



So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

-JOHN 10:15

Pastor's Message

Dear Grace Family,

There is a strange thing about life: it changes. Sometimes it changes because we want it to. Sometimes because we have no choice. And sometimes it changes while we're busy making other plans.

Children grow up. Parents grow older. Friends move away. Jobs change. Houses are bought and sold. And, if you're particularly fortunate, your hair begins disappearing from places where you once had plenty of it and appearing in places where you never invited it.

Churches change, too.

Pastors come, and pastors go. And, as I recently announced, next year I will retire from pastoral ministry after nearly a decade of service when the call committee finds the right man to serve you.

That is both exciting and difficult for me to write. I have loved being your pastor.



For nearly ten years, you have allowed me into some of the most sacred moments of your lives. I have stood with you at baptismal fonts and gravesides, preached the Word, administered the Sacraments, visited you in hospitals and homes, laughed with you, cried with you, and prayed with you. You trusted me with your spiritual lives, and I have been blessed for it. So there is sadness in knowing that my time as your pastor is coming to an end. But I want you to remember this: The pastor changes. The Shepherd does not.

The writer of Hebrews says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8).

That is more than a comforting Bible verse. It is a glorious fact. Jesus is not retiring. He is not moving away. He is not handing His Church over to someone else and hoping they can keep things going. He is the Head of the Church.

For the past decade, I have had the privilege of serving as one of Christ's under-shepherds. But I have never been the Shepherd. I have always been a temporary steward of something that belongs to Jesus. And that is good news. Because pastors are temporary. Jesus isn't. Pastors get tired. Jesus never does. Pastors eventually retire. Jesus reigns forever.

So when I leave, the most important things will not leave with me. The Gospel will remain. The Scriptures will remain. The font, the altar, and the Lord's Supper will remain. The liturgy, the hymns, and our confession of faith will remain. And most importantly, Christ will remain.

The biblical, confessional, liturgical, and sacramental identity of this congregation was never something I created. It is something you entrusted me to steward. And now you will entrust it to another shepherd. That gives me great confidence in your future.

The next pastor will not be called to reinvent this congregation. He will be called to serve it—to preach the same Gospel, administer the same Sacraments, proclaim the same Christ, and shepherd the flock that belongs not to him, but to Jesus.

There is a temptation whenever a pastor leaves to ask, “What will happen to us?” Perhaps the better question is, “Who has been holding us all along?” The answer is Jesus. He was holding you before I arrived. He has held you during these past ten years. And He will hold you long after I am gone.

Some things will change. They always do. There will be a new pastor, new stories, new quirks, and probably a new collection of pastoral jokes that you will politely pretend you've never heard before. And that's okay.

The Church doesn't need everything to remain the same. It needs Christ to remain the same.

So I look toward retirement with both gratitude and peace. Gratitude for the extraordinary privilege of serving you, and peace because this church has never been mine.

It is Christ's. You are Christ's. And He has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church.

So don't be afraid of the future. The ministry of this congregation does not depend upon the man who happens to occupy the pastor's chair. It depends upon the faithful Shepherd who never leaves His flock.

He has been faithful. He is faithful. And He will be faithful. Yesterday. Today. And forever.

And, dear friends, that is more than enough. It is everything.

In Christ's peace,
Pr. Brian Thomas

A poster for a 'Sacred Spaces' event. The title 'Sacred Spaces' is in a large, dark serif font. Below it, in smaller text, is 'DISCOVER THE MEANING BEHIND THE ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND SYMBOLISM OF OUR HISTORIC CHURCH'. To the right, the date 'SEPTEMBER 26, 2026' and time '6:00-8:00 P.M.' are listed. At the bottom, it says 'PRESENTED AS PART OF OUR GENERATIONS CAMPAIGN' with a tree logo on the left and the tagline 'Preserving our church for generations to come.' on the right.

Sacred Spaces
DISCOVER THE MEANING BEHIND
THE ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND SYMBOLISM
OF OUR HISTORIC CHURCH

DATE:
SEPTEMBER 26, 2026

TIME:
6:00-8:00 P.M.

PRESENTED AS PART OF OUR
GENERATIONS
CAMPAIGN

*Preserving our church
for generations to come.*

For more than a century, our church has quietly proclaimed the Gospel through stained glass, carved wood, marble, music, and sacred space. Join us for a special guided tour as Pastor Thomas shares the history, symbolism, and theology woven throughout our beautiful sanctuary and campus.

Whether you've worshiped here for decades or are seeing it for the first time, you'll discover details you've never noticed and gain a deeper appreciation for how architecture has long served to teach and inspire God's people. After the tour, enjoy fellowship and refreshments in the courtyard as we celebrate our shared heritage and support the Generations Campaign, preserving this sacred place for those who will worship here in the years to come.

The Pope Underestimates AI

Gene Edward Veith
Lutheran Witness, August 3, 2026

In 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued an encyclical on the industrial revolution. In 2026, his namesake, Pope Leo XIV, issued an encyclical on the AI revolution. Unfortunately, AI is more of a revolution than the American-born pontiff seems to realize.

The title of papal encyclicals comes from their first words: *Magnifica humanitas* is Latin for “magnificent humanity” — “the grandeur of humanity.” Indeed, the encyclical has more to say about humanity than about what artificial intelligence might do to humanity.

The document is, of course, very Catholic. It speaks much of “the Gospel” in ways that will puzzle Lutheran Christians. For example, “The Gospel remains relevant because it provides the criteria for recognizing what humanizes or dehumanizes and what liberates or oppresses in ever-changing situations” (par. 36). This is clearly not referring to the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Rather, this is the gospel according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “The New Law or the Law of the Gospel is the perfection here on earth of the divine law, natural and revealed. It is the work of Christ and is expressed particularly in the Sermon on the Mount” (par. 1965). Thus, Leo’s emphasis throughout is on attaining “perfection here on earth,” rather than personal salvation or spiritual growth.

Before addressing AI, Leo begins with two long chapters on the development of Catholic social doctrine, explaining concepts like equal dignity, human rights, the common good, the “universal destination of goods,” subsidiarity, solidarity and social justice. These familiar ideas are updated somewhat with contemporary progressive terminology around diversity, power, the environment, colonialism and marginalized people groups.

The pope is clearly trying to apply the insights of his namesake and of the Catholic tradition to the new challenges of AI, but that does not always work. For example, he says, “To speak of the universal destination of goods means finding ways of ensuring universal access to both technologies and the education needed to use them” (par. 109). But the problem is not getting access to AI, but that the technology is becoming ubiquitous! The problem is not educating people about how to use AI, but that AI is replacing education!

The pope worries that the rich will use AI to exploit workers. That was a concern of the 1891 encyclical. Under industrialism, workers were replaced by machines. But AI is now threatening to replace the professional class (lawyers, doctors, journalists, administrators, teachers, coders, etc.). Some pundits project that under AI, manual laborers may have the only job security. The pope treats AI like any other product of the industrial revolution. But forcing the industrialized model addressed by Leo XIII onto this postindustrial technology prevents Leo XIV from fully engaging with many of the specific challenges that the new technology poses.

The pope gives no guidance about AI issues that churches are already struggling with: AI-written sermons, AI chatbots giving pastoral counseling, AI-written prayers and liturgies, and other technological usurpations of the pastoral office. Nor does he address the bigger issues that may be looming in the future: AI that removes the need for anyone to work; AI that destroys the human race; AI that comes to be functionally worshiped as an omnipotent, super-intelligent deity.

The biggest danger that emerges from the document is what AI might do to our sense of what it means to be human. Here the pope is perceptive. He stresses that personhood is more than “intelligence”; that instead of trying to be more than human, we should accept “the limits and weakness of humanity without considering them an error to be corrected” (par. 12); and that ordinary human work is connected to God — a point that sounds almost Lutheran.

Fall Semester Studies

Hello, My Name is...God: A Systematic Theology for the Rest of Us Wednesdays 10:00-11:00 a.m.

Systematic theology sounds like exactly the kind of thing normal people should avoid — the sort of subject that belongs in musty seminaries, debated by men in bad suits who haven't talked to an actual human being since 1987. I understand that reaction. I've been in those rooms.

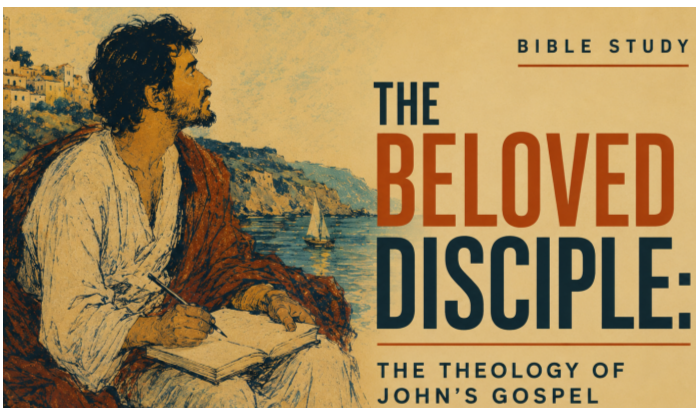
But here's what I know after many years of ministry: people are starving for this. Not starving for jargon. Not starving for academic footnotes (though I'll sneak some in). Starving for answers to the questions they actually have: Is God real? What is He like? Can He be trusted? Why does everything feel broken? Is there any hope?

Those are systematic theology questions. They are also the questions that keep people awake at 3 a.m. This semester, Hello, My Name Is...God, is an attempt to do serious theology in human English. It is unapologetically Lutheran in its confessional commitments — which means it takes the Bible with absolute seriousness, insists that salvation is entirely God's gift, and refuses to turn the Gospel into a self-improvement program. But it is also apologetic in the best sense: it will tell you not only what we believe, but why thoughtful, honest people believe it is true.

The fall semester begins where all theology must begin: not with our questions, but with God's speaking. We will move through Revelation and Scripture, Creation, the Image of God, Sin, the Holy Trinity, and God's attributes — both the ones He keeps to Himself and the ones He has, in a derivative way, given to us. Along the way we will encounter the Holy Spirit, the Person of Christ, the Work of Christ, and finally, the hope that makes all of this worth talking about.



The Beloved Disciple: A Theology of John's Gospel | Sundays 10:30-11:15 a.m.



Of all four Gospels, John's is the one that lingers. "In the beginning was the Word." "I am the bread of life." "It is finished." John doesn't just tell us what Jesus did — he shows us who Jesus is, using image after image: light and darkness, water and wine, bread, shepherd, vine, life from the dead.

This fall, join us for an 11-week journey through the Gospel of John, tracing these images from prologue to empty tomb. We'll ask what it means that Jesus turns water into wine, why Nicodemus needed to be born again, and what it costs to call yourself a disciple whom Jesus loves.

Whether you've read John a hundred times or never opened it, come dig into the Gospel that was written "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

Message from Leadership

The departure of a pastor is never easy. Rev. Thomas has faithfully served this congregation, first as associate pastor and then as its sole pastor for ten years. He will not be easily replaced.

However, as Rev. Thomas said in his announcement, Grace Lutheran Church of San Diego has endured for more than a century, through six pastors, and will continue to endure as it calls its seventh. Through God's providence, Grace enters this period of transition in a fortunate position: we have a strong identity. We are a biblical, confessional, sacramental, and liturgical Lutheran church. This identity is enshrined in our constitution and will never change, regardless of who the pastor is. This constitutional standard, and the Holy Spirit, will guide us in calling our next shepherd.

With that being said, we want to take a moment to let you know what to expect during this process.

In the coming weeks, the Board of Elders will assemble a Call Committee to identify and vet pastoral candidates. If you are a member of the congregation and are interested in serving on the Call Committee, please reach out to the Head Elder to discuss.

Once the Committee is formed, it will host an informational meeting for the congregation to explain the call process in more detail.

The Call Committee will then go about the business of identifying and vetting potential candidates. The committee will then bring its recommendations to the membership, which will vote on whether to extend calls to the candidates identified. Those who have been through this process know that it takes months, and the congregation may extend calls to several men who ultimately return the call.

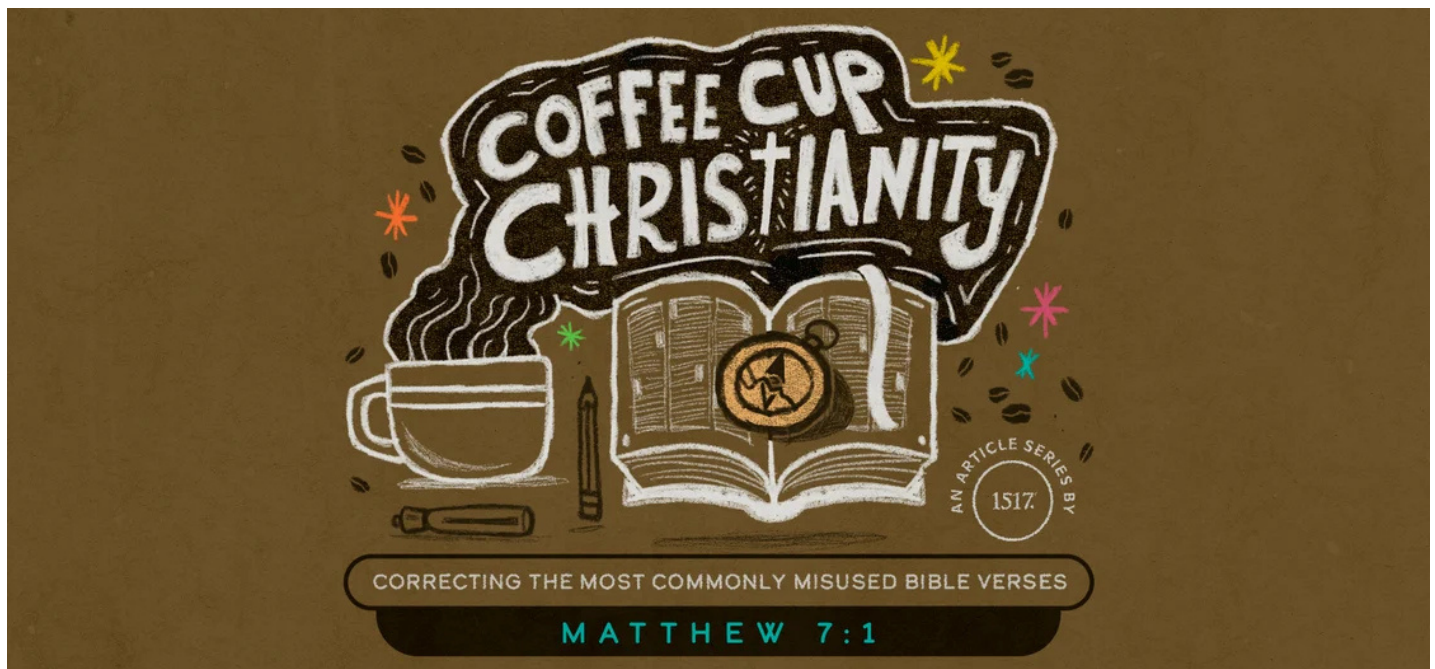
Throughout, we ask for your feedback and your prayers for the church's leadership and the Call Committee. If you have questions or wish to discuss the process, please reach out to either of us.

In closing, we thank Pastor and Rachel for their years of dedication to Grace. We are fortunate they gave us ample warning of their departure as we avoid a pastoral vacancy. It also gives us a year to celebrate them and send them off well.

Soli Deo Gloria.

Your brothers in Christ,
Carl J. Lehman, President
Jeremy Fullam, Head Elder





Judge Not!

by Pastor Brian Thomas

It may be the most quoted verse in the Bible by people who don't believe the Bible. Everybody knows it. Nobody knows what it means. And almost everyone who quotes it uses it to avoid a conversation they don't want to have.

"Judge not! That's what Jesus said."

The phrase has become less a verse than a cultural reflex—a conversation-ending slogan meant to shield us from any moral evaluation whatsoever. It is one of the great half-truths of our age — and half a truth, as any reasonable person will tell you, can do more damage than an outright lie.

The irony, of course, is that the people who say, "You shouldn't judge," are actually making a judgment. They've looked at your behavior, measured it against their moral standard, and concluded that you've done something wrong. Which tells us something important. Nobody actually believes judgment is wrong. We simply disagree over who gets to do it.

For all our talk about tolerance, ours is one of the most judgmental ages in history. We review restaurants on Yelp before we've finished dessert. We rate drivers, professors, employers, pastors, politicians, neighbors, and complete strangers on the internet. Every social media platform has become a courtroom, every comment section a jury box.

We're constantly rendering verdicts. What we cannot bear is having a verdict rendered on us. That shouldn't surprise us. Scripture says we're created in God's image, which means we're moral creatures. We instinctively distinguish right from wrong. The problem isn't that we judge. The problem is that we desperately want to be the judge rather than the judged.

(continued on pages 8 & 9)

The deepest courtroom isn't out there in the comment section or the culture war. It's inside us. Every one of us lives beneath a verdict we didn't write and can't repeal on our own. If we can't find acquittal from God, we'll look for it somewhere else. We'll seek it from our careers, our politics, our parenting, our moral record, or our carefully curated online identity. Better yet, we'll compare ourselves to someone who's doing worse than we are. If we can convince ourselves that we're a little more enlightened, a little more compassionate, or a little less hypocritical than the next person, perhaps we can silence the accusation for another day.

The problem is that it never lasts. That's why Jesus' words in Matthew 7 are so often misunderstood. And it starts with a single Greek word. The verb Jesus uses is *krinō*. It can mean "condemn"—to hand down a damning verdict. But it can just as easily mean "discern" or "evaluate"—to weigh something carefully and tell the truth about it.

English forces us to pick one word, "judge," and we default to the courtroom. But the passage itself won't let us settle there so quickly, because Jesus keeps talking. "Judge not, that you be not judged." Most people stop reading there. But Jesus continues with the famous image of the speck and the log. "Why are you so focused on the speck in your brother's eye while ignoring the log lodged in your own?" That's the setup leading to the conclusion. "First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Jesus doesn't say the speck isn't there. He doesn't say to ignore it. He doesn't say that moral discernment is unloving. In fact, the whole command depends on you being able to see clearly enough to help your brother with his speck. If *krinō* meant "never evaluate anything," the passage would end at "judge not." Instead, it ends with surgery—delicate, necessary work on someone else's eye. You can't do that with a blindfold on. Jesus isn't outlawing discernment; He's requiring it to be earned by first being honest with yourself.

The issue isn't judgment itself. It's hypocrisy. Jesus was no moral agnostic. Let's be very clear about that. The man who called the Pharisees a "brood of vipers" was not squeamish about calling things what they are. The man who said "go and sin no more" believed there was such a thing as sin. The man who flipped tables in the temple had firm opinions about what was happening there.

What Jesus condemned in Matthew 7 is a very specific kind of judgment: the judgment of the hypocrite. The self-righteous, self-exempt, log-eyed person who looks at the failures of others with contempt while remaining blind to their own.

There is a kind of judging that is really just a performance. It's not about helping anyone. It's not about truth. It's about feeling superior. It's about the pleasure of looking down. That is what Jesus is teaching in this passage. The person who uses moral evaluation not as a tool of love but as a weapon of ego. Jesus isn't abolishing discernment; He's dismantling superiority.

The church has often earned its reputation for being judgmental—not because it has spoken truth, but because it has sometimes spoken truth without compassion. It's possible to be right in all the wrong ways. Truth wielded as a weapon may win an argument, but it rarely sounds like the Savior who welcomed tax collectors, prostitutes, and failures to His table.

Yet the opposite error is just as destructive. Our culture has quietly redefined love as unconditional affirmation. If saying something is sinful feels uncomfortable, we assume silence must be compassion. It isn't.

Years ago, when I served in the U.S. Navy, a close friend of mine was slowly destroying his life through excessive drinking. Everyone around him knew it. Most stayed silent because they didn't want to seem judgmental. I eventually had to speak up. The conversation was awkward, and he didn't appreciate it at the time. Years later, after sobriety had restored his marriage and career, he thanked me. "I thought you were just trying to be holier than thou," he admitted. "Now I realize you were one of the few people who actually loved me enough to tell me the truth."

Love and niceness aren't the same thing. The physician who refuses to name cancer isn't compassionate. He's negligent. The same is true spiritually. Christians don't name sin because we're better than anyone else. We name it because we know exactly what sin does. We've watched it wreck marriages, consume addictions, destroy friendships, fracture churches, and harden hearts. More importantly, we've watched it in the mirror.

That's why the Gospel matters so much. If Christianity were merely another moral system, then exposing sin would simply become another way of climbing the ladder of self-righteousness. We'd point fingers to prove we belonged among the righteous.

But Christianity doesn't work that way. It begins with the uncomfortable confession that the biggest problem in my life isn't "those people." It's me. The law levels every one of us, and only then does the gospel speak.

The astonishing claim of Christianity isn't that God overlooks sin. It's that the Judge Himself stepped down from the bench, and took the guilty verdict upon Himself, in order to announce justification to those who could never justify themselves (see Romans 3:21-26). That changes everything. Now I no longer need to pretend I'm innocent. I no longer need to prove I'm better than someone else. I no longer need to weaponize the truth, because the truth has already exposed—and forgiven—me.

Only forgiven people can tell the truth without needing to stand above the person hearing it. That's why "judge not" is such a dangerous half-truth. It sounds compassionate, but it ultimately leaves us alone with the verdicts that haunt us. It tells us to stop naming sin without offering any answer for guilt. It silences the diagnosis while leaving the disease untouched.

Jesus offers something infinitely better. He tells us to put down our gavel—not because sin isn't real, but because the only Judge who has the right to condemn is the very One who was condemned for us

Note from treasurer, Daniel Paylor

In the coming months, the council will begin planning the 2027 Church Budget and working on the new investment plan to take effect in November. To learn more, you may talk with Daniel Paylor or email daniel.j.paylor@gmail.com

Offerings	\$88,361	2026 YTD Actual	\$166,374
Budget	<u>\$85,308</u>	2026 YTD Budget	<u>\$166,224</u>
Overage	\$3053	Overage	\$150

Faces of Grace



Pastor Brian baptized Whitney Mellos into the Christian faith this summer. She is the daughter of Christian and Bailey. Proudly holding her up is Joseph, her godfather.



A wonderful number of children gathered listening to the sermon with eager hearts. Their faithful attendance has been a gift to our congregation.



We said goodbye to Sandi Garcia as she moved closer to be family, grateful for the way she lifted our worship through her work as cantor.



We were blessed this summer to host a concert by the sacred music cortium, Vox Obscura, featuring songs in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin using ancient instrumentation. They played to a packed house! We are grateful for all who contributed to the reception that followed. It was a great summer night.

Upcoming Events



CAPS PREGNANCY+ MEDICAL CLINICS
PRESENTS OUR 20TH ANNUAL

CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

Maderas Golf Club
October 5, 2026

Golf at beautiful Maderas, one of the top-rated courses
in the nation, and support life in San Diego County!

Sponsorships are available.

VISIT CAPSGOLF.COM OR
SCAN QR CODE FOR DETAILS
AND TO REGISTER





3967 Park Blvd.
San Diego, CA 92103
619.299.2890
gracesandiego.com

The Reverend
Brian W. Thomas
brianwilliamthomas@gmail.com

Director of Church Music
Dale Sorenson
dalesorenson2@gmail.com

Deaconess
Doris Snashall
d_g_snashall@outlook.com

Office Manger
Elsy Lehman
elsyglc@gmail.com

Sunday Divine
Service
9:00 am

Sunday School
10:30 - 11:15 am
Nursery
available

Carl Lehman
Council President

Daniel Paylor
Treasurer

Judy George
Secretary

Heath Russert
Trustee

Rachel Thomas
Fellowship/Activities

Josh Mellor
Member-at-Large

Mark Jordan
Member-at-Large

Jeremy Fullam
Head Elder

Steve Hollman
Jason Huntley
Daryl Newton
Ted Nilsen
Elders

Prayers

For Strength and Healing

Dave, Eddie, Michelle, Floyd, Jose, Dale, Richard and Randy

For Our Missionaries & Seminarians

Rev. Dr. Tardelli Voss, Vicar Rowan Turner, and Vicar William Baker

For Our Military Members

Rev. Mario Ancira, Hannah Downey, Nathan Farish, Gavin Robillard, Joshua Simmons, Jon Lushenko, Micah Berge, Kariff Gomez, and Daniel Fohey

(If you are new to Grace and in the military, please email your info to the church at: elsyglc@gmail.com, so we can add you to our prayer list.)

For Those Unable to Attend

Joyce Rochester, Herb & Marge Foelber, Janice Keitel

Birthdays

September

6- Daryl Newton
7- Alma Fullam
9- Jeff Dorris
11- Andrew Gertz
11- Mark Jordan
11- Scott Dorris
13- Rachel Thomas

November

6- Jensen Belgau
11- Spencer Huntley
18- Gloria Himmelberger
27- Leo Fullam
30- Claire Latham
30- Harold Nichols

October

1- Karen Dorris
2- Lynn Willis
9- Victoria Fullam
13- Rebecca Kiperts
17- Wesley Newton
17- Mike Thompson
20- Zaro Razak
28- Jeremy Fullam

December

10 - Vanessa Yates
14 - Johnathan Belgau
14- Amélie Lehman
26- Mario Ancira

Did we miss your birthday?

If so, please email the church office to be included on the birthday list: elsyglc@gmail.com

How to Give

- By using your offering envelopes or those in the pews
- Online from your bank website
- On the Giving Page at gracesandiego.com
- Scan the QR code below
- Register your Ralph's grocery card to Grace

