

February 15, 2022

Fellow Members of Grace;

Your Strategic Planning Committee would like to share with you an update on our progress to date and our current plan for moving forward.

A survey was made available to all members of Grace from November 1 through 15, 2022 in a variety of formats. The summarized results of your responses are included at the end of this message. All of the responses, from all formats, were read, reviewed, and discussed with the goal of discerning evident themes from your ideas, suggestions, and comments.

Five broad themes emerged as priorities for our goals moving forward. Those goals are, in no particular order:

- Help one another to come together and engage again following the pandemic
- Offer diverse opportunities for participation in congregational life across the generations
- Create a sense of unity that stretches across opposing viewpoints
- Explore and offer diverse worship opportunities
- Develop a comprehensive plan for church properties, including maintenance and upgrades

Our next steps will include involving you, the members of Grace, in helping to identify action steps to be taken as we work to achieve these outlined goals. The Strategic Planning Committee members will be hosting a series of small group sessions in March and April to invite your participation in brainstorming these action steps. Please stay tuned for more detailed information on the dates, time, and locations of these sessions and plan to join us. Everyone's input is needed, welcome, and valued as we work to shape Grace's future direction in ministry together.

As mentioned, a summary of the results of the initial survey is included below; however, if you would like the full report of survey responses, those are available on the [church website](#), as well as in hard copy in the Narthex and the church office, or can be mailed to you upon request.

Thank you for your prayers and continued support of the Strategic Planning Committee and for your help in setting Grace's path forward in our future ministries together.

Sincerely,  
Strategic Planning Committee

Susan Ryder  
Pastor Cover  
Wilson Castillo  
Barb Schell  
Jen Graf  
Bob Hillegas

Karen Galle  
Vicar Susan, Intern  
Ann Hoffman  
Rick Keen  
Nevin Shenck  
Jesse Woodrow

Susan Dickinson  
Tom Blackburn  
Randy Hamme  
Marti Bert  
Patty Rohde  
Jill Schumann, Independent Facilitator

## **Survey Summary**

*Note – not all people answered all questions. And, while this is a brief summary of responses, reading the full responses gave the Planning Team members a better idea of frequency and texture of responses.*

- 61 people filled out the online survey and 13 handwrote surveys for a total of 74 responses.
- Age of respondents: 3 people under 20; 6 people between 20-40; 29 people 41-65; and 36 people over 65.
- Seven people do not attend worship, while most people attend in person and many of those also attend online.
- Many of the people who responded are long-time members and have family connections to the congregation. They often stay because the church has become an extended family. Those who have come to the church more recently appreciated the feeling of welcome, the chance to participate in activities and learning across generations, the good music program, the congregation's community service, opportunities for children and youth to be involved, location near to home, liking the pastors, and relevant sermons.
- Perceived challenges for the next few years include:
  - Re-engaging people post-pandemic
  - Declining membership and the need retain and grow membership, especially younger people
  - Building and property maintenance
  - Bridging political divides and differing understandings of the role of church in social issues which is causing unrest in the congregation and some people are leaving
  - Expanding volunteer engagement and leadership
  - Financial resources
  - Creating a sense of unity and excitement for the future
  - Determining what to do with the 1604 property and Kentland
  - Ensuring that connections within the congregation are strengthened
  - Need to expand staffing to grow programming and membership
- New things people would like to see include:
  - More social events for all ages, including shared meals
  - Outreach to members who are not attending
  - Building on the community outreach of the Giving Pantry
  - Young adult group
  - Emphasis on accepting diverse points of view and learning how to talk together about difficult issues
  - Remove politics from worship
  - Look for opportunities to engage and provide ministry to people on the margins
  - Have a service led by the youth
  - Create a time and talent process to involve people with a variety of skills and interests
  - Replace the organ
  - Establish a mission focus that all would participate in
  - Strengthen programs for children – infants through high school
  - New types of worship and music; use the band more often
  - Facility upgrades
  - Relationship with a sister Black church

- Town hall to air concerns
- Pastoral outreach to members
- Collaborations with other congregations
- Outside speakers-churchwide
- Renovate the library as social gathering space
- Connect with local schools
- Bring back the nut fry
  
- With respect to servicing the wider community, comments included:
  - Giving Pantry is an important ministry
  - Youth program involves youth outside the membership
  - Community meals and addressing other needs post-COVID
  - Perhaps something for people in Section 8 housing
  - Need to focus on internal issues right now
  - Preach the Gospel and engage the wider community
  - Learn about unmet needs in the area
  - Partnering with other congregations and organizations
  - Assisting with transportation - within congregation and beyond
  - Address global needs
  - Identify needs at the prison that Grace might help with
  - Work with schools to identify students' needs
  - Help to bridge racial divides
  
- Priorities for the next few years - comments include:
  - Welcoming and programming for young families
  - Membership growth
  - Keep politics out of sermons
  - New organ
  - Engaging young adults
  - Building maintenance and renovation
  - Community outreach and meet community needs
  - Focus on the Jesus and sharing the Gospel and studying the Bible together
  - Airconditioning and heating systems
  - Making all feel welcome regardless of political views
  - Kentland
  - Building volunteer leadership
  - Revitalize contemporary service
  - Determine what to do with 1604
  
- If you were in charge, what would you change:
  - Have one room with no mask mandate
  - Keep politics out of sermons
  - Have a group for young adults
  - Learn how the church can approach social issues to promote dialogue
  - Market more on social media

- More opportunities for meaningful youth involvement
  - More education about the Bible and Jesus
  - I would not change anything
  - Eliminate the big screen
  - More contemporary worship
  - Develop activities for seniors
  - Promote stewardship
  - Community outreach via Kentland
  - Have at least some evening office hours
  - Hire another pastor
  - Praise band more often
  - Declutter the hallways
  - Sell 1604 and use funds to upgrade Kentland
  - Provide recognition and appreciation to staff and volunteers
  - Be more inclusive in prayers
  - More collaboration between leadership and committee chairs
- If Grace stopped doing \_\_\_\_\_, I would be concerned:
    - Saturday night service
    - Youth group and youth/children's programs
    - Offering traditional worship
    - Community service
    - Giving Pantry
    - Trying
    - Being a caring congregation
    - Live streaming and online services
    - Regular communion
    - Visiting the homebound
    - Community Meals
    - Outward focus
- Groups within the congregation to work with:
    - Pastoral and member visitation with those who are ill or in need of encouragement and support
    - Young families and young adults
    - People who are grieving or terminally ill
    - Older folks in the congregation
    - Widows and widowers and perhaps people who have divorced
    - People who are alone or feeling lonely
    - Newly retired
    - Men's group and women's group
    - Disgruntled members who are leaving or thinking of leaving
    - Contemporary worshippers
    - Online community
    - Short interval volunteer opportunities
    - College students and after graduation

## **Interviews**

*Members of the Planning Team have interviewed other potential partners to explore needs and opportunities. The input from those conversations is summarized below.*

### **Lutheran Camping Corporation**

- Grace could help promote camping and perhaps provide camping representatives for area congregations that don't have them.
- The Growing Project at Wittel Farm needs garden volunteers.

### **St. Peter's Lutheran Church**

- Needs in their community include affordable childcare and the needs of Somali refugees, including volunteer tutors
- At Kentlands, Grace and St Peter's could have joint work days or host retreats together
- St Peter's could use help with their community garden

### **Giving Pantry Participants**

- Additional needs include: transportation, gas money, children's clothes, and companionship

### **New Hope Ministries**

- Grace could have a representative participate in the monthly West Shore calls that identify needs and resources.
- Needs include:
  - Transportation
  - Affordable housing
  - Volunteers
  - Skills training
  - Emergency childcare (for example grandparents on call)
  - Tech help for seniors

### **LutheranHands**

- Big expense is paying for insurance – opportunity for joint rates? 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday plate collection?
- Will need help raising visibility once trips can begin again