May 19, 2025

Grace Family,

The peace of Christ be with you always. We begin with his peace because this letter contains some significant news, yet we share it in the persistent trust that the peace of Jesus abides with us wherever we go and whatever we face.

On Sunday, May 18, the congregation of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Largo, Florida voted to extend calls to us to serve as its next pastors. After much prayer, and trusting in the Holy Spirit's guidance, we have accepted those calls. The Congregation Council here at Grace has received word of our pending resignation, and our last Sunday with you in worship will be June 29, 2025.

We want to share with you, in brief summary, what led to this discernment.

In the fall of 2024, it became clear Grace's finances were going to change - this is normal in the life of any congregation. Giving capacity changes in the congregation as it changes in the lives of its members, and as members let us know about their changing situations, we knew some reduction in financial capacity was coming. We also knew that Grace was faithfully working towards the goal of meeting the updated SC Synod compensation guidelines for pastors. Combined with other unavoidable cost increases in the coming year, we knew a shortfall in 2025 was possible (if not likely).

We approached this challenge head on. We supported a successful fall stewardship drive to meet the needs known to us at that time. In this drive, Grace *exceeded* its intended goal of an additional $750 per week pledged for 2025, a phenomenal success! However, as 2024 drew to a close, we discovered additional changes were likely forthcoming. We knew further financial constraint might require adjustments in Grace's capacity to do ministry. With this in mind, we made the decision as pastors to update our mobility paperwork.

When financial shortfalls occur, pastoral salaries are the last thing that can be pulled back (a constitutional provision). This means the only ways to adjust for financial shortfalls are to generate additional revenue, overspend our plan, cut back on the ministries to which we've committed ourselves, or make other personnel changes. None of these options seemed faithful, given the significance of the new shortfall. So, we submitted our paperwork to the ELCA's mobility server at the beginning of this year, allowing for other synods to contact us if they thought we might be well-suited for a vacancy in their area. We simply wanted to take responsible steps ahead of possible changes on the horizon, trusting the Spirit to provide some clarity. Within days, we were contacted by the Mobility Coordinator of the Florida-Bahamas Synod, who wanted to set up a meeting with us, because she thought our paperwork suggested we would be a perfect fit for a congregation in Largo.

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Facing a difficult decision, we weighed our desires. Of course, we wanted to stay. We love you, the family of Grace, and we love serving alongside you here in this place. We also wanted to make sure our time as your pastors yielded growth in Grace's capacity for ministry, rather than limiting it. When we considered additional changes in the past several months - the departure of some significantly contributing households (departures due to transfer in some cases and death in others) - the growing possibility of a call somewhere else seemed more and more like the Spirit's timing. We think this course is closer to God's will for us all, so we are accepting the call to lead elsewhere at this time.

So, what comes next? Additional details will be sent out regarding how we hope to celebrate with you the ministry we've all shared on our final Sunday with Grace, June 29. More broadly though, the forthcoming time of pastoral vacancy has important opportunities for each member of Grace to step forward and continue supporting the ministry God has established in Rock Hill.

Grace is approximately halfway through its three-year strategic plan. Remember that when we created this plan, it was established according to what the members of this congregation were discerning together. No part of the strategic plan represents a pet project from either of its outgoing pastors - this is <u>your</u> plan, <u>your</u> work, <u>your</u> ministry. Times of pastoral vacancy always allow for introspection and exploring new ways forward in faith together. Still, as that discernment continues, there is already a clear path for Grace to continue walking as it prepares to call and welcome its next pastor.

In the coming weeks, we want you to know our doors remain open for conversation about these changes. We are committed to completing our calls to Grace in a way that allows everyone to share their thoughts and feelings, conversation that will equip you better for the future. We have been through a lot together. We made it through a pandemic, a 100th anniversary, burning a mortgage, a strategic planning process, years of campus ministry, expanding outreach, vibrant worship, the discernment of a new mission together, and so much more. We have shared in the joys and sorrows, disappointments, encouragements, and hopes of life together. You'll hear us say this a lot in the coming weeks, but we might as well start now:

Thank you, Grace Family. Thank you for being in ministry with us, for making us a part of who you are, and adding to who we are as pastors in Christ's church.

There is much more to say about our gratitude and our hope for the future, but this letter has plenty to digest as it is. We are here for you in the coming weeks. Please reach out to us, as we know the calendar is likely to fill up fast. We welcome each and every opportunity to share our deep love and appreciation for our time serving as your pastors as that time now draws to a close.

Peace in Christ,

Pr. Gregg Pastor Rachel

Pr. Gregg and Pr. Rachel