

Happy Holidays from your Church Council!

With so much change happening at Grace via personnel turn over, needs around volunteer leadership and ongoing church projects and missions, it has been a little stressful to say the least. Several members of our Congregation have expressed to Council their concerns about the future of Grace.

We would like to list here many of the concerns we heard from you, along with some from Council. We are also highlighting some of our recent activities as a church, and letting you know what your Council has been discussing as a possible way ahead for 2023.

First let's look at some of our concerns and how we arrived at them.

On October 23rd, Grace hosted an Appreciative Inquiry at the church with Consultation to Clergy Facilitator Laurin Vance. During that get together we lifted up many great memories from our past. There was joy and passion in our music and youth and family programs. We also took time to gain perspective on how our church and its leadership is viewed by our younger members.

From this discussion we drew out six priorities from attendees about what we should focus on:

- A need for better communication (between groups/ leaders and the Congregation)
- Lack of volunteers/ Leadership
- A desire to have a responsible/ balanced budget
- A desire to reach consensus about use of the Fox Fund
- The future of our music and youth program(s)/ direction
- Have a deeper connection with our youth as a whole congregation and work toward a more multigenerational worship life

Additionally, with Sean Burns and the Smallbeck family moving out of the community, this brought up additional concerns:

- Our organist Judy Olson has taken on additional responsibilities in the absence of a director for our music ministries.
- We will be soon relying on volunteer leadership to continue existing youth ministry. We are grateful for this leadership, but we do not wish for this to be a long-term solution.
- We will have no custodian to maintain cleanliness, setup and upkeep of our church.

While the above concerns create a challenging reality for our church, Council and Pastor view these changes as an opportunity to reshape and ask what Grace is, and can be, going into future years.

Second, let's take a step back and look at the abundance that Grace has had throughout this year.

We have expanded our focus on food security for our neighbors. We continue to have a significant impact with Packing Friendship; we are entering a third year with our Little Free Pantry, and we are committing resources for our innovative Community Garden.

Council approved replacement of heating and cooling units making the height of summer cooler and going into our winter months, we have safe heat to see us through till spring.

Milt Herman and the Building Visioning Committee (in concert with the Fox Visioning Committee) have been addressing major property issues around our church to include:

- Restoring the exterior of our building with needed repairs
- Protecting the outside of our facility with new paint.
- Improving lighting for outside areas and our parking lot.

Additionally, they are slated to gather bids for repairing concrete work, updating the church's roof and pursuing other renovations that have been mentioned in our discussions about ways we can use the Fox Fund.

The Building group is committed to keeping this momentum going. With an identified list of priorities, they are acting in concert with Council and the Fox group to make much needed improvements and communicate with the congregation. Expect to see more projects completed throughout next year.

With regards to our sense of community as a congregation, we have made decisions that make it easier to be together in person as the risk of transmission of COVID has lessened. Now masks are voluntary, we greet each other with the sign of peace, we sing out loud, and receive the sacrament from hand to hand. We restored periodic fellowship, restarted TAG meals, began meeting again in person at Grace and so many more things that have happened this year.

Next, let's imagine tomorrow together.

Congregations, like all communities, experience change. During our Appreciative Inquiry our Congregation passionately declared how much music, youth and family and community matter at Grace. Even as they have been expressed differently through the years, those core ministries remain central to our heart as a Church. While the coming years will involve changes, we feel there is so much more we have yet to do in these particular areas.

Council has had several meetings to discern specific possible solutions that we'll address with the Congregation between now and January. Specifically:

- With regards to better communication, Council will strive to be more present for announcements at service and through our weekly, monthly messaging to try and express what is happening at Grace more often than just in newsletters.
- Regarding the lack of volunteers and leadership, we think there are many factors. Our ministry team structure was developed when Grace was a larger congregation, and at a time when leaders had more time to volunteer. Our membership has declined, which is a reality accelerated through COVID. Finally, people who might consider leadership don't necessarily have the same ministry priorities as an earlier generation.

We are hoping to approach involvement in the church from a more task- or event-based approach where Staff, Council, Committees and our current Teams will reach out for help when needed. This means the needs of Grace may be met on a situational basis versus filling team roles full time as has been done in the past. We have so many fantastic people who will offer time when asked, and we lift up that generosity and will seek that engagement moving ahead.

- Regarding leadership. Our most pressing priorities are for the position of Council President and Treasurer. We desire a culture at Grace where individuals who feel called to lead receive the support and encouragement of the whole congregation, including all members, staff and current leaders. We know it's a commitment of time and energy to be a leader at Grace. We are asking for your help through your prayers and nominations. We're asking everyone to ponder "How can I serve my church? How is God moving me to serve?"

With regards to staffing at Grace, some amazing energy has come from Pastor James, the Congregation and Council with what may be our new way ahead. Some actions we are taking include:

- We have decided to use a cleaning service to cover essential weekly duties.
- We have identified Youth and Family ministry, including Faith Formation as a priority. We plan to seek a full-time position for a trial period of perhaps three years, with strategic goals to help us assess the ministry.
- We have identified Music Ministry as another immediate priority. We plan to seek a full-time position also for a trial period of perhaps three years, also with strategic goals in mind.
- At this time, we are not looking to pursue the Intern Program for 2023/24. We feel there is a need to address youth and family and music ministry first, and revisit internship in the future if sustainable funding is available.
- These trial periods will be communicated with candidates throughout the interview and hire process. We know it will take hard work and imagination to have a vibrant ministry in these areas in the next few years, but we feel these are some of the ways our congregation is called to be the presence of Christ in our community. Both of these programmatic positions will likely have an outreach element to them, especially at first. It's all about connecting people with one another through (and because of) the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Finally, lets talk about the money.

Income through regular offerings have not kept up with our staffing needs. We mentioned attrition, COVID and loss of members as the primary reason for a decline in tithes that are used to fund our Operational Budget. So what does this mean? It is a commitment financially to have staff to help fill our programmatic needs. When we reduce staff, we have fewer opportunities for ministry to happen and people to connect in the name of Christ. Volunteer leadership is possible, but we think that's a lot to expect from the congregation over the long term.

We are in a situation where we really want the Grace of the past, but just don't bring in enough to responsibly fund what Grace used to be. We want our members to find joy in reconnecting with one another, worshiping with one another, and serving with one another for the sake of Christ. We want to learn more about our faith while being cross-generational, reinvigorate our membership and rekindle excitement for service. We have heard from you that this is what you want too.

We are not a poor church. We are abundantly flourishing in gifts from the Fox Fund (\$2.5M), the Huggins Memorial (over \$135k) and various other dedicated gifts totaling in excess of \$10,000. These gifts are constantly lifted up by the Congregation as needing to be put to use. So how do we justify not

having enough to run the church the way we want while we sit on a mountain of God’s blessings?
Council has discussed this and are proposing the following way ahead:

- We are proposing to utilize revenue gains from existing funds (like the Fox funds) to infuse our operational budget for the next 2-3 years. This means we’ll be able to fund new programs and staff at Grace while working with our current supporting Congregation.
- We are going to be clear moving forward that these commitments are a way to kickstart our membership and expand our ministry.
- We’ll propose a long-term plan to fulfill these goals and communicate with the church providing status updates along the way. We are all Grace, we should all share in the good news.
- We are leaning in with our hearts and putting our church in God’s hands. We are doing the best we possibly can with the information and stewarded resources based on wisdom, practicality and faith. We trust that these efforts will bear new fruit, and that the Holy Spirit will be with us throughout these changes.

We don’t know the future, but we know the One who does. We will not be careless with our resources, but we will take chances with hope and excitement. We ask that our whole congregation continue to love and support one another, be actively involved, and be brave to embrace something new.

God’s Blessings

Chad Dulac
President



David Coe
Vice President



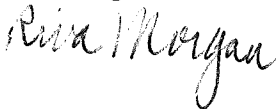
Gwen Sparks
Treasurer



Suellen Harris
Secretary



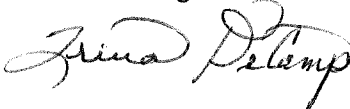
Riva Morgan
At Large



Sara O’Daffer
At Large



Trina DeCamp
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John McQuaig
At Large