



GRACE COMMUNION
SEMINARY

GCS NEWS

A Newsletter for Students and Alumni of Grace Communion Seminary

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m.morrison@gcs.edu

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lance.mckinnon@gcs.edu

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THEOLOGY

Dr. Gary Deddo
gary.deddo@gcs.edu

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registrar@gcs.edu

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CONTACT INFO:

3120 Whitehall Park Drive,
Charlotte, NC 28273
1-800-851-2611
or 1-980-495-3978
Fax: 1-844-350-3419

President's Letter



Advent Devotionals



Advent 1: Jesus Gives Us Hope

The apostle Paul wrote, "We hope for something we have not yet seen, and we patiently wait for it" (Romans 8:25, NIV unless noted).



In the days of Caesar Augustus, the Jewish people hoped that the Messiah would come to save them from the Romans. They didn't like to pay taxes to the Romans, certainly, but it was more than that. The Roman rule was also a slap in the face to their belief in the one true God. Here they were, worshipping God as best they could, singing songs about how he rewards people who trust in him, how he rescues his people from unbelievers, and yet the unbelievers ruled in the land God had supposedly given to the Jews.

So the people hoped for a Messiah. They had faith that he would eventually come, but they hoped it would be soon, in their lifetimes. And at last, he did come. He was born in Bethlehem, placed in an animal feed trough, and he was given the name Jesus, meaning "God saves." He was a helpless baby, and soon, this would-be Savior had to be rescued from the soldiers sent by Herod.

The Messiah had come, but few people knew it. The Jewish people were still ruled by Rome. Nothing had changed, it seemed. But the most important change of all had occurred, without them even knowing it: Jesus had come.

And Jesus grew, and he was baptized by John, and he taught large crowds of people, and he did many miracles, and then the Romans killed him. Nothing had changed, it seemed. But a few people knew better. They had seen the Messiah again. Death itself had been conquered, and they had reason to hope for the salvation not just of the Jewish people, but also the Romans themselves, and the Greeks and the Persians and the peoples of Africa, Asia, and even of lands they didn't even know existed, like where many of us live today.

Sometimes it looks like nothing has changed. World history is full of invasions, of conquests, of killings, of empires rising and falling, chaos and death. There have been black plagues, flu epidemics, covid and cancer. There have been people who lie, cheat, steal, and kill. And even in the best of times, there is death.

Even so, we have hope – we have reason to hope – Jesus gives us reason to hope. Without him, we have no hope, but with him, we have hope that can sustain us in times of terror, in times of tiredness, in seasons of sorrow and disappointment. We do not have all the things that Jesus has promised – the very definition of "hope" is that it's something we don't yet have – but Jesus gives us reason to believe that the things we hope for will in time be realized.

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War will cease. Cancer will be beaten. Disease epidemics will be no more. Death itself will come to an end. We know that there is something better yet to come, and it's because of Jesus. We hope, and we wait, for something that we do not yet see, because we see Jesus, the hope of the entire world.

Advent 2: Jesus Gives Us Peace

The apostle Paul wrote, "since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

One of the things that Jesus gives us is peace – in this verse, it's peace with God. Peace means much more than the absence of war – the Hebrew word *shalom* means "well-being." It means being comfortable in God's presence.

It's like the Old Testament picture of people sitting under a grapevine and a fig tree, with an abundance of good things and with no fears about it being taken away. When we have peace with God, it means not just that he stopped doing bad stuff to us, but that we can relax. We can enjoy his presence; we can be content, as one of the psalms says, like a weaned child sitting with its mother. Life is good, we might say.

God wasn't really out to get us, we find out. He is the one who sent Jesus to save us. The peace that we enjoy with God is more of a change in the way we think, than in the way that God thinks about us. It means that we have peace of mind, because Jesus has done whatever it takes to show us that God is on our side; he wants the best for us. Jesus paid the extreme

price so we would know that for sure. We can enjoy his presence, and not be fearful that he's suddenly going to turn against us because we did something that he didn't like, or didn't do something that he wanted.

God still has standards, and there are certain things that he wants us to do, and certain things to avoid, but none of these things will change his overall attitude towards us, that he wants us to experience good things instead of bad. He wants us to relax, to be content in his presence, like sitting under his vine and fig tree. Life with God is good – it is not a life of worry. 1 Timothy 6 tells us that God richly provides us things for our enjoyment. That's peace and wellbeing.

Peace with God means peace within ourselves. We are not filled with internal conflict, but we can go forward in confidence. It should also lead us to peace with other people, with our spouse, with our children, our co-workers, our neighbors. Now, not everyone is willing to be peaceable with us, but "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18). Don't seek to harm them, or take vengeance. Be considerate of their needs and feelings – that's basically what it means to love our neighbors. Jesus helps bring us peace in that way, too.

We also want world peace, for Ukrainians and Russians to sit together, to laugh together, to love one another. We'd like for Israelis and Palestinians to enjoy eating together, sharing with one another the fruits of their vines and fig trees, to not just stop shooting each other, but to actually appreciate each other. We pray for peace in Sudan, in Venezuela, Afghanistan, and Kosovo. We pray for peace in New York, San Bernardino, and Guadalajara. We pray for peace in our schools, our workplaces, and our homes.

We cannot bring world peace by bigger missiles, smarter bombs, or more weapons. It can come only through Jesus, and it starts by us accepting the peace that he gives us with God. We are comfortable with God's love for us. Jesus is peace, not only for us, but also for the whole world.

Advent 3: Jesus Gives Us Joy

An angel told the shepherds near Bethlehem, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10). Unfortunately, Herod sent some soldiers to kill him. Later, many of the townspeople of Nazareth tried to kill him. On various occasions people took up stones to kill him, and eventually a crowd of people clamored for his crucifixion. It did not seem like "great joy" for some of those people.

Well, it should have been, because Jesus came to save those people, too. They had something to rejoice about, but they didn't know it.

The news, by itself, cannot cause joy. Joy comes only when the news is perceived as good. Not everyone receives the news about Jesus with joy, even though they should, because he is their Savior, too.

Unfortunately, even some Christians don't seem very happy about it. They are reluctant converts, perhaps convinced of a truth that they really don't like. They don't enjoy being a Christian, but are afraid of being anything else.

Paul commands us, "Rejoice in the



Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). Now, we might think that joy is not the sort of thing that can be commanded; either I am happy, or I am not, and I can’t just flip a switch and suddenly be happy. Most people, I think, would rather be happy than sad, so why would Paul command people to rejoice?

Well, it is a choice. Most people have both good things in their lives as well as bad things. Some people focus on the bad things, and some focus on the good things. When Paul tells us to rejoice, he is saying that we need to focus on the good things. Notice what he writes a few verses later: “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

There may be some complaint-worthy things in our life, and it’s OK to pray about those, but Paul tells us to make a conscious effort to think about the praiseworthy things, and when we do that, we will find things to rejoice about.

When Jesus came, there was good news of great joy for all the people, but he didn’t bring some magic substance called “joy.” No, this is really a figure of speech for “he brought something that we can rejoice about.” He brought good news about something that is really good for us. He brought salvation; he gives us the joy of knowing that God loves us, wants us, and wants to live with us. We are valued, each of us, by the king of the universe! He is giving us an eternity of joy, and that gives us something to rejoice about right now.

Advent 4: Jesus Gives Us Love



“God loved the world in this way,” John 3:16 tells us: “He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (CSB). First John 3:16 tells us more: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” (NIV).

The supreme example of love is Jesus’ willingness to die for us. But this did not start at Gethsemane, nor Nazareth, and not even Bethlehem. Revelation 13:8 tells us that Jesus was “slain from the creation of the world.” When God created the world, he knew way back then that his Son would be killed. He knew it would be because people rejected him, resented him, didn’t want what he offered. He knew it would be painful, emotionally and physically, and he created us anyway.

Why? Because of love. God loved us even before we were born, even before the world existed. Love, by definition, means that he considered us more important than his own comfort and safety. He knew we would not be worthy of his love, but he still knew that we would be worth the sacrifice of his Son. God esteems us so highly not for what we have done, but for what we will be in Christ. God eagerly wants us to live, to accept what he gives us in Christ. He wants to live with us.

Revelation 21:3 says, in a literal translation, “The tabernacle of God is with humanity, and he will tabernacle

with them.” His tent will be in our midst, and he will tent with us. It does not say that we will live with him (although that is true), but that he will live with us. He comes to us where we are. That’s an example of love.

The same Greek word is used in John 1:14 to refer to the birth of Jesus: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” The birth of Jesus is a picture of God’s love for us, that he wants to be with us. He knew that he would be rejected the first time, but he came anyway, because he could see beyond that to the greater result in the future, that he would return and be accepted with great joy. The thread that runs through the entire story, that drives the entire story, is God’s love for people who at first didn’t even exist, and later, who returned his love with hatred and murder. But he sees beyond that, and he knows how it will all turn out for even more love, joy and peace. He wants to live with us, and he’s willing to make all sorts of sacrifices to make it possible. This is the kind of love that will make the future world so wonderful. We get a glimpse of that in Easter, we get a glimpse of that in Christmas, we get a glimpse of that even in the love that one person has for another, because even that love is a gift of God who made us all to be a bit like himself.

Jesus is God’s greatest gift to humanity, and it is inseparable from his love. God wants us to share his love with one another, and to share Jesus, too, because it is in Jesus that we learn the most about what love is, and in his love God shares Jesus with us. Jesus gives us love.

*Michael Morrison, PhD
President*





Eric Larison

Eric's five-year tenure officially began at the October 2023 board meeting. He is replacing the outgoing Chair, Randy Bloom, who will become vice-chair.

