The Password is . . .

The game show Password originally aired on CBS from 1961 to 1967, and ABC from 1971 to 1975, and has been revived several times since, including last year. Two teams, each consisting of one celebrity player and a contestant, compete. The word to be conveyed (the “password”) is given to one player on each team and is shown onscreen to viewers as well as spoken on the audio track. Gameplay alternates between the two teams. On each team, the player who is given the password gives a one-word clue from which their partner attempts to guess the password – such as the word “stop” given for the password “go.”

I’m reminded of this classic game show, which was fun to watch after school in the late afternoon, because if the word “Advent” was offered today as a clue, the most likely response that it would elicit would be “calendar.” After all, what is Advent? In our world today, I think most people, if presented with that word, would reply “calendar.” The Advent calendar is probably the most well-known aspect of this time of year. I’ve seen Advent calendars on sale at Trader Joe’s, so you know it’s popular.

But is that all Advent is – a countdown to Christmas? Let me be clear: I’m all for Advent calendars. I’m for anything that helps people keep that word from passing away (pun intended). But of course, Advent is more than that.

Advent is about waiting and in the process preparing ourselves, getting ourselves ready. But for what exactly? The short answer is: we’re not sure what we’re waiting for but we do it based on faith. We remember in Advent the time of waiting before the birth of Jesus, and we remember that time of waiting as the Bible shows it to us – as a time when people were indeed longing for something that would change everything, and yet at the same time not quite knowing what that something would be.

I think our wait is the same. Aren’t we too waiting and longing for something to change everything, while not knowing for sure what that something will be? I know that’s where I am, longing for serious change while not knowing the particulars: the when and the how. Yes, we wait for the second coming of Christ, but it’s a mystery what that will be, especially given that Christ is also already here. And just as people didn’t know they were waiting for a child to be born in a stable, we don’t know what the second coming will be.

So what can we do in this time of waiting, when we’re not even certain what we’re waiting for? Maybe this Advent, we can play our own version of “Password.”

To a world suffering from violence – wars in Ukraine, the Holy Land, and elsewhere – let’s pass the word “Peace.”

In the face of dire threats – climate change, poverty, and other dangers and injustices – let’s pass the word “Hope.”

In recognition of the struggles of life – calling to mind the lonely, the sick, the sorrowful, the vulnerable, the forgotten and the ignored – let’s pass the word “Joy.”

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And as a society plagued with animosity, distrust and division – let’s pass the word “Love.”

This Advent let’s not spend our time simply counting down to Christmas; let’s play, let’s live “Password,” and direct our energy to productive use. Let’s pass – let’s spread – to one another and to the world: Peace, Hope, Joy, and Love. In my humble opinion, that’s a proper Advent.

After all, as we know already, good things come to those who wait. And the wait of Advent, thanks be to God, leads us to the WORD that becomes flesh and dwells among us. And that, my friends, definitely is worth passing on.

May we all have a blessed Advent and a joyful Christmas!

Grace and peace,

The Rev. Tom Synan+

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**Advent Lessons & Carols**

**Sunday, December 10th at 4:00 pm.**
The pews are often filled for this service, so plan to come a bit early to find a seat.

**Grace Church Tree Trimming!**
Join the Rector in trimming our tree and spreading the Christmas spirit on Sunday, December 17th, during Coffee Hours in the Connector.

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**St. Nicholas Bazaar**
Hope to see you at the bazaar!
It's always such an uplifting day!

Thank you to all who helped before the bazaar, all who signed up to help at the bazaar, and all who signed up to clean up. The bazaar is truly a parish-wide event!

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**Adopt-A-Family For Christmas**
For many years Grace Church members have enjoyed buying or making gifts for a family that is struggling. Wish lists for some 40 families will be available on Sundays starting Nov 19th after both services. The deadline is Dec 17th. AFTER the St Nicholas Bazaar the gifts may be brought to the undercroft on Sunday mornings. If you are interested in adopting a family, please contact Mary Hocken. 413-537-0251, melizhocken@gmail.com

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Iconography Workshop

An ongoing iconography workshop meets every Sunday afternoon, from noon to four in the Parish Hall. Previous artistic experience is not necessary, since icon writing is as much a contemplative process of an inner spiritual journey as it is an artistic discipline. Please contact Sandy Lillydahl at slillydahl@library.umass.edu for additional information.

Tea and Titles

Tea & Titles meets once or twice a month at 2:30 pm in the Connector to share and discuss books recently read. For more information, please contact Jude Wobst at judith.wobst@gmail.com

Our next meeting is December 14, 2023 at 2:30 pm. All are welcome!

Men's Group

The Men's Group is always looking for new members for general discussions and personal exchange. We meet on Friday mornings 7-8:30. We meet in person every other Friday of each month. (On the other Fridays we will be zooming to accommodate members who live away or are unable to attend for other reasons.) For further information contact Charlie Dickinson: lcd@polisci.umass.edu

Bible Study

Join the Rector and others to study, and react to, the Gospel and Old Testament lesson for the following Sunday. We meet via Zoom Saturday mornings at 10am. Email Tom at tsynan@gracechurchamherst.org to receive the connection.

A Week at Grace

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Raising the Questions

Raising the Questions is a Grace Church reading and discussion group that started in the fall of 2017, continued sporadically on Zoom during COVID, and is once again meeting in person. The group formed because of questions we were asking ourselves and of others; we discuss a variety of topics that center on theology, images of God, liturgical language, and alternative forms of worship. We compiled the booklet of alternative prayers that was available in the back of the church during Lent (2022), and was the source for the discussion group on language and liturgy that same Lent. We welcome everyone and the questions and ideas they bring.

Raising the Questions now meets at 9:30 am the second Tuesday of the month.

Pastoral Call for Volunteers

Do you like to cook? Do you like to drive? Would you like to help fellow parishioners? Pastoral Care is looking to develop a list of volunteers to be contacted as needed. Most likely a request for food or a ride would occur every other month or so. And being on the volunteer list does not obligate your assistance every time a request is made. If you are interested in this ministry, please see the sign up sheets at coffee hour, or email Gail Gnatek at ggnatek@gmail.com.

Palestinian Oil

Palestinian olive oil will be available for sale by the Episcopal Peace Fellowship in the Connector on the first Sunday of each month. It is first cold press organic and fair trade olive oil. The proceeds from the sale enable Grace to provide a scholarship for a student at the Episcopal Technological and Vocational Training Center in Ramallah.

A Litany for the Restoration of Peace in The Holy Land

God of peace, we pray for the people of Palestine and Israel in these perilous and dangerous times.
For all who are fearful for the safety of their loved ones and themselves, we pray that the assurance of unfailing love, even in the midst of danger, settles upon them. Shelter them from despair and protect them from harm.
For all who are wounded, we pray they find healing.
For all who have died, we pray they find rest.
For all who grieve, we pray they find comfort.
For leaders on all sides, we pray for a renewed will to lay down arms, for the strength to put the grievances and wrongs suffered by their people to rest, and for the conviction to embrace a path of reconciliation and peace that preserves the rights and dignity of all of your children.
God of mercy, help us to remember there is no border that can separate us from your great love and protection, no stone that can sound the well of your deep mercy.
God of justice, we pray with hopeful hearts that your beloved children of the Holy Land will be spared a future of sustained violence and unrest and that a recognition of the humanity of all people will prevail.
We ask all this in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

- American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

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ClimateAction@Grace

Climate Change Prayer

Holy God,
earth and air and water are your creation,
and every living thing belongs to you:
have mercy on us
as climate change confronts us.

Give us the will and the courage
to simplify the way we live,
to reduce the energy we use,
to share the resources you provide,
and to bear the cost of change.

Forgive our past mistakes
and send us your Spirit,
with wisdom in present controversis
and vision for the future to which you call us
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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11th Hour Bell Ringing for Climate Change

Monday, December 11th

Calling all ages to be part of the 11th Hour Bell Ringing for Climate Change Monday, December 11 at 10:45. Join friends and neighbors for prayer and meditation before the 11th hour ringing begins. No one is too young; no one is too old. Our church bell will be rung for 11 minutes on the 11th day of each month at 11 AM. After the bells ring, everyone will have a chance to make a joyful noise of resolve. Bring your cow bells, dinner bells, kazoos, and gongs, drums, cymbals, and noise makers of any kind. Signs and banners are encouraged. Who knows, maybe some folks passing by will stop and join in or at least catch the spirit of what committed people can do when joined together in faith.
**Request publicity for your event!**

To make Grace Church events as successful as possible, the Communications Committee developed an online form to request event publicity. The form, which includes instructions for completing and submitting the request, is found on the Grace website under the Outreach Commission or [https://www.gracechurchamherst.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Request-for-Event-Publicity-Form-2023.pdf](https://www.gracechurchamherst.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Request-for-Event-Publicity-Form-2023.pdf). The Communications Committee asks forms be submitted six to eight weeks prior to an event to ensure adequate time for publicity.

