

VOICE OF GRACE

Vol. 57 January 2026

Getting Serious! About our Youth and about our Goal

As a congregation, what are we trying to do?

Empowered by the Gospel of our Savior and guided by the "Rooted" vision, we have two parallel endeavors going on. Next month, we will discuss our "Engrafting Plan for Organizational Clarity" of the Rooted Vision as we launch the next phase of Personal Mission Statements. This month, we focus on our 20-year Goal as we now enter year 3 of this goal. "By our Centennial Celebration (2043), we will cultivate a new generation of deeply-rooted disciples who will offer Gospel-centered ministry to our community for the next 100 years." Indeed, our Rooted vision leads us to be a church and school the Chain-of-Lakes Region of Polk County can count on. Even amidst trying and confusing times, we will effectively minister the love of our Savior long into the future.

So how are we doing? Exactly, what are we doing to accomplish this vision and attain this far-reaching goal? We have sought to get to know one another across the generations, exceeding our first-year objective of making over 800 cross-generational connections in our 80th year of ministry. Last year, our leadership began discovering and exploring Seven Practices of Congregations with Healthy Youth Ministry. This year we delve into the first four practices. Please make an effort to memorize these practices as we preach about them next month.

Congregations with healthy youth ministries have:

Warmth, Grace, and Challenge (week of Jan. 18) Supportive Adults (Week of Jan. 25) Engaged Parents (Week of Feb. 1) Opportunities to Serve and Lead (Week of Feb. 8)

Pastor Steve Braun has written wonderful **SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDIES** focusing on these practices. He's chosen stories from the Bible that illustrate these practices for us to discuss, apply to our own lives, and live out in congregational ministry. Our effectiveness in

accomplishing the Lord's work comes from the Lord Himself, who not only directs us in His Word, but empowers us through His Word to do His work upon this earth. Let yourself be energized and equipped by God's powerful Word. Sign up for a Small Group. (see page 5)



God's Word

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God gives direction on how we are to care for and teach young people the ways of God. In Deuteronomy 6, God commanded the people of Israel how to teach their children as they lived from day to day. In the Scriptures, we see young people like Samuel and David stepping forward in faith to do great things as they are empowered by God's Spirit. In Luke 19, Jesus tells His disciples to let the children come to Him and not get in their way or make it hard for them. We see both young and old sharing the Good News of salvation in Jesus in the epistles of the New Testament.

A Sad Statistic

Unfortunately, there are fewer and fewer young people found in Christian congregations today. In our own LCMS church body, "the reality is that we have not retained the majority of young people who started off in our churches for several generations now. We

(continued on next page)

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SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT Christie Thompson know from LCMS's annual statistics that we are currently retaining 60-70% of our young people in the LCMS from Baptism to Confirmation.

We retain around 34 percent of those from Confirmation into young adulthood. That means we retain around one in every five young people we baptize through to young adulthood." (p. 20 Seven Practices)

This does – and should – break our hearts. Yet, we cannot stay in a state of lament. With the power of the Holy Spirit, we turn to God's Word and the Christian Community, and we strive to do better. (This is why we are doing these small group studies!)

You Can Help

One way to change the statistics is by seeking to develop a healthy youth ministry. WE EACH PLAY A ROLE by embracing our vocations as parents, supportive adults, and congregational and youth ministry leaders. With God's help, we continue to put forth our best efforts, even when we don't see how God is working and using us in a young person's life. God can and will continue to grow the seeds of faith He plants from you and me.

The first four of the practices that we share this month focus on the opportunities, people, and environment of the congregation and home. Rather than focusing on programs or networks, these practices concentrate on qualities our congregation can develop as we seek to accomplish our 20-year goal. Please **PRAY** for this endeavor. God wants us to pray and promises to answer our prayers, especially prayers that are in line with what He



wants. God wants our efforts in this holy task! So pray for today's young people. Pray for parents. And pray for all of us to be our best in accomplishing God's purposes in our time.

Pastor Braun and I thank you for taking this endeavor to heart.

– Pastor C. Reich

Idea When



90 or Older?

We are throwing a Birthday Party to celebrate you! Please join the church staff in the Mary-Martha Room at 3:30PM on Thursday, January 15.

Of course, there will be ice cream and cake!

INSTALLATION OF OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND BOARD OF ELDERS SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 2026

We thank our God for the dedicated service of the members of the Board of Directors, Board of Elders, and School Board. Please keep them in your prayers as we work together to promote the Kingdom of Christ.

Board of Directors 2026

Ed Smith, President
Dr. Ken Rogers, Past President
John Woodward, Vice President
Alan Garbrecht, Secretary
Barry Walker, Treasurer

Terry Tressler, Financial Secretary

Dr. Don Eason, Board Member Steve Hnatiuk, Board Member Kevin Murphy, Board Member Claire Rice, Board Member

Larry Walker, Board of Elders Rep

Keith Schelp

David Zabel

Board of Elders 2026

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Jerry Carter
Lowell Fricker
Douglas Hall
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Dr. Terry Hostler
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Wendy Kirin
Gerry Krigelski

Caylee LeFan
Patti Meier
Mary Beth Moore
Karen Nelson
Rob Petersilge
John Price
Sue Ramer
Dennis Rick

Leslie Ladner

Ted Lasseigne

Jennifer Smith
Mike Splinter
Tammi Straughn
Jan Struck
Larry Walker
Roger Walker (Head Elder)
Rhonda Wise
Britta Witcher
John Woodward

School Board 2026

Albert Cross, Chairman
Elizabeth Davis, Vice Chair
Beth Walters, Secretary
Cypthia Cochran, Board Membe

Cynthia Cochran, Board Member Mark Irby, Board Member Cyndi Threlkeld, Board Member Mike Rottmann, Ex Officio

The Rev. Charles T. Reich, Ex-Officio

Jon Peterson, Ex Officio Aleah Hearn, Ex Officio

(2 open School Board positions for appointment by BOD)

Construction Plans

Work on the long-awaited canopies is finally underway! Covered entrances into our facilities were promised a campaign ago. Things changed when we decided to build a whole new parking lot on the front of our campus – and when the opportunity arose for us to purchase the building and property across the street. Those things have been accomplished and now we set to work on covered walk-ways and entrances.

The old and deteriorated canopies and sidewalks were removed after Thanksgiving and in early December. Footers for the canopy's columns will be next, then the canopies, and, finally, concrete and sidewalks. It will be beautiful, safe, functional, and long-lasting. This is at least a 4-month project – hopefully completed by Easter, but May is more likely.

Remember, our goals and plans are far-reaching. As long as the Lord has people in the Chain-of-Lakes Region, we seek to be ministering to them from central Winter Haven until our Lord's return. We are positioning our facilities with those things in mind. Special gifts to this campaign are always accepted. Contributors may choose to direct their contributions to capital expenditures or to ministry operating expenses. We recommend simply giving to the Rooted Vision which funds our total ministry of making deep-rooted disciples and capital improvements to our campus.

Thanks to all for your generous support thus far. With God's help, YOU have made this happen.











SIGN-UP FOR A SMALL GROUP!

EMBRACING MINISTRY WITH THE NEXT GENERATION OF DEEP-ROOTED DISCIPLES

Grace has embraced the mission of cultivating a new generation of deeply rooted disciples. But the question remains: how do we do this? Join us as we explore the Seven Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry. Small Groups will focus on Bible-centered discussion: tackling various passages of Scripture that engage discussion on cross-generational ministry. We will take time for personal sharing, and engage with weekly challenges that help empower all generations for ministry in God's Church.

Dates:

Jan. 18-24 - Lesson I: Warmth, Grace & Challenge

Jan 25-31 - Lesson II: Supportive Adults

Feb. 1-7 - Lesson III: Engaged Parents

Feb. 8-14 - Lesson IV: Opportunities to Serve and Lead

"A SPECIAL BOWLING NIGHT WILL BE HELD AT
THE END OF THE STUDY AS WE CELEBRATE AND
ENGAGE IN MULTIGENERATIONAL MINISTRY TOGETHER."
DATE: TBD

How do I sign up? Sign up via the church app, website, by scanning the **QR code**, or via sign-up sheets in the narthex.

