

## Church Retreat, Part 4A

*(Last week's was supposed to be Part 3 but I typed 4 so let's call this 4A!)*

In the second half of the retreat we broke into five different groups and explored the question: "What do we hope and dream for Grace Baptist in the next five years?" I am going to list the ideas that came to the forefront, then offer some summary reflections.

- Be better known in our community

- Be welcoming but stay true to our identity. (I call this "growth with integrity".)

- Embrace missions—especially "hands-on" missions. What new ministry endeavors might we initiate?

- Seek better to serve young families and attract young families.

- Have more inter-faith services and events.

Keep our "personal" worship style.

- Be relevant in our community.

- Encourage the next generation of members and leaders and be open to the changes that might bring.

- Various ideas need a champion or we get stuck.

- The Church should be a beacon of light to the community.

- Find a "sweet spot" of growth with age groups and diversity.

- We need to develop a process by which the church can speak out on moral issues important to us.

- There was talk of using our property, or helping 5<sup>th</sup> Street Ministries, to build affordable housing for those in our community.

- There was much discussion about how to get our church's name and ministry out to the Statesville community. Or, how to get the bushel off our light! Different communications strategies were discussed.

- The Church Cabinet talked about ways to help our congregation do its work of ministry more effectively and efficiently. They will be looking at the Covenant and organizational structure to see what modifications need to be made toward that end.

## Some Reflections on Growth and the Good Future for Grace.

Here are some well-proven principles to bear in mind as we go forward together:

**One: *Be yourself!*** That is, pay attention to your strengths and keep them strong. Plan with our “core values” in mind. Some of these are: 1) The importance of community. Grace is a community of friends. 2) Meaningful worship 3) Mission involvement 4) Welcome of all people wherever they are on their journey of faith and 5) Commitment to justice and making our Statesville community a better place for all people.

**Two: *Be willing to fail.*** One church consultant I’ve worked with said that when churches draw up their future plans they should have a 50% chance of succeeding! If they have 100% chance of succeeding we aren’t stretching enough. Harvard Business professor Peter Drucker said: “Sometimes to repeat the successes of the past is worse than a failure.” In other words, be ready to take risks for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

**Three: *Be willing to listen.*** Listen for God, listen to each other and listen to the voices and needs of those outside the church. This requires deep listening, the kind of listening that the Japanese pictogram describes as “listening with fourteen hearts”.

**Four: *Shore up weaknesses*** that keep us from growing. One of these the Board of Education has identified is ministry to our children.

**Five: *Discover best practices in churches like ours which can guide and serve us.***

**Six: *Find ways to serve.*** That is, serve the real needs of people around us. Spiritual needs and broader needs. One idea floating around is to form a school partnership with a school that needs bolstering.

**Seven: *Stay Positive.*** A community thrives on the positive energy of its members and leaders. It’s been said that “The Seven Last Words of The Church” are: “We’ve Never Done it That Way Before.” Three killer words in congregation conversation are “That Won’t Work”. It might not, but to speak those words too quickly shuts down the conversation.

**Eight: *Deepen your own spiritual life.*** This will deepen the spiritual life. This will deepen the spiritual life of the congregation. The Christian life is not lived in the shallows.

**Nine: *Explore how to identify spiritual gifts in the community and encourage them.*** We might take another look at the Church of the Savior in Washington and their process of “sounding a call”. In this process a person or small group of persons “sounds a call” and invites whoever feels led to join them in a new ministry endeavor. This could be a short-term project or a longer term project. It need not involve the whole congregation.

**Ten:** Continue talking about the church in your daily life and inviting people to come to Grace. All the statistics show that this is the primary way most people hear about a church and decide to attend.

**Eleven, and finally:** Seek the help of God. We cannot do what is necessary without the Spirit of God. Jesus asked a person this simple question: “What do you want me to do for you?” If Jesus asked Grace that question, how might we answer?