GCS Appoints a New Board Chair

GCS welcomes Eric Larison as the new Board Chair. Below is a write-up by Randy Bloom listing many of Eric's qualifications and experience.

Eric has a master's degree in English from California State University, Los Angeles and a Certificate of Advanced Study of Educational Leadership from State University of New York, Oswego. In 2019, he retired from public education as a teacher and administrator after 36 years. He currently serves as the Executive Director of the New York State Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, a professional learning organization for educators. A graduate of Leadership Greater

Syracuse (NY), Eric has served on the board of directors for two nonprofit community service organizations. From 2016-2022, he served as a director for Childcare Solutions, the regional organization that supports early learning, professional development, licensing, and inspections for center and home-based childcare providers. He is the director and current board chair of Contact Community Services, which provides suicide prevention, mental health, and youth development services.



Jeff Broadnax

Congratulations Doctor Broadnax

GCS would like to congratulate Jeff Broadnax for completing his Doctor of Ministry degree from Shiloh University. We are grateful to have his additional education and credentials brought in his service to the seminary. Jeff teaches our Trinitarian Youth Ministry class, which will be offered in the upcoming Spring term. Congratulations Dr. Broadnax for this monumental achievement.



GCS Offers Its First Online Assembly



A Time to Gather for Devotion and Prayer

On January 23, 2024, Grace Communion Seminary will hold its first assembly. We will meet by Zoom at 8 pm Eastern time to share in a short devotional, and prayers for the work that we are doing together. Invitations with Zoom links will be sent to all students who register for spring semester courses. If you aren't taking a class this semester but still want to attend the assembly, send an email to Georgia McKinnon at registrar@gcs.edu.

In a world with more than 24 time zones, we know that everyone may not be able to attend our gathering. If you have a schedule conflict at this time slot, let us know for our future planning considerations.

Schedule of Courses

All schedules are tentative

Spring 2024: Registration begins Jan. 3. The first lecture will be posted on Tuesday, Jan. 16. Other lectures will be posted on Mondays, January 22 through March 17. All work is to be completed by April 14.

BI510	Old Testament Survey	Jeannine Graham
BI523	Acts of the Apostles	Dan Rogers
CM501	Foundations of Christian Ministry	Lance McKinnon
CM506	Trinitarian Youth Ministry	Jeff Broadnax
CM510	Polity of Grace Communion International	Greg Williams
TH502	Jesus Christ, the Nature of Humans and Salvation	Gary Deddo

Summer 2024: Registration begins April 29. The first lecture will be posted on Monday, May 13. Other lectures will be posted on Mondays, May 20 through July 22. All work is to be completed by August 11.

BI501	Biblical Interpretation	Mike Morrison
CH502	Church History: The Second Millennium	Steve Dolson-Andrew
CM504	Practice of Ministry	Ted Johnston
CM510	Church Planting and Development	TBD
CM513	Trinitarian Worship	Lance McKinnon
TH515	Theological Ethics	Gary Deddo

Fall 2024: Registration begins August 26. The first lecture will be posted on Monday, September 9. Other lectures will be posted on Mondays, September 16 through November 11. All work is to be completed by December 8.

BI540	Using Biblical Greek Study Tools	Mike Morrison
CH501	Church History: The First Millennium	Steve Dolson-Andrew
CM507	Experiencing the Trinity	Larry Hinkle
CM511	Homiletics	Dan Rogers
FE501-3	Field Education	Randy Bloom
TH507	Theology of C.S. Lewis	Gary Deddo

All schedules are tentative. If fewer than five students register for a course, it may be cancelled, at the discretion of the instructor. **Thesis and Capstone courses for the master's degrees are offered in all semesters.**



CONGRATULATIONS To Our Recent 2023 Graduates

Master of Pastoral Studies (MPS)

**Anthony Gachanja • Saji Jacob
Anthony Mullins**

CTS & DCM

Certificate of Theological Studies (CTS):

David Borum	Jon Arnold
Glowen Kyei-Mensah	Joel Calmateo
Theo Okai	Jamie Garcia
Bill Corbet	Selena Venegas

Diploma of Christian Ministry (DCM):

David Borum	Theo Okai
Glowen Kyei-Mensah	Michael Guibord



THANK YOU FOR PARTNERING WITH GCS

As the year draws to an end, we look back with grateful hearts for those whose passion and enthusiasm for GCS have moved them to partner with us through financial support and prayer. Your sharing with us is a blessing for the seminary to be a blessing to those we serve. We pray God's grace and blessing for you in the new year.

WE HOPE YOU WILL CONSIDER GCS IN YOUR YEAR-END GIVING

Financial support from alumni and friends like you has a profound impact on the seminary's mission of *"Equipping Men and Women for Church-based Ministry."*

Every gift is God's provision for his work in Grace Communion Seminary.



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