

August 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:

As we enter another fall season, I am grateful for its accompanying changes. We're seeing more students around Grace, getting a break in the heat, and fall programs are starting once more. I look forward to teaching my SALT class again and the chance to connect with some of our younger members as we wrestle with faith. When I look at the calendar, the next several months are full of activity, and a variety at that. Plus, when summer ends, much of the travel separating us slows down, too. With attendance on the rise, new opportunities for ministry together begin to emerge. There is a palpable sense of hope, thanks to all we might do and all we plan to do soon.

That said, we are also about halfway to the winter solstice, and I know for some of us, the coming lack of sunlight is a difficult experience. For those of us who struggle with [seasonal affective disorder](#), fall can feel more like a gateway to the depressing doldrums of winter. Perhaps I'm projecting. I can only guess whether it applies to anyone else, but there have been several years in my life when, given the time, I have allowed my fall to become overshadowed by the gloomy winter that is on the way. Taking hold of the opportunity to ruminate on the coming gray clouds and cold weather, I have missed some of the best of fall. I have squandered opportunities to delight in the changing colors of the leaves, the crisp first bluster of a different kind of breeze, and the peculiar benefits of all things 'pumpkin spice'.

The lesson I have come to learn is that, while I can neither prevent nor predict a difficult winter, I can certainly choose whether to waste a pleasant fall. The key to avoiding that problem – for me – is embracing more fully all that I can do during this season of return and harvest. I've learned I am more susceptible to melancholy when I have the time to be. This is no appeal to frenetic activity or working until one collapses from exhaustion. (I can just as easily miss the benefits of the present by being too busy as if I had been sedentary and somber.) Rather, this is an invitation to discern what time we might be wasting on worry. How many blessings of today are we allowing to slip through our hands while we busy ourselves, worrying about the struggles of tomorrow?

If any of this resonates with you – and, even if it doesn't – I have something you might want to try: church. Yes, it isn't much of a surprise that a pastor would suggest such a thing but hear me out on this. One of the dominant myths in life is the lie of solitude, that we're all on our own; we are not. We are created in community and meant to dwell therein. Some of us might do our best work on our own, but no one lives their life best that way. Here's a tip I share with all new members of Grace: studies in congregational dynamics agree that the most satisfied members of congregations are those who participate in worship AND at least one other activity. We are created for worship AND community. If one of those is something you do only occasionally, my prayer for you this fall is that you would add the other. If you haven't been in worship lately, come! And if you have, join one of our groups, too! Try out one of the Sunday School classes for a couple of months. Ask Walker how you could help care for Grace's Property. Join us at one of our Extending Church meetings and see how you can partner with us to bring community to those who can't join it for themselves. The options for connecting with community are abundant and, as a bonus, they bolster your psychological and spiritual health.

We will hear Jesus say the following in Sunday's Gospel story: 34He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34). Here he invites disciples to be willing to sacrifice some of their self-regard for a higher purpose. He continues, telling them those who lose their life for his sake end up saving it. What I offer you today is somewhat similar. Those who are willing to extend their life a bit more in the community formed in Jesus' name end up receiving far more than they might imagine. It's a great way to enter the fall and a great way to enter more fully into the life of Christian discipleship.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

Pastor's Remarks:

This past Sunday, Grace took part in God's Work. Our Hands. Sunday, an ELCA-wide day of service. I'm not sure whether this is the first time Grace has taken part in GWOH, but it's the first time since I've arrived, and it was great to participate! Our GWOH project involved our 3 Outreach Partners and a 4th internal activity.

For each of our Partners, we invited in-kind donations that would support their organizations. We filled an entire SUV with books, clothes, and shoes for Better Bound Bookstore! We had a sizeable number of cleaning and safety items given to Habitat. Some items came in for Children's Attention Home (we believe most of those donations were shipped straight to CAH, though, since their wish list was on Amazon). Already, we have heard thanks from our Partners and delight over these donations!

We did not stop at donations, though! Each Partner station also had a writing connection activity. For BBBS, we wrote letters to the teens working with this organization; we sent at least 5 personal notes to each of those teens! For CAH, we wrote affirmation cards – small cards with simple encouragements – and we wrote more than 50 of these cards for the youth to read when they need to be affirmed. We also wrote letters for specific situations, like “when you've had a hard day” or “when you need to make a choice”, for these youth to read when they need extra encouragement. For Habitat, we wrote thank-you cards to the core volunteers – those who keep the projects going week to week: we wrote notes to 12 construction volunteers and 31 ReStore volunteers. We are hopeful that all of these messages will bring smiles and warmed hearts!

Finally, we recognized the work that Grace members are doing here and beyond our walls. We know there are so many ways that our members are doing God's work out in the world, and everyone was invited to write some of their work on sticky notes to share. Here are some of the ways Grace is doing God's Work with Our Hands: crocheting prayer shawls and baptismal blankets, volunteering for the Heart2Heart Foundation, running the a/v during worship, volunteering at HOPE of Rock Hill, taking part in Extending Church, feeding ministries, serving as an adult leader with Youth activities, serving on the Race and Reconciliation committee, hugging friends, donating to HOPE, taking care of family pets, serving as part of the Bereavement committee, staffing VBS, helping in the classroom, serving as a worship assistant, doing chores at home, participating in Rock Hill PRIDE, serving on the board of South Carolina Lutheran Retreat Centers, worship bulletin production, volunteering with Back the Pack, gardening and sharing the harvest.

That's 22 ways Grace members are doing God's work, and we know that's just a fraction of the work being done! I was so glad to have GWOH as a day to take part in God's good work as a group, and to recognize that there are so many ways we are doing that work in our daily lives, on our own and with others. I hope you'll take some time, if you haven't already, and consider how you are doing God's work and what blessings that is bringing into your life. And then, maybe share that story with someone – it might just be the encouragement they need to take on some work of their own!

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel