

June Remarks from Our Pastors

In their reports to Council each month, Pastor Gregg and Pastor Rachel conclude with some personal remarks that summarize the most recent period of their leadership here at Grace.

Senior Pastor's Remarks:

I have probably spent too much time thinking about insurance in the past month. This is a problem experienced by many pastors across the ELCA and in other denominations, too. Increasingly, insurance companies are deciding against insuring congregations for the ministry they provide. Much of [this trend](#) seems to be fueled by the weather.

Climate change is wreaking havoc with a greater frequency of worsening storms and natural disasters. When church buildings are damaged by these events, the cost of repairing and replacing beautiful, historic structures can quickly skyrocket. Some insurance companies are dropping congregations because they are simply too risky to keep on the books. There are other causes, too, but even in Rock Hill we can see how storms cause expensive claims.

At Grace, we were rather fortunate when the hailstorm came to this area this past April. Our roof surfaces held, and while they sustained damage, we all know of several homes and businesses throughout our area that were not so fortunate. While working through the claims process with [our insurer](#), we received word that Grace's coverage will not be renewed in the coming year. Upon learning of this, a small group of people has been working with me to find new coverage for our ministry to continue without interruption. We have a couple of bids, but the process has consumed much more time than any of us would like. Before offering us a quote, each company wants to know a great deal about our property, including its age, its vulnerabilities, how we use it, and so on. For the most part, the process of gathering all this info has been a chore, but I am also happy to report we have several things working in our favor.

We have been proactive about making repairs and replacing elements of our facilities over the years. We might be 100 years old, but we have taken pretty good care of the space with which God has blessed us. We don't just 'sweep things under the rug' here at Grace. When something breaks, we fix it. When something is wearing out, we replace it. We have been proactive in upgrading our facilities and we are continually seeking ways to make them safer. We are easier to insure because of the way we care for what we have, though that is not the reason for our care. We care for what God gives us because this is faithful stewardship. Plus, showing care in this way makes good use of the time we have as stewards. One never knows how long we will have to serve in that regard. Ask John the Baptist.

As we await further quotes from our next insurer, part of me hopes the people involved in providing us with our new premiums *stay home* from church this Sunday. The Gospel we will hear is a reminder that one cannot follow God's will without accepting substantial risk. In [Mark 6:14-29](#), we read how John the Baptist spoke the truth to people in power, and the result of this faithfulness was his execution. The courage it must have taken for John to admonish the king of his day is juxtaposed with the careless way the decision is made that John should die. It all happens so fast.

Disasters – whether by human hand or nature's force – frequently catch us by surprise. However, we can acknowledge that we are unlikely to have seen the last one. Whatever *may* come, will come, at some point. One can respond to that inevitability in several ways. The first response might be to hide oneself under pillows and blankets. Every now and then, this is probably not the worst idea, as our brains sometimes need respite from the many forces in this world beyond our control. The second response would be to delude ourselves into thinking bad things only happen to *others*, and that we are somehow immune. This one is less effective than the first. Finally, the third response is a sober awareness that disaster, crisis, suffering, etc. are all a part of life, but not a reason to shy away from living. Jesus knew this well.

As disciples, we are called into a world that is broken, and the broken places tend to have sharp edges. We are likely to end up getting hurt, the nearer to the brokenness we are. However, Jesus is there in the broken places, with the broken people. Jesus goes there, intent on mending their wounds, healing their hurts, giving them the strength to rebuild their lives. There is no way to avoid the risks of discipleship. As an organization, we acquire insurance. As disciples, we receive assurance from the one who accompanies us through every disaster, offering us new possibilities, new hope, new and abundant life.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

Pastor's Remarks:

In the past month, I've led 2 child/youth centered events: Vacation Bible School and Youth Beach Retreat. There were gifts and joys in both, and I'd like to share some of those with you.

SCUBA VBS was our return to VBS programming for the first time since 2019. After 4 years without this program, I was cautiously optimistic about the week. I was sure that we'd have a good time, but I wasn't sure if we'd have very many kids, or if we'd have enough volunteers – would we pick up momentum again after such a long hiatus? Registration was slow at the beginning, but then the pace really picked up! In the end, we had 33 children and 28 volunteers as part of our week!

In the preparation for VBS, and during the week, I was continually impressed by the level of commitment, attention to detail, and flexibility shown by our volunteers. From weeks of prep to willingness to change roles during the week, our volunteers put the kids first and gave it their all! And that commitment made a real difference for our kids – I saw them opening up, engaging in the stations, enjoying the games, learning the stories, and making friends! At the end of each day, we gathered to talk about what we enjoyed, where we saw God during our time together, and what we learned. These kids were truly connecting and learning, thanks to our great volunteers!

Another excellent part of VBS was the opportunity to invite new people to Grace. Nearly half of our participants were non-members! We had friends, neighbors, and members from Epiphany join us, and we heard again and again how glad they were to be welcomed. We were also able to connect some of our newer members in volunteering! Finally, on Friday, we hosted a celebration lunch, where family and congregation members were invited to come see what the week was about – we had many visitors with us for that meal, who shared how much their children had enjoyed their time with us!

2 weeks later was our Youth Beach Retreat. This year, we had a very small group, with 5 youth and 2 adults. With the change in the school district schedule, the shortened summer means less time for family vacations, so we had more scheduling conflicts than usual. However, having such a small group gave us some great opportunities for connection! We could easily talk as a whole group, play games with everyone participating, and get a table for lunch without a wait!

Most importantly, our group was a community where everyone felt welcome and wanted. One of our kids is newer to our group, and this was their first trip away with us. They commented how awesome it was that our church is so welcoming! They even asked if they could bring their friends to youth in the fall, because they want to share this community with them.

This last month has been full of welcoming moments and community-centered ministry – these are just two examples. I have been so glad to see Grace connecting widely with our members and our community, and I'm looking forward to more to come!

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel