

# THE Visitor

February 2026

Grace United  
Methodist Church  
318 N Center Street  
Geneseo, IL 61254  
309-944-4208  
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geneseograce.org

In the Philippines the Baguio Episcopal Area where my District belong, they launched a Convocation for all Pastors and Lay Leaders, centered on the theme of the Discipleship Ministry following the way Jesus modeled discipleship with His own disciples. One of the major topics was how to establish Campus Ministry at the Elementary and High School levels. The direction was clear: every Local Church must have at least one Campus Ministry.

Taking this call seriously, I wrote to the School District Supervisor and the School Principal of a school near to our Church. Our church request permission to start a Campus Ministry. We decided to focus on the High School level, and by God's grace, the door opened. **We began doing Campus Ministry once a week, and slowly,** I built relationships with both the teachers and the students. At first, there were no long sermons just presence, conversations and teaching Moral Recovery, and trust.

When Christmas time came, the church sponsored a feeding program at the school. That simple act spoke louder than many words. Later on, the church offered a Praise and Worship Ministry, and this is where the story became very exciting. Eleven young men became very active and started coming regularly, not only to church, but also to our parsonage. We let them eat with us during lunch, and sometimes even on Saturdays and Sundays. Our home slowly turned into a combination of parsonage, youth center, and free cafeteria, and we were happy about it. We have a generous sponsored every time we ate.

The church began helping them with their school allowances, and I also looked for people who were willing **to help with their tuition fees. We didn't just teach the Word; we tried to live it. These eleven boys kept coming** to church, and we started teaching them how to play drums, guitar, and organ. Soon, worship became more joyful and definitely louder. These young people became a praise and worship leaders and they even became District Youth leaders too.

Every Saturday morning at 5:00am, yes, 5:00am, true discipleship we had activities together. We went jogging, then played basketball, and I proudly served as the referee. After the games, we ate together, lovingly **sponsored by our Women's Group, who truly understood that food is also part of ministry.**

As time passed, these young men grew, not just in skills, but in faith. They became very active in the church, attended confirmation classes, and eventually became leaders. They volunteered in many ministries and served faithfully. And the fruit of discipleship was beautiful: all of them finished college, one became a Pastor, and one became an administrator in a church-related school. Even more joy came as the parents and families of these young people began attending worship. One teacher and her entire family also joined the United Methodist Church. There was joy everywhere.

From proclamation to participation, from invitation to transformation this is how discipleship happens. Not only in sermons, but in relationships; not only in church, but in everyday life. Sometimes it begins with Campus Ministry, and sometimes it begins with basketball, music practice, shared meals, and eleven young men who were simply loved. And that is my story of Youth Discipleship.

*Pastor Cel*



Pastor Excelsis (Cel) Biteng  
Email: celbiteng@gmail.com

318 N Center Street  
Geneseo, IL

Sunday School:  
Adult Classes 8:00am  
Ladies Bible Study  
10:00am

Worship Sunday at 9:00am  
Kids Worship (Ages 4-11)  
Sunday at 9:00am

## stayCONNECTED



309 944-4208



geneseograce.org



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Geneseo Grace

2026 Offering Needed to Meet Monthly Budget

**\$30,833.00**

January 4-25

**\$18,926.36**

General Fund

**YOUR GIVING MAKES  
A DIFFERENCE.**



For your convenience we have 3 ways to give online!

Scan the QR code | website: geneseograce.com |  
Download the "Vanco" mobile app



Date	Attendance	
	Worship	Sunday School
December 21	128	13
December 24	115	
December 28	79	15
January 4	75	16
January 11	72	17
January 18	68	18
January 25	80	24

## Prayer Requests

Adopted children & families  
Kim Brake  
John Davis  
Family Member  
Nikki Haars  
Andrew Lord  
Michelle Matheis  
Patty  
Family of Ken Pippin  
Ellen Rubino  
Barb Sigwalt  
Todd

Annika  
Mike Clark  
Ruth Ann Eaker  
Cathy Gaudet  
Mary Kintigh Family  
Clarice Massingill  
Karen Myhre  
Mary Petre  
**Powell's Brother**  
Henry Rupe  
Sally Swanson

Those in Assisted Living & Nursing Home:  
Joyce Criddle    Mary Lou Deane    Cathy Gaudet  
John Riggs    Connie Ryner    Barry Snodgrass  
Sarah Stees    Carolyn Stenzel    Rita Webb

Please contact Julie Dahlquist  
with prayer updates.

## COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

January 19, 2026

The Council meeting began as Pastor Cel expressed that her goal for 2026 is for Grace Church to fulfill its mission statement: **"To passionately follow Jesus so others will know God's love."** She encouraged each committee to turn in its Annual Report form by February 27. She also shared her ideas for Lent and Holy Week, with Good Friday and Sunrise Services being planned. A Maundy Thursday Brunch for women was discussed. Pastor Cel reported on her visits to families and our nursing-home/assisted-living seniors. Council members voiced appreciation for her visits and phone calls. District Superintendent James Fielder appreciated the reports given for the Charge Conference on November 16.

Council members on the Staff Parish Relations Committee reported that Tia Mariman will be taking over Andy Radue's duties. They also reported on the congregation's generosity with their Christmas gifts for staff members.

Karen Doy, Chair of the Mission Committee, announced the next Blood Drive will be at Grace on Thursday, March 12, 7:30am-11:30 am. Donors can schedule a slot online. She also announced that there were to be six Special Missions Sundays throughout the year. Missions agreed to set a floor of \$500 for each. The Committee also decided that the Easter Mission offering will go to Rebuilding Together. The committee would like to encourage more individuals to join the Rebuilding Together Community Work Day. **"The Concert for a Cause" raised \$700 for Philippine Relief.** The Mission committee added \$1600 to that effort.

The Finance Committee is still in search of a chairperson. Pastor Cel said the Nominations and Leadership Development Committee will meet to discuss the filling of this position. Reports sent by Mark Mosbarger showed the church ended 2025 in the black. Also, Mark is continuing efforts to terminate the current contract with Republic garbage service.

Brian Humphries, Trustees Chair, thanked Steve Doy for installing the flooring in the men's restroom in Otterbein. He reported on a water heater leak in the main floor men's room which Wirth repaired. He is still waiting to hear back regarding the repair of the lobby windows. On the north steps, wood caps over the brick flowerbeds are rotting. Steve Schulte will replace these with limestone slabs.

Tom Hitzhusen, Worship Committee Chair, reported good feedback regarding the sanctuary's five Christmas trees and the placement of the outside Nativity scene. The committee complimented the Altar Guild for a wonderful job decorating the church for Christmas. Ushers will be on a month-to-month basis. Tom plans to have ushers scheduled 2 - 4 months in advance. An inclement weather policy has been updated. Tom Hitzhusen and Jeff Orton will help advise Pastor Cel on cancelling church services and activities when necessary. All local television stations will be notified, and cancellation information will be streamed. The next Worship Committee meeting is scheduled for February 2 at 6:00pm.

Evangelism Committee met on January 13. Chairperson Gayle Barnes reported that the Grace Church float entered in the lighted Christmas parade was a success and received positive feedback. The committee thanks Dee Humphries for baking several dozen cookies for the parade entrants to enjoy. Thanks also to Mark and Nancy Koster for setting up and hosting in the foyer. Pastor Cel suggested delivering Easter Eggs to shut-ins on Easter Sunday. **Plans for the New Teachers' Luncheon in August were discussed.**

The Council also discussed the future possibility of a worship service on Wednesday or Thursday evenings.

The next Council Meeting will be on March 16, 2026, at 6:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jeff Orton, Church Council Chair



Join us on Wednesday, February 18  
at 7:00pm for Ash Wednesday Service



SCHEDULE  
begins at 7:00am

February 21 - St. Malachy  
February 28 - First Lutheran  
March 7 - Kingswood  
March 14 - TBD  
March 21 - TBD  
March 28 - Grace UMC

## LOOKING BACK WITH



Did you know . . . years ago, baptisms were held only once a year? When Alan Henry Yager was baptized, it was on Children's Day (the second Sunday in June). Alan was christened with seven other infants and one adult in 1936.

## SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1



We are family. When we walk past our neighbor who is hiding in plain sight, we limit the gifts and graces that our sisters and brothers in Christ bring to the table. We limit the experiences, the voices and the beloved community that take place through mutual sharing of gifts. With a special offering celebrating Human Relations Day, we join with United Methodists around the world, remembering that the size of the table of divine love is unlimited.

Across the United Methodist connection we come together to help bridge the gap between church and community by participating in an offering set aside for Human Relations Day. For more than half a century, United Methodists have observed this churchwide special Sunday in recognition of the message Jesus demonstrated during his life: **all of God's children are important.**

One of the wonderful aspects of The United Methodist Church is that we can do so much more together than we ever could do on our own. On Human Relations Day, we join other UMC congregations in a special offering to support neighborhood ministries through Community Developers, community advocacy through United Methodist Voluntary Services and work with at-risk youth through the Youth Offender Rehabilitation Programs.

In recognizing Human Relations Day, we are called to make an impact in communities where people **struggle because they don't have the tools or resources to reach their God-given potential.** Our gifts are part of building beloved community through faith based volunteer programs, community developers and programs that work with at-risk teens.



The Mission Committee has designated Rebuilding Together as the recipient of the Easter Offering with a floor of \$500.00. Rebuilding Together Henry County, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit established in June 1994, began with one simple mission: to provide free home repairs to low-income homeowners in Geneseo, helping them remain safe and secure in their own homes.

Over the past 30 years, RTHC has grown significantly and now serves communities throughout both Henry and Stark Counties. What started with a single workday has expanded into three year-round programs: Comprehensive Home Rehabilitation and Accessibility modifications; the Safe at Home services, which include wheelchair ramps; and the [Re]Use program offering durable medical equipment loans. Today, RTHC supports 75-100 families each year, helping neighbors live more safely, independently, and with dignity.

Each year, more low-income homeowners face tough choices between essentials — like food or medicine - and critical **home repairs. Rebuilding Together helps ensure families don't have to choose by providing safe, healthy home repairs** at no cost. Eligible homeowners are low-income seniors, veterans, individuals with disabilities, or families with children who cannot complete the work themselves. Referrals come from community groups, neighborhood organizations, faith communities, service agencies, or self-referral. Please check with the homeowner before submitting on their behalf. Applications are available on line.

Anyone 14 years or older can volunteer! All skill levels are welcome - from those who can lend a hand with basic tasks to trained tradespeople. Carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and other skilled volunteers are especially needed as house captains and crew leaders. A waiver must be signed prior to volunteering.

Contact Sarah at 309-288-4600, or [snyder@rebuildingtogether-hc.org](mailto:snyder@rebuildingtogether-hc.org), or complete an online application to volunteer or request assistance.

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Grace church supports missionaries Richard & Alma Navarro, assigned to Taiwan. They have two children, Charis Dorothy & Chadash Matthew. An abbreviated portion of their quarterly newsletter is below. Their entire newsletter is posted on the Mission Bulletin Board.

Alma & Richard minister to migrant workers, primarily fellow Filipinos, in Taiwan. These workers face many challenges as they are away from family and living in small spaces. In the **midst of these struggles, the Word of God gives comfort and assurance. "The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow" (Psalm 146:9).**

Their ministry, called TAHANAN, remains committed to caring for these migrants. They focus on teaching responsible financial stewardship and offering spiritual guidance. They believe that even while living and working far from home, they can experience the abundant life that God desires for all His people.

This ministry was the only ministry invited to a special dinner fellowship with local officials and local residents in the community, as they stand as the only foreign ministry actively participating in and supporting programs for the local community. They serve the community through clean up drives and other outreach efforts. This invite affirms that sincere service, love in action, and faith lived out can build bridges, break barriers, and create meaningful relationships.

They also provided an opportunity for migrants to laugh, connect, and share memories through Balik Tanaw Part 2. **This activity was created to help ease the heavy burdens brought by long hours of daily work and life's pressures.** Through childhood games, participants were able to reminisce about a time when life was simpler, laughter was free, worries were few, and joy came naturally. More than a game, it became a celebration of life, gratitude, community, and **God's enduring grace.**

The Navarros give thanks to God for the gift of life, hope, and love GUM church brings to their ministry journey. They continue to life us up in prayer, asking God to strengthen and empower us as we keep touching lives in His service.



WITH DEEPEST  
*Sympathy*

*To the Family of Lora Lea Miller  
who passed away on January 7, 2026*

*To the Family of Ken Pippin  
who passed away on January 17, 2026  
Beloved Husband of Cindy  
Father of Tracy, Stormy & Sean*



OWLS Lunch

(note the date change!)

Thursday, February 12

at 11:30am



Join us for lunch followed by an interesting program. Sign up in the lobby or call the office.

BOOK CLUB

Tuesday, February 3 at 1:00pm



Our fun group meets in the church library. We will discuss "The Yellow Tailed-Moth" by Margot Shepherd. Together, our group enjoys exciting Book discussions and just plain good conversations. New faces are welcome anytime!

**FEBRUARY**  
Birthdays & Anniversaries

- 01 - Gary Dahlquist  
Lynne Haars
- 02 - George Farley  
Mike Hamer  
Dee Humphries
- 03 - Pastor Ely Biteng
- 04 - Lorrie Snodgrass
- 06 - Tom Hitzhusen  
Valerie Shoemaker
- 07 - James Mickley  
Cal Venema
- 08 - Gayle Barnes  
Daryl Rice
- 09 - Jeff Orton
- 10 - Pastor Cel Biteng
- 11 - Kathy Tank
- 12 - Amie Blank  
Audrey (Toone) Smutzer
- 14 - Levi Neumann
- 15 - Lois Johnson  
Hannah Lohman Wallace
- 16 - Jerry Snodgrass
- 18 - Peggy Betcher
- 19 - Rachel Sheffler  
Lynda Yoder
- 20 - Molly Neumann  
Dean Yoder
- 24 - Michael Emerick
- 25 - John Dwyer  
Ron Neumann
- 27 - Bonnie Johnsen
- 28 - Emma Dunker  
Betty Ernst



- 11 - Art & Sandy French (43)
- 16 - Alan & Connie Yager (63)
- 17 - Jerry & Pam Snodgrass (47)



# February

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
<p>Regular Sunday Events</p> <p>8:00am - Adult Sunday School 9:00am - Worship 9:00am - KIDS Worship 10:00am - <b>Women's</b> Bible Study</p>	2	3	4	5	6	7
	6:00pm - Worship Committee, Chapel	1:00pm - Book Club, Library	9:00am - Staff Meeting 9:30am -Worship Staff Meeting  7:00pm - Choir Rehearsal	5:30pm - Staff Parish Meeting, Library		
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Regular Sunday Events	8:00am - Prayer Group, Library  6:00pm - Opal Circle Meeting	9:00am - Pearl Circle Meeting, Chapel	9:00am - Staff Meeting 9:30am -Worship Staff Meeting  7:00pm - Choir Rehearsal	11:30am - OWLS Lunch, Otterbein  		
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Regular Sunday Events  10:30am - Breakfast Served by Pearl Circle  	8:00am - Prayer Group, Library		  7:00pm - Ash Wednesday Service			7:00am - <b>Men's</b> Lenten Breakfast at St. Malachy
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Regular Sunday Events	8:00am - Prayer Group, Library		9:00am - Staff Meeting 9:30am -Worship Staff Meeting  7:00pm - Choir Rehearsal			7:00am - <b>Men's</b> Lenten Breakfast at First Lutheran

DO ALL THINGS WITH  
*Love*