

January 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:

This year, after the fog of holiday fatigue had lifted a bit, I started thinking in both directions - considering the future and past alike. I was looking forward to the coming year, its celebrations and visioning for the future. I also started thinking about the whirlwind we all just shared together, and I noticed how much it seemed like the first Advent and Christmas we spent at Grace.

It seems somewhat strange to think Pastor Rachel and I are already in our fifth year at Grace. Back in 2018, we arrived just in time for the second Sunday of Advent. If one thinks of the liturgical year as a roller coaster ride, Advent is the first big drop - thrilling speed, all the way through Christmas. Everything is whizzing by so fast, it's hard to notice much of anything. This is especially true in one's first year with a new parish. This year, though, felt much like our first. The calendar was so full, and we were so busy, all those weeks practically flew by, just like the first time. Now, what stretches out ahead of us is not unlike our first winter: a time of looking ahead, while we celebrate who we've been.

You might remember our first season after Epiphany had a theme: Following the Light. This was a time of listening that we entered into together as a church family. We held gatherings in members' homes, and at the church building, too, all for the purpose of sharing stories about who Grace has been, and where God might be leading Grace in the future. We heard the story of the Magi (the mysterious figures who first came to see the newborn Christ) and remembered how they returned from their experience changed - they went home by another way. Their path was forever different, thanks to encountering Jesus. We are not returning to that approach again this year, but it does parallel the coming celebrations of history and visioning process for our ministry together.

We have diverse stories, all of us who have met Jesus through Grace. He began his life by transforming the lives of others, right from the start. I like to think that, today, we are among some of the more recent additions to that long list of people transformed by our encounters with Christ. Though each of us came by a different path, unique and important, we share the powerful common ground that we have met Jesus again at this one place called Grace. It has been happening for more than 100 years. I feel tremendously blessed to have been one of the many, and I have only experienced a handful of those years personally!

I wonder, with hope for the future and trust in God's promises to be there in it, what new way lies ahead for all of us.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

Pastor's Remarks:

In January, we find ourselves both in the middle of the year and the beginning of the year. We are in the midst of a bustling program year, with Sunday School, Young Youth & Youth, Choirs, and committees all rolling at full steam. We're also beginning a fresh calendar year, with new congregational goals, as well as the celebration of our 100th anniversary! It's a unique time of beginnings, endings, and continuings, and many good things are happening in all of these areas.

We ended 2022 with an excellent December. We welcomed people into our building for the Rock Hill Christmas Parade and Holiday Delights concert. We shared beautiful Holden Evening Prayer services, the Grace Christmas Festival, a variety of holiday gatherings, and gifts donated to local neighbors. We celebrated Christmas Eve with 3 wonderful services, surrounded by friends and loved ones as we welcomed the Christ Child. (Click [HERE](#) to see photos of several of these events).

We also concluded our Fall Stewardship Drive, with 96 commitments made toward 2023, for a total of \$484,334 committed to our ministry shared this coming year! This is \$119,487 more committed this year than last year, which builds our confidence in our ability to do all the ministry we feel God calling us to in 2023. Thank you to everyone who made a commitment, and who supports this ministry we do together!

As we begin 2023, there are many exciting things coming up. We will soon start our Mission & Vision work with our consultant, Pr. Nathan Swenson Reinhold, including creating a Strategic Plan for the next few years. We'll be focusing on making new connections in our community and across generations. We'll be celebrating our 100th year of ministry in this place (the 100th Anniversary team has some great ideas that we'll hear about soon!) and looking toward the next 100 years.

And of course, our ongoing ministry continues strong. We are continuing to grow in our relationships with our Outreach Partners and our Extending Church ministry is building new friendships. We have two baptisms this month, visible signs of God's love and the growth of faith. Our Youth will be able to go on their ski retreat for the first time in 3 years at the end of this month!

As things end, begin, and continue, God is working in and among us. This year is off to an excellent start, and I can't wait to see what great ministry we will do together in 2023.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel