that proposal became reality in summer 2025.

Many of the accomplishments in buildings and grounds were a fulfillment of plans made by prior Vestries. Dale Yerse was instrumental in maintaining our main building as well as Grace House. Tom Steffel was tireless in the upkeep of our grounds, including the Memorial Garden.

What we accomplished in 2025:

FINANCIAL / BUDGET

- Michael Boss agreed to serve as Treasure after Gary Roberts completed his term

- The Endowment Committee was chaired by Gary Roberts and consisted of the following members: Karen Morris, Barbara Rowe, Michael Boss, Marlene Hyatt, Mary Lou Daily. An *Endowment Awareness* reception was held in May
- \$6,500 in Outreach Endowment funds were allocated for use by Outreach Standing Committee
- The Vestry approved a goal of \$2,000,000 for the Endowment ideally allocated in the following sub funds: 50% Capital, 25% General, 25% Outreach
- Also in May, the Vestry chose “A Chorus of Generosity” as the stewardship theme. Several small group gatherings were held in the fall. The campaign yielded 132 donations of time, talent and treasure with pledges totaling \$517,445 at the end of the year resulting in a 13% increase over last year.
- A budget for 2026 was created under the guidance of Michael Boss and approved at the December Vestry meeting. It represents a 13% operating expense increase,
- Grace House tenants moved out November 30. We are working with Select Homes to secure new tenants.

STAFFING

- David Ferguson was hired as bookkeeper in March to replace Dan Boyette who moved to Charlotte
- Will Arledge began as our new Minister of Outreach and Formation in August
- Tony Caldwell’s last day as sexton was December 30. The Vestry voted to enter a contract with French Broad Cleaning Company. The scope of their services will include interior cleaning and grounds maintenance

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

- The rain garden is under construction. We received a \$2,000 grant from the Diocese to offset our part of the construction cost. Plant installation is scheduled for spring 2026. Nearly all of this project was funded by a grant from the NC Dept of Agriculture, Soil & Water Division and the Pigeon River Fund.
- All church windows – inside and out – and all gutters were cleaned by Diatomic Window Cleaning
- The front parking lot lines were painted by Tom Steffel
- LED lights were installed in Thatcher Hall, offices, and classrooms by Dale Yerse
- We entered a new contract with Ledbetter’s Heating and Air Conditioning, Inc. for HVAC services. Warranty on equipment was not affected
- TV was mounted on wall in library
- Two large screens were mounted in Thatcher Hall. AV work is still in progress
- Windows in Grace House were replaced

- Repairs were made to Grace House deck
- Tom Steffel organized fall and spring clean-up days
- Several trees on the property were removed or pruned in consultation with Element Arbor
- The Vestry entered a contract with Rhino Renewables Solar and Electric to install solar panels. The timing of the contract allows us to take advantage of company rebates and tax credits. Details for installation are to be determined.
- The Vestry approved the formation of an ad hoc committee (Vision 2028) to advise us as the parish prepares for its 150th anniversary in 2028. In broad terms, the Vestry sought guidance from this committee to plan strategically about:

Preserving what we have (Prioritize capital improvements and deferred maintenance needs, suggest process for discerning use for Grace House, recommend process to meet capital needs prior to our Endowment Goal being met)

Building for the future

Increase operating revenue to support new ministry position beyond 2026
Reach our \$2,000,000 Endowment goal

A full report of the ad hoc committee's work can be found here. [Ad Hoc Vision 2028 report](#).
As you will see there is much discernment ahead!

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Lockey, Senior Warden

Creation Care Ministry

The Grace Creation Care Ministry supports the Grace mission *to revere God's creation* by fulfilling the creation care mission: *to respond to the call to revere the sacred beauty of God's creation by working with other Grace ministries and the community to foster intentional and sustainable practices by engaging hearts and minds through education, service and advocacy.*

All are welcome to join in Creation Care Efforts. 2025 activities include:

- Three Sunday Forums: Earth Day Sunday with guest speaker Hanni Muerdter, Director of the Southern Highlands Appalachian Conservancy; St. Francis forum with speaker Clara Curtis, former Director of NC Arboretum; November forum with speaker Kipp Sutton, Executive Director of Environmental Action Community
- Spring partnership with Circle of Life Garden Club, six lessons in the garden for children grieving losses

- Creation Care Day Campers in the giving garden for lunch, gardening and nature themed crafts in July in partnership with FUMC
- Led nature classes at FUMC with Clean, Green & Kind Kids on Sunday evenings
- Recommended and offered research support to Vestry about Solar Panels for Grace. The Vestry voted to benefit from federal incentives (a 40% discount) at their December meeting before incentive deadline expired.
- Consulted with landscape architect Clara Curtis on 15 native shrubs and trees to plant around the perimeter of the giving garden and spending out the remainder of the \$1k award money from Interfaith Power and Light
- Transplanted a White Oak sapling from the Miller St. bank to the lower giving garden, as Oaks support more insects and wildlife than any other Eastern native tree
- Regularly added creation care segments to the Prayers of the People
- Continued use of composting service for the collection of all leftover food and paper products.
- “Blue Grass Mass” special event planners purchased certifiably compostable materials that were taken to a composting facility in Asheville after serving lunch to more than 200 persons.
- Began construction for our Rain Garden, a project approved in 2020, but delayed due to serious weather events. This is funded through the Haywood County Soil and Water Conservation District, as well as the Pigeon River Fund. Grace also received a \$2000 grant from the diocese, leaving less than \$5000 funding gap which will come from our Vestry Reserve. Watch for more information about this in 2026!

~~~ Membership Statistics ~~~

Average Sunday Attendance 170 (last year 154)

Christmas Eve & Day Attendance 307 (last year 292)

Easter Attendance 262 (last year 255)

Baptisms (2):

Gillian Cunningham

Jaxon Ryder Volgas

Jaxon Ryder Volgas

Katie Sorel

Lisa & Michael McNeil

Laura A. Jones

Confirmation/ Receptions (2):

Will & Marion Arledge

Fritz & Diane Czypull

Lars & Mary Schatte

Amy Swanger

Sylvia Leeb

Eli Cole

Cheryl & Michael Stephens

Letician Morgan

New Members (23):

Rebecca & John Britton

Sarah Fulton

Ray & Kathy Dunleavy

Will & Marion Arledge

Gillian Cunningham

Burials/ Committals/Deaths (7):

*Frederick Michael Deeb
Maryln C. Pedgrift
Alfred Eugene Hamar
Gwendolyn Franks Breese
Rebecca Howell Prevost
Elizabeth Weber
Ursula Pries*

Transfers Out / Inactive (13):
*Mariah Nebus
David & Ann-Cherie Dye*

*Bill Humphreys
Sinclarie Sparkman
Iris Durrell
Patty Coulter
Cheryl Lentz
Mary Pat Moore
Hill Champion
Donna Weaver
John & Janet Turley*