THE Visitor

October 2026

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

ONE YEAR OF GRACE

A Journey of Faith, "One Year of Grace: God Has Been Faithful."

As I reflect on my first year in the United States and my first year serving at Grace United Methodist Church, my heart is filled with one simple word: GRACE.

One year ago, my family and I came to a new country, a new community, and a new church. We left behind many things that were familiar to us. There were sacrifices, worries, adjustments, and moments of uncertainty. As a mother, leaving my daughter behind was one of the hardest experiences of my life. I also worried about my son, ER, as he adjusted to a new environment, and about my husband, Ely, who wanted to contribute but was unable to work because of his visa status. And then there was me, a pastor coming from the Philippines, serving in a new culture and speaking a language that is not my first language. I wondered, "Will they understand me? Will they accept me? Will I truly belong?" But God answered those questions, not all at once, but through people. You welcomed us. You gave us grace. You were patient with us. You opened your hearts and allowed us to become part of your church family. Slowly, what was once unfamiliar began to feel like home. I came to Grace thinking that I would teach. But I soon discovered that God also brought me here to learn. I learned about American culture, church traditions, the history of Grace UMC, and the many ways God has already been working through this congregation. I also learned that ministry is not about perfect words. It is about loving, listening, praying, serving, and walking with people. Sometimes people do not need a sermon. Sometimes they simply need someone to sit with them, hear their story, and remind them that they are not forgotten. This past year, I have seen God's grace through pastoral visits, nursing-home ministry, worship, prayer, outreach, and the people who have walked through our doors. We have seen new faces return, people discover a sense of belonging, and others become willing to serve. Our nursing-home ministry has also expanded, giving us more opportunities to share the simple message: "God loves you. You are not forgotten. You are still part of God's family." Matthew 20:1–16 reminds us that people entered the vineyard at different times, yet they were all invited to participate. This speaks deeply to me. We may come from different places. We may arrive at different times. We may have different gifts and different stories. But God welcomes us all into His vineyard. So, as we begin another year together, I pray that we will not simply grow as a church in numbers or programs. My prayer is that we will grow deeper in God's Word, stronger in faith, richer in love, and more faithful in serving others. If you are reading this, please know this: There is room for you in God's vineyard. You are welcome here. You are valued here. You are loved here. And you have a place in God's family. My first year has taught me that God's grace does not mean that everything will be easy. Grace means that even when the journey is difficult, God never leaves us. What began with uncertainty has become a testimony of grace. God called us. God carried us. God taught us. God welcomed us. And God continues to lead us. May our lives always be a reflection of that same grace.

With prayers and gratitude,

Pastor Cel

Grace United Methodist Church

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

318 N Center Street
Geneseo, IL

Sunday School:
Adult Classes 8:00am
Ladies Bible Study 10:15am
Sunday School 101 10:15am
Children's Classes 10:15am

Sunday Worship Service
9:00am
Wednesday Worship Service
6:00pm

stayCONNECTED

309 944-4208

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Geneseo Grace

YOUR GIVING MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

2026 Offering Needed to Meet Monthly Budget

$30,833.00

August 30 - September 27

$24,987.89

General Fund

ONLINE GIVING

For your convenience we have 3 ways to give online!

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

MEN OF GRACE

NEW TIME!
Meets every Tuesday at 6:00pm in the library. This group welcomes all men!

Date	Attendance		
	Worship	Sunday School	Wednesday
September 2 & 6	70	22	11
September 9 & 13	70	25	8
September 16 & 20	74	28	14
September 23 & 27	86	11	20



United Methodist Men meet in the library for Bible Study every Thursday, 6:30am-7:30am. We are studying the book of Romans. Discussions are facilitated by Mike Rubino & Steve Wildemuth. Come with questions!



Church Council met September 22. Those in attendance were Pastor Cel Biteng, Jeff Orton, Gayle Barnes, Lynne Haars, Karen Doy, Brian Humphries, George Farley, Joe Mickley, Jean Hahn, LaVon Swanson, Dave Swanson, Traci Sigwalt, and Coral Minge. Pastor Excelsis Biteng shared her report. We celebrate the one-year anniversary of her arrival and the blessing that she and her family have been to our congregation.

LaVon Swanson met with Safe Sanctuaries Committee and attended a meeting to learn about Holy Currencies, a six-month program beginning in November, which allows church members to share their talents to serve the Lord better. Our District Superintendent will be holding informational Zoom calls to share more details. LaVon explained that grants are available through the Methodist Conference for events our church plans to hold.

George Farley reported that Staff Parish will have all job descriptions completed by the year's end. The employee evaluations have been completed, and church policies are being updated. George distributed and discussed the SPRC budget for 2027. All staff will receive a 3% wage increase, and Pastor Cel will receive a 10% increase.

Joe Mickley shared and explained the financial statements. Overall, this year's giving corresponds similarly to last year's, but the expenses have been greater (i.e. the elevator). The 2027 budget was discussed. The budget will remain the same except for the changes in the SPRC budget. Dave Swanson moved, and Gayle Barnes seconded to accept the 2027 budget. Motion approved. The Council discussed Pastor Cel's payment process for the parsonage utilities.

Brian Humphries expressed his appreciation for the work on the Otterbein ceiling tile installation. He hoped the Anderson house roof and two garage roofs will be replaced soon. The need for a Technology Committee was discussed.

Lynne Haars reported that the Worship Committee discussed our bandwidth, Wi Fi, and broadcast equipment needs. Quotes for new equipment are being collected. She expressed her joy that several new choir members have joined.

Karen Doy thanked everyone who helped pack 102 student supply bags on Mission Sunday. The bags have been delivered to Midwest Missions. The Committee discussed developing an application form for anyone needing financial help to further their pastoral education at seminary. The Mission Committee's next meeting will be October 19.

Gayle Barnes announced she will be stepping down as Evangelism Committee chair and that Jane Scherer has agreed to be her replacement. Gayle said the Evangelism portion of the 2027 Budget will remain the same as 2026.

Nominations and Leadership Development has met a number of times. Joe Mickley and Pastor Cel announced that Darrell Slabaugh has agreed to co-chair the Finance Committee while Debbie Slabaugh will be a member of SPRC beginning January 2027. Joe Mickley will be Chair of Trustees, and Jeff Orton will continue as Church Council Chair for another year. Many members have volunteered to sit on committees but still more are needed to fill all positions. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" --Isaiah 40:13.

In other items, a question was asked regarding who pays the expenses for the pastor's vehicle. Gas and oil changes are the Pastor's responsibility. Dave Swanson moved and Brian Humphries seconded to buy new tires for the pastor's vehicle. Motion approved by committee members.

Next Council Meeting: November 16, 2026 @ 6:00pm

The business of the church is the Lord's business.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeff Orton, Church Council Chair



Invite everyone you
know to
Trunk or Treat
at Grace UMC
Sunday, October 25
2:00 - 4:00pm

A sign up sheet is available in the foyer for those who would be interested in participating in this event. Just bring your car, park in the church parking lot by 1:45pm, raise your car trunk lid, and welcome trick or treaters to the treats in your trunks. This can be a fun event for local children, with little effort involved, in participating by our church members. Hope we see you in the parking lot on October 25!

Help Sweeten Our Trunk or Treat Event!
Candy donations are welcome.
Please drop off bags of wrapped candy
in the lobby by Thursday, October 22.
Thank you for sharing!



Grace Church's Education Committee needs volunteers to help during FROGS Sunday School class following the church service from 10:15 - 11:15am beginning October 4th. Jackie Mickley is leading the Sunday school class, but a second person is needed to help with the lesson, which also covers the Safe Haven requirements of two adults present.

Children's Sunday School Classes
10:15 - 11:15am

Sunday School Classes for children ages 3yrs - 5th grade is held following church service, from 10:15am - 11:15am. Classes are held in the 2nd floor FROGS room. After the opening children are divided into classes of 3 yrs - K and Grades 1 - 5. Two teachers are present at all times.

In addition to a Bible lesson, the classes include singing, Bible verse memory, fun activities and crafts. Our mission is to make each Bible story relevant to the children's daily life. Any questions can be directed to Jackie Mickley @ 309-502-9228 or jackiemickley@gmail.com



Join us for Breakfast on
Sunday, October 18
following Worship Service.



Opal Circle would like to give a BIG thank you to all who joined us at the Sunday brunch on September 20. The food was great (Grace Church has wonderful cooks), but the fellowship was even better! A special thanks to the Sunday School youngsters who helped with the brunch cleanup.



Sunday, October 11

"A faithful pastor points people not to himself, but to Christ."
Thank you Pastor Cel for faithfully leading, teaching and serving.



OWLS Lunch
Thursday, October 15
11:30am
Join us for lunch & fellowship followed by our program. Marilyn & Bruce Boardman will speak about the Field of Dreams and their time & experiences in Uganda. They will share the positive changes that their efforts brought to these areas. If you plan to attend, please sign up in the lobby or call the office.

Stitchers Garden

Friday, October 16
at 9:37am in the library
Everyone is welcome to join us as we work on sewing, crocheting, crafting, etc. projects & enjoy chatting with each other!



OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

01 - Paul Flynn
04 - Wendy Boone
05 - Nash Verbeck
08 - Jody Rathman
09 - Kirk Hodgson, Evie Junior
10 - Shaina Lohman
12 - Jerry Scott
13 - Jody Akers, Daniel Lohman
14 - Caitlin Pauley
17 - Perry Farley
18 - Josh Yoder
19 - Wyatt Mickley
20 - McKenzie Davison
21 - Eliza Shoemaker
22 - Brad Dunker, Joy Dwyer, Dean Johnson, Nancy Koster
23 - Claudia Loucks, Claire Rushing, Diana Scherer
24 - Kevin Akers
25 - E.R. Biteng
28 - Harold Johnson
29 - Lyla Gorman
30 - Cindy Pippin



OCTOBER ANNIVERSARIES

07 - Bronson & Allison Good (9)
10 - Tyler & Hilary Junis (11)
14 - Ed & Tari Kneen (58)
15 - Barry & Lorrie Snodgrass (49)
20 - Jimmy & Evan Hill (19)
27 - Marty & Libby Anderson (36)
30 - Gordon & Betty Bodeen (55)

PRAYER list

Chuck Boardman
Corlette
Ruth Ann Eaker
GUMDROPS Families
Margaret Hitzhusen
Clarice Massingill
Cheryl & John Opsal
Mary Petre
Sally Swanson
Kim Brake
John Davis
Family Member
Nikki Haars
Joe & Claudia Loucks
Michelle Matheis
Patty
Ellen Rubino
Alan Yager

Those in Assisted Living & Nursing Home:

Joyce Criddle
John Riggs
Carolyn Stenzel
Lois Johnson
Connie Ryner
Karen Venter
Tari Kneen
Barry Snodgrass
Rita Webb



"In Memory of Clark Barnes - A Friend to All Veterans"

This bench sits in the Veteran's Memorial area at the courthouse in Cambridge. It was dedicated on Saturday, September 12. A well deserved honor for Clarke. (Gayle is standing between the two veterans)

LOOKING BACK WITH Grace

On October 7, GUMDROPS (Grace United Methodist Church's Draw, Read, Open Play and Snacks program) will begin its fall session. GUMDROPS was co-founded in 2008 by Amber Williamsen & Heather Smith as an outreach program. The program was designed to run like a mini preschool and it was open to the public. Besides Amber & Heather (plus many wonderful church volunteers), other past leaders have been Jillian Cucuru & Erin Vorac. GUMDROPS is currently being led by Jenna Rushing.





Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Regular Sunday Events 8:00am - Adult Sunday School 9:00am - Worship 10:15am - Wom-**en's Bible Study** 10:15am - Sunday School 101 10:15am - Kids Sunday School				1 6:30am - UM **Men's Bible** Study, Library 11:00am - Medicare Meeting, Otterbein	2	3
4 Regular Sunday Events	5 8:00am - Prayer Group, Library	6 1:00pm - Book Club, Library 6:00pm - UM Men Meeting, Library	7 9:00am - Staff Meeting 9:15am - GUMDROPS 9:30am -Worship Staff Meeting 6:00pm - Worship Service 7:00pm - Choir Rehearsal	8 6:30am - UM **Men's Bible** Study, Library	9	10
11 Regular Sunday Events Pastor Appreciation Sunday	12 8:00am - Prayer Group, Library 6:00pm - Opal Circle, Chapel	13 9:00am - Staff Meeting 9:00am - Pearl Circle, Chapel 9:30am -Worship Staff Meeting 6:00pm - UM Men Meeting, Library	14 9:15am - GUMDROPS 6:00pm - Worship Service 7:00pm - Choir Rehearsal	15 6:30am - UM **Men's Bible** Study, Library 11:30am - OWLS Lunch, Otterbein	16 9:30am - **Stitcher's** Garden, Library 	17
18 Regular Sunday Events 10:30am - Breakfast, Otterbein Annual Conference	19 8:00am - Prayer Group, Library 6:00pm - Missions Committee, Library	20 9:00am - Staff Meeting 9:30am -Worship Staff Meeting 6:00pm - UM Men Meeting, Library	21 9:15am - GUMDROPS 6:00pm - Worship Service 7:00pm - Choir Rehearsal	22 6:30am - UM **Men's Bible** Study, Library	23	24
25 Regular Sunday Events Trunk or Treat 2:00 - 4:00pm South parking lot	26 8:00am - Prayer Group, Library	27 9:00am - Staff Meeting 9:30am -Worship Staff Meeting 6:00pm - UM Men Meeting, Library	28 9:15am - GUMDROPS 6:00pm - Worship Service 7:00pm - Choir Rehearsal	29 6:30am - UM **Men's Bible** Study, Library	30	31 

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