

Grace Lutheran Church

8307 Sheffield Avenue
Dyer, Indiana 46311
219-865-1137
<http://gracedyer.org>
church@gracedyer.org



Pastor's Annual Report - 2011

The year 2011 was the 51st year that our Lord Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit gathered to His heavenly Father a community of Lutheran Christians at Grace in Dyer. We are a community that gathers regularly to receive our Lord's gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. In receiving we rejoice and sing our praises to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all the days of our life.

January began a new calendar year in God's grace. On the first Sunday of January, we rejoiced in the richness of the Epiphany season, celebrating the visit of the Magi and the Baptism of Jesus. It is always a joy to wind down from the busy Christmastide with an annual trek to Fort Wayne for the Symposia at the seminary where I am refreshed with God's Word taught and preached.

On February 13th, we doubly rejoiced as we celebrated the Transfiguration of our Lord and as Eric Donner (Rick) Deam was confirmed in the Evangelical Lutheran faith and officially joined our fellowship. In March, we received the Botkin family and in September the Kerstetters as transferred members. Our newest members are a great blessing, serving the congregation in many ways.

Many beloved of the Lord completed their baptism journey. Lila Corman, mother of Gene Corman, was received into glory and buried on February 23 where she is resting in peace until the resurrection of the dead. In the next month, the Lord received her sister Lucille Berg also into His loving hands. Their congregation had recently gone vacant and was without a pastor. As we are one body in Christ, I served our fellow members by consoling the family and conducting their funerals. Shortly after Easter, our dear brother Raymond Gollnick departed in peace according to the Word of the Lord. He was laid to rest on May 5th and now dwells in eternal bliss with our Lord. On October 29, Joseph Koch, husband of Marion Koch, was laid to rest. Blessed are the dead for they have rest from their labors.

During the three weeks between Epiphany and Lent, we considered the threefold emphasis of our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: Witness, Mercy, and Life Together. Each week considered the theme in preaching and Bible study. Knowing what we believe and why we believe it is critical. To further our life together, fourteen members of Grace graciously volunteered their time in a strategic planning workshop on February 25-26. We discussed the six chief duties of a Christian congregation and our strengths and weaknesses. Over the following months we developed and implemented strategies to react and act. We have already seen an increase in financial stewardship, more regular attendance numbers, and the return of a few inactive members.

Grace received a generous gift in March designated by the donors for sanctuary improvements such as lighting and painting. Donors also paid to have the parsonage downspouts buried, replace the wireless microphone in church, and add outdoor LED lighting to church, sign, and cross. Monies were donated for future organ replacement. These generous offerings over and above the weekly tithe are a cause for rejoicing.

Lententide and Eastertide bring us to glorious climax of the festival half of the church year. We rejoiced in the service of Corporate Confession and Absolution on Ash Wednesday. Each midweek we sang the service of Evening Prayer and considered the confession of LCMS founder CFW Walther. This Lenten journey culminated in Holy Week, with Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, two (!) Good Friday services,



Easter Vigil, and Easter Sunrise and festival services. We even continued the celebration with Easter Wednesday midweek service. What a wonderful gift it is to receive Jesus frequently and to have him dwell richly among us!

One of the greatest joys of the Christian community is to witness another sinner reborn into the life of faith. We were blessed as a congregation to share in this joy with Abel Maluchnik, family, and friends on May 22. Baptism is central to the Christian life, wherein you received adoption in Christ to be a child of God. The Holy Spirit abolished Satan and his host. The atonement of Christ was freely given to you for your justification.

We continued our celebration of Eastertide for seven Sundays, ending with the annual joint circuit Ascension service, this year at Trinity Hammond. Pastor had the privilege of preaching and many of our members received the Lord's gifts with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. The dinner was lovely, the choir sung with gusto, and Pr. Davies celebrated the Lord's Supper reverently. As is the custom of the church, we celebrated Pentecost and Holy Trinity as high festivals, thus concluding the festival half of the church year.

The summer months are a time of reflection upon the teachings of Jesus Christ, specifically oriented toward our life individually and together. Even so, during this "Time of the Church," we had opportunity for a few minor festivals. We remembered the mother of Our Lord, St. Mary, on August 15. St. Michael and All Angels received special recognition on September 29. As with the year past, we conducted a Narrative Divine Service on the weekend of September 3/4. This provides us yearly with an opportunity to receive our Lord's service in Word and Sacrament but to learn more about the "what," "how," and "why" of the Divine Service.

Grace continues its active service to community and world. We hosted a Pancake Breakfast and bake sale to benefit Kids Against Hunger on September 10. We delivered food baskets for Thanksgiving and Christmas to needy families both here and in our community. Even so, evangelism remains one of our weak points. An ad-hoc committee of Betty Natzke and the Kolarczyks have begun to address this and will hope to do more in the year to come.

