

Dear Parents,

What a wonderful gift! These are the words I wrote in my journal this morning as I reflected specifically on our recent Winter Retreat, but also on the entire year so far. I think my gratitude stems from seeing such an incredible community of kids and leaders who seem to be able to laugh, play, pray, worship and grow together in ways that I have continually marveled at all year. One student just could not stop saying thank you to her leader who was persistent in inviting her and then leading her to Christ on the retreat. I look at the big picture down to individual students like that girl and just turn back around and say thank you to Christ and thank you to all of you parents who have blessed us with the chance to partner with you in passing on our faith!

If all this gratitude is in our hearts (because I know I speak for all the leaders who are loving this year with me) at just the half way point, I cannot wait to see how grateful we are after everything else happens that is coming up. And there is a lot ahead, so hopefully this letter will give you all you need to continue on this wonderful journey with us.

Sunday Teaching Series

The Treasure Principle

I have been using this excellent book by Randy Alcorn to teach kids about money the past few weeks. We have discussed being stewards, storing treasures in heaven, generosity and will end with being a globally minded giver on Sunday. It has been a challenging series for me as I learn about using money better and I think the kids have grown a lot as well. One of the key practical applications we have implemented is to have two offering containers set out each week for students to develop their giving habits now. Half of the offering goes to the church and half is going to an orphanage we are starting to partner with in Trinidad. After sending teams to Trinidad for so many years, we are excited to deepen that partnership and interact all year long with them.

Purity Series

From February 17th to March 9th we will be doing a series on purity. We will have large group teaching and panel discussions along with small group time to talk through the material presented in the large group. In our highly sexualized culture we believe it is important for the church to speak out and reclaim the beauty of sexuality according to God's plan for it. Throughout the series we will focus on teaching a biblical view of sex and dating which emphasizes convictions and character over chemistry. But we will be addressing the reality of hormones and will seek to address topics such as: kissing, petting, oral sex and sexually transmitted diseases. These topics will not be prolonged or described graphically, but rather they will be addressed as part of what culture is normalizing as okay and as something that far too many Christian kids have no idea how to handle when they face them – sadly all of these topics are very much a part of what middle school students are talking about and experiencing. We welcome parents to come and listen to the large group sessions and we encourage you to discuss purity with you students throughout the series and beyond.

Planting Seeds Series

In April we will break up by grade to give age appropriate foundational faith teaching to students. The 6th graders will be introduced to the history of Christianity, the 7th graders will be learning basic theology and the 8th graders will be studying spiritual practices for growing in their faith. More details will follow as we get closer to this series.

Wednesday Nights

Brookwoods Blast

Jason Bryant, our middle school ministry assistant, has been leading an outstanding team of Wednesday night leaders this year. For the next few weeks we will be continuing to use the four teams that were started on the retreat for various athletic and intellectual competitions. New students will be added to the teams each week as they come and at the end of three weeks the winning team gets an ice cream party.

Middle School March Madness

In March we will be hosting a three-on-three basketball tournament. Games will be played at 6:00pm and 8:00pm (before and after our regular meetings). It will be a double elimination tournament designed to involve students who love the game and their friends who may not be connected to a church. Please encourage your child to participate – guys and girls are both welcome.

Summer Trips

Believe it or not, the two day retreat was just not long enough and I came away very excited for more time with students. That is why I cannot wait for summer when we will have multiple chances to go away on mission trips and a week long camp. Here are the details about all that is happening.

Mission Trip Application Process

Applications can be picked up at 3 Militia, at the Middle School Welcome table or online at www.grace.org/middleschool. The application says they should be turned in February 10th, but I will accept them up through February 17th which is the day of the interviews. The interviews will be 10 minutes long and students can sign up for a slot sometime between 11:30am and 3:00pm. Then the trip leaders will meet to determine which students should be placed on the two teams. Typically we only take 8th graders to Trinidad.

West Virginia: July 12-19

Leaders and Ministry: Brian Dietz and Heather Dietz – This will be our fourth trip to West Virginia. Our job will involve partnering with World Vision to build a community center and to clean up homes in an impoverished part of our own country. We'll also offer a VBS to the children in the neighborhood. We will stay at a nearby camp in their cabins and also have access to their pool for cooling off at the end of the day. Heather and I have been co-leading trips together for five summers (two others were to WV) and

cannot get enough. We will be adding additional leaders as well over the next few weeks and cannot wait to see who God brings to the team from the students!!

