

The Grace Lutheran

Newsletter of Grace LCMS – Greenwood, Arkansas

January 2026

Resolving to Love (Not Peck) Each Other

Aside from the obvious reference to resolutions, the title to this little installment probably seems rather odd. Hear me out. I was recently speaking with a married friend of mine and his lovely bride of many years. During the course of conversation, the topic turned to making resolutions for the New Year. I don't really make resolutions. Do I try to make improvements in my life? Absolutely! But I don't need a specific date on the calendar for that to happen. There's no time like the present! My friend informed me that his New Year's resolution was to try and make his wife happy this coming year. A very noble desire indeed! I started to say, "*You know... over 90% of all resolutions fail within the first seven days, and people just quit after that.*" Before I could get the whole sentence out, though, his bride chirped up, "*And my resolution is to make sure he keeps his resolution!*" That's one resolution I think is going to have a high success rate. I have no doubt that she WILL keep her resolution!

Now, at first glance, this probably seems like the wife is resolving to be a bit "hen-pecky" to her husband (and maybe that will be the case). I don't know. They do love each other, and they've been together faithfully and happily for thirty years. What they have "works for them," so I have no reason to doubt their resolve to continue loving each other in their quirky little way, nor do I have reason to feel sorry for the guy, as if he's going to somehow regret his resolution.

But this got me thinking about our relationships, one to another, as brothers and sisters in Christ. When asked where his brother was, Cain responded, "*How should I know? Am I my brother's keeper?*" No answer is given. It's a question worth pondering though. Am I my brother's keeper? Am I my fellow parishioner's keeper? (We're all brothers and sisters in Christ,

right?) Am I my spouse's keeper? If you asked my buddy's wife, she would say "*yes, I am!*" (My bride would probably say much the same about me.)

I guess it depends which way you look at this. I can't **make** anyone do anything; i.e., my brother, my fellow parishioners. I'm not your "keeper." I'm not your boss. You're not my "property" or my employees or anything like that. However... the Hebrew word we translate as "keeper" (*shamar*) also carries with it the meaning of "hedge about, guard, attend to, protect, preserve." If you see a stranger's child wandering into traffic, do you shrug your shoulders and say, "*Meh, I'm not their keeper,*" or do you seek to protect, save, and guard, this little one who is in obvious trouble? They may not know they're in trouble, but you do! No answer is needed. You know the right answer.

Well... so it is with our relationships to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, you hear the writer to the Hebrews doing this exact thing when he encourages his fellow Christians (who had been staying away from worship, either out of fear of persecution, apathy, or indifference), "*Let us not neglect to meet together, as some are in the habit of doing*" (Heb 10:25).

Understand: I am NOT saying that you should resolve to hen-peck everyone else about how they aren't measuring up to the perfect standards demanded in Christianity; ref. "*Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect*" (Matt 5:48). If you're looking to henpeck imperfect Christianity, start by pecking at the person in the mirror! Besides, resolutions don't really work this way, do they? I've often joked that my wife's New Year's resolution is for me to lose weight. It doesn't work that way. Losing weight has to be my resolution. I can't resolve anything for anybody other than myself. I'm not their keeper. BUT... because my wife loves me, will she do what she can in her power to protect me, and guard me (maybe even save me) from poor decisions? I would hope so! That's what love does, right?

Love gets involved. Love doesn't sit back and do nothing while the loved one continues

Continued on next page...

Pastor's Pen, continued...

toddling towards obvious danger. At the time, it may seem like “hen-pecking.” That’s Old Adam’s pride at work. *“No one is going to tell me what to do! Stop hen-pecking! Mind your own business! Worry about your own problems! ‘Heal thine self, O physician!’”* We’ve all been there, I’m sure. You know how I can be so sure? Because we all wear the same Old Adam sinful flesh. Nobody likes to be told they’re wrong, especially when they’re convinced they’re not doing anything wrong to begin with.

Let me say it again: I am NOT saying that you should resolve to hen-peck everyone else about how they aren’t measuring up to the perfect standards demanded in Christianity. What I am saying, however, is perhaps we all resolve, as brothers and sisters in Christ, to truly show forth our love for Christ and for one another by endeavoring to take better care of each other, and—yes—this does *necessarily* include holding each other more accountable in terms of weekly worship. Let us resolve, as the family of Christ in this little place, to be more involved in each other’s lives; i.e., our struggles, our triumphs, our worries, our woes, etc. *“If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”* (Gal 6:1-2). *“Encourage one another and build one another up”* (1Th 5:11).

I can’t tell you how often I get asked, *“Pastor, how is so-and-so doing?”* I do realize that in many instances, this is coming from a good place. (There are times, though, that I’m fairly certain that it’s coming from more of a “gossipy” place too!) Whatever the reason, though, rather than ask me, why don’t you resolve this year to reach out to so-and-so yourself. Find out firsthand how they’re doing. Don’t just send a text or a soulless e-mail. Seek them out. Maybe a phone call, so they can hear your voice; so they can hear the genuine care and concern in your voice. Better yet, be “old-fashioned” and knock on their door. Face-to-face is always best! Go out for coffee. Go for a walk. Just sit and catch up. Whatever. Let them know—firsthand—that they are loved and

missed, and inquire how you can help them to get back to where they need to be.

This is what I’m resolving to better and more of in this coming year. God-willing, and with your loving help and encouragement, I might just be able to keep this resolution. Your resolution, I suppose, is to make sure I keep my resolution. Know that, in Christian love, I will try to do the same for you. As we enter into this new year, purely by God’s grace, may the whole body of Christ be built up and strengthened and Christ Himself glorified in/through all of us together.

In Christian love,
Pastor

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Life in Christ...

Happy New Year! Pastor Zirbel’s **Wednesday Bible Study** continues on 1/7/2026, with the study of the book of Lamentations. All are encouraged to attend the study that begins at 10:00 am.

POINSETTIAS – If you purchased poinsettias, feel free to take them home with you! Anything left after TODAY will be tossed!

VOTERS MEETING – The semi-annual Voters Meeting will be Sunday, January 25th, immediately following the 10:15am worship service.



Blessed New Year to all!
Thank you for all of your pecan purchases which help to support mission and outreach efforts, including the financial support of two seminary students. Grace

LWML also supported Preborn (local), Madagascar Mission (national), and Mid-South Missions (international). Your support helps to make this possible!

The next regular meeting of Grace Society LWML will be Tuesday January 13th at 12:30 PM at the church.

Epiphany Blessings!!
The Church's mission is to call sinners to communion with the life-giving flesh of Christ.



January Birthdays

5 Dick Scrivner
7 Joseph Pinckney
11 Jordan Cox
14 Nancy Williams
21 Peyton Blanton
22 William Mullen



Remembering in Prayer:

*Let my prayer be counted as incense before You, and the
lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!*

Psalm 141:2

For the sick – Father of mercies and God of all comfort, our only help in time of need, look with favor upon those who suffer illness and infirmity. Assure them of Your mercy, deliver them from the temptations of the evil one, and give them patience and comfort in their illness. If it please You, restore them to health, or give them grace to accept this tribulation with courage and hope.

For those who grieve – Heavenly Father, into whose keeping we entrust our loved ones, help us to look to You in our time of sorrow, remembering the cloud of faithful witnesses with which we are surrounded, Grant that we may one day share in the joys of those who now rest in Your presence.

For those who are lonely – Ever-present Lord, You have promised never to leave us nor forsake us but to abide with us to the end of time. Grant that those who live alone may not be lonely but find both comfort from Your promises and fulfilment in loving You and their neighbors all their days.

For the joy of the resurrection among us; for the fruit of faith nourished by the Word and the Sacraments.

For faith to live in the promises of Holy Baptism; for one's calling and daily work; for the unemployed; for the salvation and well-being of our neighbors; for schools, colleges, and seminaries; for good government and for peace.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord we pray. Amen

Altar Guild Gleanings:

Season of Epiphany

The beginning of the church year, the Time of Christmas, is divided into three times. Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. Christmas begins on the evening of December 24, the Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord, and continues through January 5. The third part of the Time of Christmas is the season of Epiphany.

Epiphany of Our Lord falls on January 6 and commemorates the visit of the Wise Men to the infant Jesus. Like Christmas, this season begins on the eve of the feast, which is the evening of January 5. Depending on the date of Ash Wednesday, there may be as many as eight Sundays after the Epiphany.

Emphasis – Epiphany season focus is on the self-revelation of God to the world. Beginning with the Epiphany, when Christ revealed Himself to the Gentile Wise Men as a “Light to lighten the Gentiles,” this revelation emphasis continues, as the Gospel readings depict how Jesus revealed Himself in Word and deed.

Color – The color of purity and eternity, symbolizing perfection, celebration and joy, white is the color used for Christmas and its season, including Epiphany and its season. The First Sunday after the Epiphany celebrates the Baptism of Our Lord, when the voice from heaven revealed Him as “my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17)

Customs & Décor – There are no special decorations or customs for Epiphany. Any Christmas greenery may be left up for the service of Epiphany, but should be removed before the Baptism of Our Lord.

On the First Sunday after the Epiphany, the Baptism of Our Lord, the church's baptismal font may be filled with water for the faithful to dip their finger in and cross themselves as a reminder of their own Baptisms. The Baptism of Our Lord was the first of His deeds to “fulfill all righteousness” and sanctify the waters of our Baptism. The use of the full set of candles (Eucharistic lights and floor candelabra) may continue throughout the Epiphany season as a reminder of the revelation of Christ “the Light of the world.”

**All Information gleaned from the CPH Publication “Altar Guild Manual”
by Lee A. Maxwell.*



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Bible Study & Worship Opportunities:

Sunday Worship Service 8:00 & 10:15 AM

Sunday School 9:00 AM

Wednesday Adult Bible Study 10:00 AM