The needs of the congregation received specific attention in September. The Constitution revisions that were completed in the Summer of 2010 were approved by the Indiana District and accepted by the congregation's voters. The Strategic Planning report challenged pastor and congregation to consider our wealth in a God pleasing way. As a result of our intensive catechesis and pledge drive, we received offering commitments of \$75,000 for 2012 from half the contributing households. We rejoice in this act of faith and hope for more participation in the future.

In conjunction with this program, we offered a 13-week course called Financial Peace University. Everyone who attended benefited from the wisdom of Dave Ramsey in managing their household well. The course even impacted the way we approached the 2012 budget discussions. I hope we can offer this course in the future as both a refresher and for new attendees.

The financial status of the congregation was a great concern in the final quarter of the year. Our projections were for a significant shortfall. Through the stewardship program and some difficult cuts to the 2011 budget, we ended the year with a shortfall around \$5000, much lower than expected. We thank God for the offerings of our members and the mercy of our God. He truly "knows our needs and well provides them." The budget for 2012 reflects adjustments and cuts of nearly 20% over 2011. We pray this responsible stewardship is pleasing in God's sight.

Our church anniversary is annually commemorated with the festival of the Reformation (October 31). It is fitting to rejoice in the reclamation of the Gospel by the Reformers and to celebrate the founding of our congregation together. All Saints' Day (November 1st) is our opportunity to remember all the dearly departed and give thanks for their life and resurrection received in Christ. Thanksgiving Even (Nov 23) rounds out the non-festival half of the year by thanking God for all our blessings.

The festival half of the church year began anew with Advent on November 27. Our midweek services considered the three emphases of witness, mercy, and life together in the context of the Christmas story. The rejoicing continued through our Christmas candlelight and festival services. We even continued the festival into the three days following Christmas. Our final services of 2011 coincided with the feast of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus. It is a blessing to serve the congregation in this way, so that the Word of God truly dwells with us richly.

On My Own Preschool remains a keystone to Grace's outreach efforts. We hosted an open house in January to try to reach the needs of the community. Our staff puts on a number of events throughout the year, including Men's night in February and a closing picnic in May. We rejoice that these children, many of whom come from non-liturgical churches, are willing and able to sit quietly in church, to hear God's Word, to sing hymns of praise and confession, and to intensely learn and study the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and the Ten Commandments.

As a congregation, we began serious efforts to reach inactive and former members, encouraging them to hear and receive more frequently. This is a serious matter. Many delinquent members were sinned against by this congregation or a former pastor. Others preferred to follow their own itching ears and listen to false teachers. Some were challenged by the death of a spouse, the divorce of their marriage, old age, or sickness. Whatever the reason, it is our duty to care for them just as Jesus came to us while we lay beaten and left for dead in the ditch of our sin.

Our catechetical offerings included the regular children's Sunday School opening, Saturday and Sunday Bible Studies studying St. John's Apocalypse, weekly Preschool chapel studying the six chief parts from the catechism, youth catechism classes, and midweek study of the Lutheran Confessions. Our catechism class grew as we began study of the New Testament pericopes. Joining Ethan and Wyatt are Joseph Botkin, Elsie Gillespie, and guests Faith and Chloe Sikma. The congregation put on the annual Vacation Bible School from June 20 through the 24th. It was well-attended with an average of 52 students. Everyone learned of their savior in Christ. We offered workshops throughout the year for funeral planning and the importance of a last will and testament.

The life of our congregation is blessed by frequent opportunities for friendship. We enjoy our Sunday morning "coffee and pastry" break before Bible class and Sunday school. We celebrated the anniversary of the congregation with a church picnic and barbecue. The ladies and their male tag-alongs enjoyed what looks to be our last Holiday Bazaar and Luncheon. The men enjoy their dartball league with other local LCMS congregations.

At the end of 2010, the baptized membership of Grace stood at 106. The communicant membership at 80. The average attendance was 65 per weekend, which means that 60% of our active members are in attendance in Divine Service on a given week.

And so the civil year came to its end a month after the Church's year had wrapped up. Through all the changes, all the joys and all the sorrows, our faithful Lord continued to serve us His mercy, His forgiveness, His love both lavishly and freely. He truly shepherds His people with tenderness from this passing age into the bright light and shining joys of that Age to come where with the Father and the Holy Spirit, He ever reigns in majesty and glory. To the blessed Trinity be all the glory forever and ever! Amen.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Rev. Christopher Gillespie". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and connected.

Rev. Christopher Gillespie, Pastor of Grace, in his 2nd year of the current pastorate