

October 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:

Here's a fun fact about me: I graduated at the top of my class. It didn't happen that way in seminary, college, or even high school. But, back among all the other students of *Beep Beep Driving School*, I passed the final exams with the highest grade in the class. I even got a t-shirt to prove it. While many of the things I learned in driving school were helpful, one lesson strikes me as the most appropriate across a variety of endeavors: the eye scan technique.

While driving, the hands and feet move a bit, though not too much; the eyes, however, are a different story. While driving, the driver is supposed to be constantly scanning the field of vision for potential hazards. Looking straight ahead is fine for a few seconds, but insufficient to cover everything a driver needs to see. Relying on peripheral vision simply does not afford enough warning about trouble on the horizon. Likewise, even though the car is moving *forward*, it is vital that its driver know what is approaching from the rear. Therefore, the rear-view mirror becomes a part of the scan. To be a safe driver, one must shift focus from what is *immediate*, to what is *forthcoming*, to what is presently *behind*, and back again. This scanning approach for our focus is helpful in a variety of scenarios, including church leadership. I am excited because as we begin looking ahead to the coming year of ministry, we are just beginning to apply this scanning focus approach to who we are as a congregation.

Grace is nearly 100 years old, and we will be celebrating that longevity and faithful history throughout 2023. We are going to give thanks for the ways in which God has carried this congregation through a century of ministry, one in which there were times of plenty and want, success and struggle. Through it all, the faithful focus on Christ and what he means for the world has been the guide for God's people in this place. We will recommit in this coming year to that focus.

At the same time, we will also begin to scan ahead, discerning together who we are becoming as we *Move Forward in Grace*. We are not the same people today as we were in 1923. We have different passions, gifts, and perhaps even an evolving mission as a congregation today, and we need to be intentional about exploring what that looks like. It is the *mission* of the congregation – that part of God's total work that is ours to do – that will shape everything else as we continue in ministry together. Having a clearer sense of that mission not only helps us understand what we are called to do but helps us begin to imagine how we best approach the task (our *values*). Furthermore, a clearer mission means we have a clearer picture of what the world looks like when the mission is accomplished (our *vision*). All these things taken together help us know which way to turn as we continue.

There is a risk anytime congregations look backward – with focus firmly locked on where we've been, we are vulnerable to having no direction over where we are going. Scripture reminds us repeatedly that God is frequently (if not continually) calling God's people to something new. However, having no sense of our past would leave us without the important stories of how God has been active for us. That knowledge of what God has done in history is the root of our faith – we know God because of the particular stories of God's saving work in our past, with a grounded trust that empowers our ministry in the future.

So, *Moving Forward in Grace* together this coming year, we are going to be shifting focus deliberately. Sometimes we will be looking back at where God has been for us. Other times we will be looking ahead, imagining, and hearing together where the Holy Spirit is calling us to go. Still other times we will be dwelling in the joy of the present moment – rejoicing that Christ will be in our midst each day of a big, big year for Grace.

I look forward to everything we will see together.

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Gregg

Pastor's Remarks:

This month, I have seen so many moments of connection across our congregation! I'd like to share some of those stories with you as my October remarks.

If you're on Instagram, you may have seen the "I'm Welcome at WELCM and so are you!" videos that our campus ministry students have been sharing. The students talk about their experience and then they nominate another member of WELCM to share some of their story! Bella F shared, "I think it's so beautiful to find a faith community that fully accepts me and everyone else for who they are." Cat shared "I joined WELCM last year as a sophomore looking for a campus ministry that supported me as I explored new ideas concerning Christianity. In joining WELCM, I've found a community of friends that challenge me to think in new ways while continuing to respect and value me as I am."

This past Tuesday, we held our Blessing of the Animals. This was a first for me, and I loved it! We had about 15 pets join us in person, along with their humans. There were several people who brought friends, for fun and/or for pet support, and we were glad to have them with us, too. The animals and the people had a great time meeting and playing with one another.

Children's Word Time has started so well; both our children and our volunteers are jumping right in to this new part of worship. The children have shared their experiences with each other, helping each other better understand the scripture, and we have had multiple generations worshipping together in this new way thanks to our volunteers! We have some volunteers coming up who aren't parents of our participating children, and I'm looking forward to our kids discovering even more adults who care about their faith!

The Extending Church program is 3.5 months in, and members of the Extending Church group have been calling, sending cards, and visiting with other members of Grace. I have delighted in hearing stories of people's connections; discovering common interests, sharing life events, being encouraged to rejoin in-person worship. Many members have continued to be in touch with each other as they add more people to their connection lists!

I am so thankful to see the ways Grace is connecting right now. I'm sure you've seen other ways, too. Sharing these stories is itself a great way to connect, and I'd love to hear them if you'd like to share!

Peace in Christ,
Pr. Rachel