Our Small Groups:

Monday - 10:00am - Church, Luther Room (Led by Vivian Meyer)

Tuesday - 6:00pm - Church, Luther Room (Led by Peggy Griffin & Sharon Wilson)

Wednesday - 6:00pm - Church, Luther Room (Led by Rob & Bonnie Petersilge)

Wednesday - 6:30pm - Church, Trinity Hall (Led by Christie Garst & Lilliann Witcher)

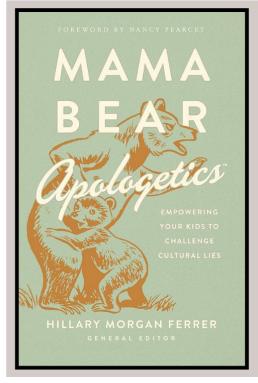
Thursday - 1:30pm - Lake Wales, Various Homes (Led by Keith Schelp)

Thursday - 4:00pm - Church, Luther Room (Led by Vicar Stephen & Michelle Reddick)

Thursday - 7:00pm - Grove Roots (Led by Pastor Steve & Lowell Fricker)

Sunday - 9:45am - Church, Trinity Hall (Led by Pastor Charles)





Upcoming Study for Parents:

Mama (and Papa) Bear Apologetics Wednesdays at 6:30pm beginning *in February*.

Empower Your Family with Biblical Truth! Join our engaging Parent Bible Study on "Mama Bear Apologetics" by Hillary Morgan Ferrer. Equip yourself to challenge culture, discuss faith amid negativity, and guide your kids in relationships and authentic living. Through Scripture and practical discussions, we will learn to strengthen our prayer life and family bonds. This study isn't just for moms, but for dads too!

For more information contact Pastor Steve or Cynthia Ennis!



LSB 897 O Rejoice, Ye Christians, Loudly

- 1 O rejoice, ye Christians, loudly, For our joy has now begun; Wondrous things our God has done. Tell abroad His goodness proudly, Who our race has honored thus, That He deigns to dwell with us.
- Joy, O joy, beyond all gladness, Christ has done away with sadness! Hence, all sorrow and repining, For the Sun of Grace is shining!
- 2 See, my soul, thy Savior chooses Weakness here and poverty; In such love He comes to thee. Neither crib nor cross refuses; All He suffers for thy good To redeem thee by His blood.
- Joy, O joy, beyond all gladness, Christ has done away with sadness! Hence, all sorrow and repining, For the Sun of Grace is shining!
- 4 Jesus, guard and guide Thy members, Fill them with Thy boundless grace, Hear their prayers in ev'ry place. Fan to flame faith's glowing embers; Grant all Christians, far and near, Holy peace, a glad new year!

Joy, O joy, beyond all gladness, Christ has done away with sadness! Hence, all sorrow and repining, For the Sun of Grace is shining!

Text: Christian Keimann, 1607–62; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827–78, alt.

Text: Public domain

This hymn may not be as well-known as other Christmas hymns and carols, but its text was composed with celebrations of the New Year taking place within the twelve days of Christmas. The author, Christian Keimann, was the principal of a German school, where he wrote sacred dramas to fulfill one of the requirements of his position. This hymn was included within the play titled "The newborn Jesus, revealed to the shepherds and wise men," and was published in 1646. Some time after the publication of this play, the hymn became a popular hymn for use after Christmas Day and before the Epiphany of our Lord (January 6).

Here in this text we find Keimann calling us to make a joyful noise to the Lord because He has done wondrous things. (That sounds very similar to Psalm 98:4, our theme verse for 2025-26!) With that in mind, Keimann continues on into the refrain, writing "Joy, O joy...Christ has done away with sadness!" In the second stanza we find the reason for the season: Christ our Savior chooses to come and lie in a manger helpless. He chooses to hang on the cross helpless: All to redeem our souls. For this we have great joy: "Christ has done away with sadness!" We pray: "Jesus, guard and guide [us]...Grant [us] holy peace, a glad new year!"

Thomas Schulteis
Director of Worship Arts (Organist)

Women's Ministry

We hope you all have your calendars marked for the book reviews beginning Tuesday, January 6, and each Tuesday for the month of January. In addition to the wonderful and interesting book reviews presented by a different reviewer each week, our ladies will again be preparing lunches at the cost of \$8.00. Watch the blue pages for all the details regarding the books being reviewed each week and those presenting the reviews.

Another event in January is Quilt Sunday weekend (January 17 and 18) with all the beautiful quilts on display in the sanctuary as usual. These are handmade by our own quilting ladies who meet every Thursday morning and would welcome any ladies who have an interest in quilting. After the quilts have been put on display, they will be sent to various places worldwide to those who need them either for bedding or for the warmth, depending on the area.

Our annual February bake sale will take place February 7 and 8 following the services. All the items are made by our ladies offering a variety that surely will meet everyone's liking. As always, all proceeds support our mission projects and seminary student. These items can be great Valentine's treats.

Martha circle meets second Thursday of each month at 1:00, so please come and join with other ladies for Bible study, great discussions, and fellowship.

Upcoming Discover Grace Class

Are you interested in membership at Grace? Or would you simply like to learn more about what we believe? If so, we would like to invite you to join us for our next Discover Grace class on **Saturday, January 24, from 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM**. This is a wonderful opportunity to understand what the Bible says about topics of the faith. It is also a great time to get to know other believers who are learning alongside you. Please join us! If you have any questions, you may call Michelle Reddick at the church office – 863.293.8447 – or email her at mreddick@glwh.org. Lunch will be provided.

Grace Bytes

Meets the 2nd Tuesday of Every Month

If you are interested in learning about the Bible and Lutheran theology, please join us for Grace Bytes on the second Tuesday of each month starting in the sanctuary at 5:30 PM. We will have a short time of prayer then move to the Mary-Martha Room for pizza and a time of learning and discussion led by Pastor Braun. Bring a friend, your questions, and join us!

Tuesday, January 13, from 5:30 PM – 7:00 PM

January's Topic: <u>Epiphany – The Season of Quiet Hospitality: Feasting with the Magi and</u>
Blessing Your Home

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH 48th ANNUAL BOOK REVIEW SERIES January 2026



Please join us, and bring your friends, each Tuesday in January, at 12:00 noon, for a glimpse into 5 excellent book selections and a tasty lunch prepared just for you by our Women's Ministry. Mark your calendars for the following dates:

January 6 – Clementine Churchill: The Life of Mrs. Winston Church (2016) by Sonia Purnell – reviewed by Judy Joiner

January 13 – *Christmas Karol* (2025), by Faith Moore – reviewed by Bob Sammons

January 20 – Theo of Golden (2025), by Allen Levi - reviewed by Martha Walker

January 27 – Babette's Feast (2024), by Karen Blixen and The Book No One Wanted to Read (2023), by Richard Ayode – reviewed by Pastor Steve Braun

Please note:

The church and school is getting a new look with new covered walkways so, we have some construction going on. Please park in the lots on Bates Avenue, behind the sanctuary, and enter through either the office door at Bates and 4th Street, (Door Q) or the first door off the parking lot facing Bates Avenue, (Door T) There will be friendly guides to escort you to Trinity Hall. Suggested cost to cover lunch, \$8.00.



Grace Lutheran Church Sunshine Club News



<u>January 8, 2026</u> (2nd week)-Kick off the New Year with the Sunshine Club. Bring your favorite pot luck dish to share (fried chicken provided) and we'll provide a very special surprise dessert to celebrate the New Year and YOU! We look forward to seeing you in the new year! Join us in Trinity Hall. Arrival begins at 11 AM ...11:30 Devotions and announcements...Lunch Noon...Program 12:30 PM. A thank offering will be collected.



Artist Gleeva Straughn will join us and share her most recent collection. MERGE is an exhibition that imagines what it would be like if Polk County's founders could see the thriving community of today. Gleeva creates collages using only recycled paper clippings from local publications, with no paint involved. The pieces are meant to spark a dialogue between the past and the present. We hope you'll experience her art with us.

One of the most active groups (1961-present) in our church community, Sunshine club focuses on individuals and couples, providing social interaction, support and spiritual growth. Join us the first Thursday of the month for food and fellowship. Everyone is welcome.

GRANDPARENTS' DAY

SAVE THE DATE—WED. JAN. 28, 2026 - 8:30-11:30 AM

National Lutheran Schools Week Grandparents'/Grandfriends Day – We need volunteers to serve snacks in Trinity Hall and serve as Grandfriends. Contact Tammi Straughn, 863-660-2617 for more information. Thank you.

1 Mairel -

Name		- Archive Confidence of the Co
Phone number	Email	
Yes, I want to be a during the morning activitie	grandfriend to a student for the morninges.	g. You'll accompany the student
Do you have an age	preference?	
Grade 1-5 stu	udent 8:30-10 AM	
Preschool stu	udent 10:00–11:30 AM (ages 2,3, 4 and	Kindergarten)
No age pref	erence.	
I'm happy to serve s	nacks in Trinity Hall from 8:30-11:30 AM	1.
Please return this form to the	he church office or take a nicture with vo	our phone and text to Tammi at

Please return this form to the church office or take a picture with your phone and text to Tammi at 863-660-2617.

Treasurer's Report for the Five Months Ending November 30, 2025

	Current Month		Year to Date		Year to Date			
	Actual		Actual		Budget		Variance	
<u>Church</u>								
Income	\$	101,839.18	\$	584,409.32	\$	623,583.30	\$	(39,173.98)
Expenses	\$	100,246.14	\$	562,846.44	\$	612,656.07	\$	(49,809.63)
Total Net Income (Loss) Church	\$	1,593.04	\$	21,562.88	\$	10,927.23	\$	10,635.65
School								
Income	\$	846,969.07	\$	2,225,946.14	\$	2,204,375.35	\$	21,570.79
Expenses	\$	376,593.00	\$	2,059,064.45	\$	1,980,999.94	\$	78,064.51
Designated (In/Out Accounts)	\$	(8,339.31)	\$	(9,384.99)				
Total Net Income (Loss) School	\$	478,715.38	\$	176,266.68				

Investment Assets

Church Endowment Fund	\$ 778,925.92
School Endowment Fund	\$ 486,962.48
Bernthal Endowment Scholarship Fund	\$ 151,652.38
All Other Scholarships/Investments	\$ 23,793.08



Parish Statistics

Wedding

Kaitlin Cruit & Diego Briceno 12/6/2025

<u>Death</u>s

Dorothy Janssen - 11/17/2025

Grace Lutheran School Pre-School 2's-8th Grade News SCHOOL WEBSITE: School.glwh.org

GRACE LUTHERAN



Happy New Year! May God bless you all in 2026!

What is a new year without resolutions? Do you know about resolutions? They are things that people plan to do in the New Year. What resolutions have you heard people making?

Most resolutions are things that people hope to do to make their life happier or healthier. Making resolutions is one thing. But what is the hard part? It takes work to carry out resolutions. Often, it takes sacrifice. For example, if someone wants to lose 20 pounds in 2026, what must they give up?

Have you ever thought of resolutions having anything to do with God? God wants the best for us, and so it's good to make resolutions that improve our lives. But it's easy to forget other people when we make resolutions. It's easy to forget plans for serving God and others.

When God chose Solomon to be king of Israel, Solomon made some resolutions for his new life as king. His resolution came in the form of prayer. He prayed, "Give your servant...an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil...:" (1 Kings 3:9). Solomon's resolution was to be the best king possible for God's people. Do you think that would take hard work?

Do you agree that many of our own resolutions should be about how to help others be happier and healthier? We can make those kinds of resolutions, because when Jesus died to take away our sins, Jesus also gave us the power to serve others as He served people during His time on earth. As you think about the New Year, make it a priority to serve others, and do so in a way that shows them you are a child of God.

Our Pre-K students are loving their monthly classroom visits to the Kindergarten classes for kindergarten readiness! This month, the students learned about Jesus' birth and the star that shone that night. They then practiced writing the letter **S** together for "star."





This Christmas tree was decorated by some of our Grace Lutheran School Staff members using ornaments and a tree skirt created by students.

Phone: 863-293-9744

Artists of the Month

Katy - 1st grade (candle) Samuel - 2nd grade (poinsettia) Caroline - 5th grade (Christmas Tree)



SCHOOL CALENDAR

January

7: School Resumes Beginning of 3rd Quarter Uniform Sales 7:30AM - 4 PM

13: \$2 N.U.T. Day (Grades K - 5)

14: Uniform Sales 7:30AM - 4 PM Middle School Youth Group

6:30 - 8 PM

15: Class Pictures

19: No School - MLK Jr. Day

21: P.A.C.E. Coffee Talk 8:15AM

26 - 30: National Lutheran Schools Week Scholastic Book Fair

28: Grandparents' Day Early Release

Spirit Day (Cain's Snowballs) Uniform Sales 7:30AM - 1:00PM

Middle School Youth Group 6:30 PM - 8 PM



THE MISSION STATEMENT OF GLS: The mission of Grace Lutheran School is to provide its students and their families with a strong spiritual and academic foundation so that they know and understand God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ and are also able to live lives appropriate to their positions in their families, churches, community, and country.



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
*	Shell 20	26*	*	1 Nappy	2	3 5 PM Worship Svc
8:30 AM Worship 9:45 AM Bible Study & Sunday School 9:45 AM Confirmation 10:45 AM Worship Installation of Officers	5	10 AM Bible Study 10:30 AM Church Staff 12 PM Book Review 5:30 PM Prayer Svc	8:00 AM Staff Devos 1 PM WM Board Mtg. 6:30 PM HS Youth	9:30 AM LWR Quilters 11 AM Sunshine Club 1 PM Martha Circle 6 PM Trinity Bells	9 10 AM Bible Study - MM 6 PM AHG Princess	5 PM Worship Svc
11 8:30 AM Worship 9:45 AM Bible Study & Sunday School	6:30 PM Elder Meeting 12 7:30 AM Staff Devos 7:45 AM Kingdom Ringers	7 PM Praise Rehearsal 13 10 AM Bible Study 10:30 AM Church Staff	6:30 PM YA Bible Study	7:15 PM Grace Chorale 15 7:45 AM Kingdom Ringers 9:30 AM LWR Quilters	Late-In 16 10 AM Bible Study - MM	LWR Weekend 17
9:45 AM Confirmation 10:45 AM Worship 12 PM Families in the Park	6 PM School Bd. Mtg.	12 PM Book Review 5:30 PM Grace Bytes 7 PM Praise Rehearsal	6:30 PM MS Youth	3:30 PM 90+ Birthday Party - MM 6 PM AHG 6 PM TL 6 PM Trinity Bells 7:15 PM Grace Chorale		5 PM Worship Svc
8:30 AM Worship 9:45 AM Bible Study & Sunday School 9:45 AM Confirmation 10:45 AM Worship	MLK, Jr. Day No School Church Office Closed	7:30 AM Staff Devos 10 AM Bible Study 10:30 AM Church Staff 12 PM Book Review 5:30 PM Prayer Svc	8:30 AM PACE Coffee 6 PM Stephen Ministry 6:30 PM HS Youth	7:45 AM Kingdom Ringers 9:30 AM LWR Quilters 1 PM Adult Game Day 6 PM AHG 6 PM TL	23 10 AM Bible Study - MM	9 AM - 3 PM Discover Grace - MM 5 PM Worship Svc
25 8:30 AM Worship 9:45 AM Bible Study &	7:30 AM Staff Devos 7:45 AM Kingdom	7 PM Praise Rehearsal 27 10 AM Bible Study 10:30 AM Church Staff	6:30 PM YA Bible Study	6 PM Trinity Bells 7:15 PM Grace Chorale 29 7:45 AM Kingdom Ringers 9:30 AM LWR Quilters	30 10 AM Bible Study - MM	31
Sunday School 9:45 AM Confirmation 10:45 AM Worship	Ringers 5:30 Business Mgmt. 6:30 BOD Meeting	12 PM Book Review 5:30 PM Prayer Svc 6 PM Discover Grace 7 PM Praise Rehearsal	6:30 PM HS Youth	6 PM AHG 6 PM TL 6 PM Trinity Bells 7:15 PM Grace Chorale		5 PM Worship Svc



VOICE OF GRACE

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CONNECTING PEOPLE TO JESUS