

Ministry Minute

Grace Circle

“Many Hands Lighten Grace Circle's Workload”



What's that Biblical admonition about idle hands?

Well, there are no worries about that when you know all that Grace Circle members have their hands in.

The group puts together the “Laundry of Love” kits for homeless youth and STEP, and they assemble kits for newborns in other countries, as well as collecting and sorting the goods for each of those works of love.

Grace Circle organizes the Country Store, which is part of Westwood's Holiday Fair. The women gather up containers for a member who creates soup mixes that are sold as part of that event. In addition, baking days and personal contributions provide many of the jams and jellies, canned goods, breads, cookies, bars, and other baked goodies for the operation. Some contribute popular Scandinavian treats such as lefse, spritz, and krumkake.

Recently, when a member began dialysis, the women signed up to provide rides to and from treatment.

But at the heart of their commitment is the Bible study and monthly meetings that inspire many of their good works.

Grace Circle meets at 12:30 pm on the second Tuesday of each month from September through May. Each meeting includes a Bible study and discussion, a business meeting, and prayer requests. Average attendance at each meeting is 15-20 members, though there are more members who contribute to the work through donations or work at home.

Their monthly lessons come from Gather, a magazine produced by Women of the ELCA that includes a mix of devotions, stories, theological reflections, and sometimes inspiration for projects. The group also has two potluck luncheons each year: one in October and another in May.

Summer activities in the past have included visits to different churches, a trip to the Arboretum, and a tour of the Hindu temple in Maplewood. Those events have become more limited as the members have aged.

“Many of us are getting older, so we don't do as many field trips. It's hard to know if places are accessible for us,” said member Kay Elliasen.

They are eager to grow.

“The women are friendly, and it's a warm group,” said member Mary Ann Cameron. “It's a congenial group that welcomes new members.”



Members assemble a minimum of 100 Newborn Kits each year for Global Health Ministries. GHM sends the kits to other countries to encourage prenatal care and to make connections with mothers in the hope of encouraging vaccinations and well-baby checks. To assemble the kits, Grace members spend part of the year collecting infant hats, undershirts, diaper pins, and cloth diapers, receiving blankets, small bath towels, washcloths, and bars of Ivory soap. All of that is wrapped in a pillowcase.

“People donate (supplies), and we receive grants from Thrivent to buy what's needed. Cloth diapers are hard to come by,” Mary Ann said.

Grace Circle members assemble the kits and, when supplies are abundant, have put together as many as 200, according to Kay.

This year, the annual laundry kits were donated to STEP, the St. Louis Park Emergency Services Program. The kits consist of a small package of detergent and \$5 in quarters for laundry machines. The decision where the kits are donated is based on needs each year. Some other years, they are distributed to young people in unstable housing situations.

Grace members understand the mission they serve at and for Westwood.

“It's outreach,” Kay said. “We do a lot, but in a group, it's easier to do.”