Purpose: World Vision has created what they call Vision Trips for teens and families that focus on community transformation in Appalachia. The rural communities that make up much of Appalachia are in great need of outside support and the churches in the area have been doing great work to meet these needs.

Finances: Each student will be responsible for sending out support letters to friends and family. These letters will ask people to partner in the trip with prayer support and financial support. Our goal will be for each student to raise at least \$700 to cover their costs. Most students are able to raise 100% of their costs through supporters. However, parents are responsible for any remaining balance if enough support is not raised.

Transportation: We take a direct flight from Boston to Pittsburgh. We will then rent minivans to transport us about one hour south to Bertha Hills, WV which is just outside Morgantown (the first night we will stay in Pittsburgh at my parents home – they love having us). These vans will also serve to transport us to and from our worksites each day. We will then drive back to Pittsburgh for our return flight.

Trinidad: June 27 – July 5

Leaders: Brian Dietz and Angela Rogers – This will be my seventh time to Trinidad and I can't wait to go back and minister in such a wonderful place. Angela will be making her second trip to Trinidad, having also served as leader on two trips to West Virginia. We will be adding leaders over the next few weeks and again look forward to seeing which students God will lead to Trinidad with us this summer.

Purpose: High School, Middle School and Family teams from Grace Chapel have been going to Trinidad since the 80's and always find it to be an excellent place for people of all ages to be exposed to missions (even seven year olds have gone with us). We will work with one of our missionary partners in supporting Trinidad and Tobago Urban Ministries. They will offer us many ministry opportunities including chances to run a VBS, work with an orphanage and help with a construction project.

Finances: Each student will be responsible for sending out support letters to friends and family. These letters will ask people to partner in the trip with prayer support and financial support. Our goal will be for each student to raise at least \$900 to cover their costs. Again, students will be personally responsible for any funds not raised, but typically all the support has come from the support letters.

Transportation: Trinidad is about a six hour flight with one layover typically in either Miami or San Juan, Puerto Rico. The island is located about 7 miles off the coast of Venezuela in the Caribbean.

Camp Berea: August 3-9

Camp Berea in Bristol, New Hampshire has been providing summer camp experiences to kids for many years and after our amazing experiences the past five summers there was no question that we would be heading back for more this summer!! We will be taking our own volunteer staff so the relationships will already be formed and will carry on right in to the next year. Our kids will have the chance to try water skiing, tubing, riflery, archery, paint ball, hiking in the woods and countless other fun, challenging and stretching activities. And Camp Berea's spiritual growth philosophy is to see each kid step up to the next level in their faith. Whether they are a non-believer or have grown up in the church, during the week every student will be challenged to take a new step of faith and carry that home with them!!

The camp is open to kids from all over New England, but I have reserved spots for our students (waiting to find out about a possible group discount). To streamline the process, we have taken ourselves out of the registration loop and will just have you sign up directly through Berea. The registration process will be made clear in the brochures that will be coming home to your kids in the next month or so.

To help kids raise money for camp we will do a car wash in June. The car wash will be free and kids will get people to sponsor them for every car they wash. It is possible to raise all the money through this fund raiser. ***Please note that Berea can only guarantee our reserved, discounted spots until April 1 so sign up quickly when you get the brochure.*** I believe this camping opportunity will change so many lives and I look forward to seeing our kids develop in their walks with Christ!!

Middle School Parents Email

We love partnering with you and to facilitate a better partnership we would like to offer more details about what happens in the middle school ministry each week. To do that, we have decided to pilot a weekly email blast to parents of middle school students. This email will include information about upcoming events, partnership opportunities for you as parents and details about current teaching to aid in follow up discussions with your kids. We will start by sending out the email during the four weeks of the purity series. After that we will evaluate the email and determine if and how it will continue from there. If you are interested in receiving the email, but do not know if your email is current in our database, you can email Angela at arogers@grace.org.

Have a wonderful winter. We look forward to many more blessings as we connect with you and your middle school student!!

In Christ,

Brian Dietz
Pastor of Middle School Ministry
Grace Chapel