**Prayer Circle is still here!**

We are ready to pray for the needs of those in crisis who want a degree of anonymity. Names will be held in confidence by members of the Circle and will not be published outside Circle members. Names will remain on the list for a month, unless otherwise requested. If you would like to be prayed for in this way, or would like to make a request for a loved one, please contact MJ Fowler (mjfowler3@comcast.net).

**Thanks to Sarah Chadwick for the Christmas cheer for our departed.**

The Columbarium looks lovely right now so do go and take a look what she has designed.

- The Grace Garden Ministry

**Coming to Grace Church Gardens Next Spring!**

The Grace Church garden ministry is pleased to be in the planning stages of a new pollinator garden space. We are working with John Root, who is the founder of Pollinate Amherst, a citizen advocate group that was instrumental in the passage of the Pollinator Resolution by the Amherst Town Council. Pollinate Amherst has planted a demonstration garden at Groff Park and is in the process of renovating another pollinator garden at the Larch Hill Conservation Area.

This new garden will be in the front of Grace Church next to the Connector walkway. The daffodils that are currently in this space will be re-located to other areas around the church.

We will provide more information about the pollinator garden closer to the spring planting.

Sara Liberty-Laylin, Garden Ministry Chair

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The past two months, our Community Conversation Board has focused on the topic of translation, especially as it relates to faith and Scripture. Thank you to all who have thought about this topic and shared what’s on your mind!

One person shared: “I love thinking about different translations, how they were made & how they are used! I think context and purpose matter a lot: liturgy, study, reading at length, for example. I also don’t think it’s possible to separate translations from the traditions that they are made and especially used in.” Another recommended the Education for Ministry program as a way of exploring “how the Bible touches your life and spiritual journey.” Translations that were named as favorites were Luther’s translation in German and the King James Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and the New Jerusalem Revised in English. One contributor shared how their perspective on translation has evolved. “I thought nothing could compare with [the King James]… Now I like to look at several different translations… to understand a text.” One person wondered about others’ thoughts on The Message.

Throughout Advent, our Community Conversation Board will invite thoughts on “Being a Witness: How Do We Testify to the Light?” One of the important figures of the Advent season is John the Baptist, who the Gospel of John describes “as a witness to testify to the light.” We invite you to reflect on what being a witness or testifying to the light means today, and for you personally. Please find the board in The Connector to share your own thoughts or read the thoughts of others.
Children’s & Youth Ministry

Christmas Pageant

Once again, Grace is beginning preparations for its annual Christmas pageant, part of our 4:00 p.m. Christmas Eve service. Children + youth of all ages are invited and strongly encouraged to participate! If you have children visiting for Christmas who won’t be available for rehearsals, or if your family has any conflict with the rehearsal times, we still would very much like to welcome them into the pageant!

Please email Megan at mmcdermott@gracechurchamherst.org to confirm your child(ren) will be participating, along with preferences about the kind of part they’d like to play (Is there a particular role they have in mind? Are they comfortable with having a lot of lines or fewer? Would they be open to singing a solo) and any conflicts with the rehearsal dates. Feel free to also reach out with any questions!

Sunday Dec. 3rd – Get a head start on Christmas pageant music at Sunday School! 9:15-10:15 a.m., Upstairs Classroom, Parke House
We’re having an optional get-together on Dec. 3rd to sing hymns together and get a head start on musical preparations for the pageant!

Sunday Dec. 10th – First rehearsal, parish hall, 9:15-10:15 a.m.
All pageant participants are highly encouraged to join in our first rehearsal in the parish hall, where we will distribute scripts and begin practicing our parts, learning blocking, and singing together.

Sunday Dec. 17th –Second parish hall, 9:15-10:15 a.m.
All pageant participants are highly encouraged to join in as we continue to prepare the pageant.

Sunday Dec. 24th – Christmas Eve dress rehearsal, 2 p.m.; service, 4 p.m.
Dress rehearsal will give us a chance to rehearse in the church, with musical accompaniment, and to meet the live animals that will hopefully be acting out the Christmas story with us. Snacks will be provided.

Upcoming youth group opportunities

Friday Dec. 1st - Bazaar Volunteering, Parish Hall, 5 p.m. - As per tradition, youth group will organize & price toys for the Christmas Bazaar held the following day. Join us for this vital volunteer project & some take-out for dinner! Please RSVP to Megan.

Saturday Dec. 2nd – Toy Sales & Bazaar Volunteering (Cleanup) – Youth volunteers have traditionally helped sell toys and games. Sign up for a shift with Megan by email at mmcdermott@gracechurchamherst.org or in the sign-up sheets on the Connector. The bazaar can use some extra help cleaning up at the end of the bazaar at 2 p.m.!

More info will be coming soon on other December youth group activities.
Grace Church Facebook Page

Be sure to like us at https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100071025877972 and check back frequently for updates, events, and announcements. There are so many wonderful things happening at Grace - please help spread the word and share our Facebook postings with friends.

Outreach!

Our November Outreach Offering brought in $1028.00 for Doctors without Borders.

Generosity changes everything, starting with us.

Thank you for your generosity!

Advent Art Meditations Over Zoom – Journeying with Mary

This Advent season, join with us to meditate on Mary, mother of Jesus, through a variety of visual art pieces, for 3 Mondays – Dec. 4th, 11th, and 18th. We gather at 12:15 p.m. over Zoom.

Megan will offer a reflection on the images for the week and then guide the group into a time of personal meditation, with accompanying reflection prompts or questions. We will then come back together for optional discussion on reactions to the artwork and thoughts about what the artwork stirred up in us. These meditations usually last about half an hour, and you are welcome to bring your lunch to the Zoom with you!

Please make sure you are subscribed to Grace Church emails so you can receive the Zoom link by email on Monday mornings. If you are interested in these meditations but can’t attend live, please check in with Megan at mmcdermott@gracechuchamherst.org for access to recordings of the meditations or links to her slides of art/reflection questions.

Campus and Young Adult Ministries

Last GEMS (Grace Episcopal Ministry for Students) of the semester – Dec. 2nd, 11-12:30 p.m., Coronation Cafe

Our monthly gathering for college students is usually the third Saturday of the month, but because of the semester’s end, we’re moving our gathering up to Saturday Dec. 2nd! Rev. Megan will be at Coronation for an hour and a half. Drop in for the whole time, or just to say hello! We can chat theology, spirituality, faith…or whatever is going on in your life! Email for more info: mmcdermott@gracechurchamherst.org.

Theology on Tap Christmas Party

Our Theology on Tap group, which had been meeting monthly this fall, went on a break this semester to allow for its leaders to focus on some new campus ministry possibilities. However, we are hoping to gather again for a Christmas party. This is open to all ages, but has been a community that we especially intend to be welcoming to young adults. More info coming soon. If you haven’t been on my Theology on Tap email list and would like info, please email me at mmcdermott@gracechurchamherst.org.

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Wonderful news from Haiti; Lights go on at St. Matthieu! And computers follow quickly!

In this season of thankfulness and in anticipation of Advent and the coming of the light, the community of L’Ecole St. Matthieu in Bayonnais, Haiti welcomed on Nov. 10 a shipment that arrived from the port at Cap Haitien, following a period of delay in customs and a five-hour journey on rough roads. The truck was carrying solar panels and twelve ceiling fans with built-in lights (ready to be assembled and installed by a local electrician and his helper, assisted by a waiting crew of teachers, staff and volunteers from the village). The truck also brought 15 computers—a server and 14 new laptops. The pictures below and on the facing page document the excited but efficient activity to assemble and install the equipment. Solar installation was handled by a team led by a Haitian installer from the US non-profit solar company Brighten Haiti, assisted by six interns in the company’s training program for young Haitians.

The back story:
What brought this all about?
--- The story begins with the hard work and leadership of the St. Matthieu clergy and school staff. Because the previous priest in charge, Père Joseph Tancrèl Diegue, had the vision to insist—long before there was any idea of how electrification could be achieved— that the three new buildings that form the core of the school campus be constructed with electrical wiring, the school was solar-ready! The teachers, especially those trained with Anse yon Ayiti (Teach for Haiti), like the principal Clibert Massillon and the teacher of 6th (and some 7th-8th) grade classes, Kesnel Decius, have long wanted and prepared space for computer resources. The computer lab will be set up in the school’s library, which was completed in 2020.

--- Brighten Haiti was founded by CEO Kevin Keene to repurpose US solar panels that would otherwise have gone to landfills, and use them to bring electricity to schools in Haiti. L’Ecole St. Matthieu was chosen to be a pilot for a project that Brighten Haiti intends to expand to other sites in rural Haiti. Over the past year and a half Brighten Haiti has struggled to find ways around the dysfunction in Port-au-Prince and move these treasured supplies to Bayonnais. He finally moved his operation to Cap Haitien in the extreme north of the country, where the gangs have less presence than in the capital.

Brighten Haiti connected Grace’s Haiti Ministry with another non-profit, Bethel UMC Computers for Education, based in Warrenton, Virginia, which for 25 years has been donating computers to underprivileged schools in the US and now around the world. They agreed to donate to St. Matthieu new Hewitt Packard laptops, including what they call “Internet in a Box,” a server already loaded with educational resources that the school can use without needing to access the internet, which in Haiti is intermittent at best and extremely expensive. The server is loaded with 2300 books in Haitian Kreyol, French, English and Spanish. It includes all of Wikipedia; Khan Academy and Kolibri educational resources such as language-learning modules; Ted talks, and more. We are grateful to the organization’s founder, Denny Baumann, for working closely with the Haiti Committee to get these computers packed and shipped to Arizona, where Brighten Haiti was loading a shipping container with the solar gear and other items destined for St. Matthieu.

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A $5000 grant from the Diocese of Western Massachusetts was awarded to Grace in December 2022, to pay for the fans/lights, and the fees of a local electrician to connect the three buildings’ wiring and install the fans; along with shipping the computers from Virginia to Arizona and thence to Houston, where the container set sail, and trucking the items from Cap Haitien to Bayonnais. The grant was also spent to purchase a projector and screen so that images from the server (or educational films or music) can be shared with a larger number of students than the computer lab can accommodate.

**Future hopes:** Included in the container shipment with the panels, fans and computer lab equipment were an electric rice cooker and rice warmer, also purchased through the grant from the Diocese. The school cooks—who have been using an open fire fueled by charcoal or wood, set between three rocks on the ground, to prepare the school lunch—will experiment with whether this method will work for them, once school lunches can be resumed. (At present the school cannot offer a school lunch, since gangs ransacked the warehouse of the NGO, Food for the Poor, that was providing the rice and beans). If the solar powered electric devices are judged by the cooks to do the job, a next step would be to outfit the kitchen with more of them. They would be much better for the environment than scarce wood or propane and less strain on the school operating budget.

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**Ungirding** all this effort, hope and achievement is the long-standing partnership between the parish of St. Matthieu and the parishes of Grace Church and St. James, in Indian Head, MD. Thanks to many individuals’ contributions and through fund-raisers ranging from soup sales to fish fries and Friday card games, the partnership has faithfully provided the funds that have built buildings, paid the faculty and staff, and provided the children with uniforms, textbooks and school supplies. **Thank YOU all** for making possible the lovely new teaching spaces that were ready for this new equipment and for supporting—year after year—the teachers and students, who are already starting to use it.

Installing the solar electricity system, fans, and computers was completed in just three days. As the accompanying photos document, a member of the Brighten Haiti team gave a group of teachers and students an initial training session on the computers; and others on the school staff have learned about the fundamentals of the solar electricity system. The principal was given an iPhone with enough paid minutes to enable him to report periodically and to ask for assistance if it’s needed. The Haiti Committee received a report and these photographs from Brighten Haiti’s on-site installation manager, Rolguens Meristill, along with other photos via WhatsApp from Clibert Massillon, the school principal. We look forward to a video, currently in preparation by Brighten Haiti, that we plan to share with the congregation at Grace.
Haiti Ministry

Teachers and local helpers welcome the truck and assemble the fans.

The electricity comes on and the fans turn! The kids are thrilled!

A team of installers from Brighten Haiti use their new skills to set up the panels and connect the school buildings into one system.

The students meet the computers!

Training kids and staff on the computers in the library/computer lab

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<td>10:00 am Christmas Service</td>
<td>12:00 pm AA</td>
<td>7:00 pm Alamon</td>
<td>5:10 pm Evensong</td>
<td>9:00 am Bible Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15 am Christmas Lessons &amp; Carols</td>
<td>12:00 pm Iconography</td>
<td>7:30 pm AA</td>
<td>5:10 pm Evensong</td>
<td>9:00 am Bible Study</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Times are in 24-hour format.*
“Grace is nothing else but a certain Beginning of glory in us.”
--Thomas Aquinas

Grace Episcopal Church, located on the Town Common of Amherst, is a community of prayer and action. If you want to connect with God or if you are seeking a deeper knowledge of God, and you would like to do this with a community that cares for you and honors you, then Grace Church is the place for you. Our doors are open to one and all, regardless of where you are in your spiritual journey.

We love because God first loved us. 1 John 4:19

Discover true life and true love at Grace Church.

Service Schedule

Sunday 8:00 am and 10:30 am Holy Eucharist
Wednesday 12:10 pm Rite I Holy Eucharist and Healing Prayer
Friday 5:30 pm Evensong

See our website, www.gracechurchamherst.org for updates