

Transforming for Mission Consultation
Grace Lutheran Church – Escondido, CA
January 20-22, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

It has been a privilege to work with Pastors Jim Young, Scott Gary, and Sam Gomez; staff; leaders; and members of Grace Lutheran Church. Our prayers continue that the Lord will use this report to inspire the congregation to expand the Kingdom of God in this place.

STRENGTHS:

1. Strong Biblical Foundation: Grace has a rich heritage standing solidly on strong Christian doctrine. People seem to highly value their Lutheran roots where Bible-based truths are the backbone of all teaching and preaching in the church and school. One person declared, "Decisions are never made based on tradition around here; they are based on the Word of God." There is a strong reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit in all facets of ministry and relationships. It is no wonder that members describe themselves as "passionate people" who are "alive" and joyful. They clearly see that "God is moving" in this place.

2. Excellent School/Preschool: Grace Lutheran Church sees its school and preschool as a vital arm of service and evangelism. The school and preschool enjoy a rich history of respect and excellence in the Escondido community, and many families have learned to know Jesus as their Savior and come into membership at Grace throughout the years. Parents have high praise for the school and preschool and for the skilled and caring staffs. The schools are academically excellent and developmentally appropriate. They offer services for students with special gifts and needs as well as services for counseling and care.

They dealt creatively and boldly with declining enrollment by integrating students and teachers from Light and Life Christian School, which was in need of a campus. This merger provided an additional 150 elementary school students and 75 preschool students as well as dedicated and qualified Christian teachers. Care was taken to ensure important unifying factors were in place, and the congregation accepted changing the name of the school to "Grace Christian School, A Ministry of Grace Lutheran Church", in order to provide a more user friendly welcome for the new families. Parents from Light and Life report a high degree of satisfaction with Grace, and efforts are on-going to integrate them more fully into the congregational life of the church. The new principal, Ben Elliott, has dealt successfully with the challenges facing him upon his arrival and is regarded as a faithful and effective leader in the school and church. The school provides for a variety of opportunities for extra-curricular activities, worship experiences, dramatic and musical productions, service to the congregation and community, and bonding with Christian friends. The church supports the school and preschool with its prayers and financial subsidy and by recognizing their contribution to the life and growth of the congregation.

3. High Value of Relationships: The people of Grace not only have relationships as a stated value and ministry strategy, but demonstrate the high value of relationships in their interaction with one another. We heard the reoccurring theme of their bond of love and their welcoming and caring community. We saw these relationships in action and also heard about ministries in which relationships were nurtured and enriched, such as Life Groups and the adult Bible study "New Horizons." Members mentioned repeatedly about a culture of trusting, empowering, and valuing people. There also seems to be a great desire to build relational bridges with Grace Latino Ministries and there is anticipation that Vicar Dave's role will facilitate taking that relationship deeper. We also heard from new school teachers that they have experienced true care and have been embraced by the community of Grace. This embodied and culturally engrained value will serve the

congregation well in both reaching new people and as support when they are challenged to move forward in ministry.

4. Gifted and Committed Staff and Lay Leaders: Grace is blessed with pastoral, school, and support staffs that are highly gifted and exude a joy and passion for the ministry. Staff members are seen as competent in multiple areas. The staff also benefits from a complementary mix of relational and organizational talents. They seem to work together in harmony with mutual respect for the unique contributions of others. Grace is also blessed with a powerhouse of lay leaders who understand ministry and are passionate about their faith. The "2016 Strategic Plan," which they produced, is a recent example of their gifts and competence. Staff and Lay leaders are committed in time and energy to see the ministry flourish.

5. Excellent Facility and Location: Grace is blessed with high quality facilities in an excellent location. The grounds are well kept and convey pride in having a quality presentation to the community, school students and families. They also provide ample space for members and ministry. Recent upgrades have given the campus a modern and ecological appeal. The spacious campus also creates a peaceful and restful environment with room to grow. Thoughtful expansion has given the campus a logical layout. Equity in the property gives a solid financial foundation to the ministry. Grace's proximity to the 15 freeway enables a regional ministry and accessibility both north and south along the 15 and to the west via the 78 freeway.

CONCERNS:

1. Weak Administrative Systems: Repeatedly in staff interviews, statements were made regarding lack of clarity about their job descriptions, infrequent annual performance reviews based on the job description and agreed upon goals for the year, the lines of accountability, clear follow-through, affirmation of work well done in a timely manner, and the importance of their job in the big picture of the congregation and school mission. Another area of the administrative system needing attention is that of communication. Apparently, decisions are made at the senior staff level, but those in support staff are not promptly informed of the decision and any role they play in the implementation. Volunteers reported they were recruited for specific tasks repeatedly but received infrequent or no acknowledgement for their efforts.

2. Development of Financial Resources: Individual members in attendance at the Leaders' Session on Saturday morning reported concern about the current financial condition of the congregation, and expressed uncertainty regarding the completeness of the reports. They were aware of the lower church attendance, and the anticipated decrease in offerings. Some expressed concern about a lack of emphasis on biblical stewardship training that could develop stronger giving patterns by active members. They also identified needs for a middle school permanent building and wondered how and when those needs would be addressed.

3. Lack of Vitality in Worship: Some congregational members and staff expressed concern that their worship experience at Grace lacks vitality and relevance. They appreciate the faithful proclamation of God's Word and the administration of the sacraments, but some feel they are not being "fed" by the sermons because they seem repetitive and lacking in practical applications to their daily lives. The music in both the traditional and contemporary services was described by some as lacking energy and enthusiasm. Worshippers would like to participate in more lively and "spirit-filled musical experiences. They believe especially the music at the contemporary services should be more up-to-date and appealing to young people. They would also like to see the services be more user-friendly for children and first-time visitors. Some like to worship with their families and would appreciate not having to compete with Children's Church, although Children's Church is very well-done and loved by their children. They believe that services should be planned with attention given to the

cadence and flow of the experience. Having more people participate in worship each week is a goal that would result in positive synergy and the opportunity to connect with other members and guests as fellow members of the Body of Christ.

4. Inability to Implement a Culture of Invitation: There is a tremendous feeling of loss as members consider the dwindling numbers of people in worship. It was noted by some members that it seems people of Grace are not embracing a culture of invitation. If the quote seen on campus "Building relationships for eternity one person at a time" were really lived out, the impact on growth could be significant. The opportunities for caring contact with school families abound. Relationships could be established among school families and with pastors and members as they attend school events. Also, it was suggested that as members live out their daily lives as God's people they could learn how to apply touches of Jesus' love to others in a natural way. The concern was raised, "Are we are really comfortable with "outsiders?" Besides the outreach development needs, there were also concerns by some members that the internal care systems of the congregation had atrophied.

5. Need for Clarifying Retirement Plan for Senior Pastor: Congregational members and staff expressed the need for understanding the retirement plan of the Senior Pastor. Even though this reality has been raised for a number of years, the ambivalence has generated confusion and some apathy. The Senior Pastor is well loved, has expressed his desire to retire, and recognizes the need for refreshing Senior Pastor leadership. The 2016 Strategic Plan and this consultation have raised issues of implementation. Will the current Senior Pastor be providing leadership over the years required to put these plans into reality, or will that leadership be provided by a new Senior Pastor?

PRESCRIPTIONS:

1. Executive Administrator: Under the leadership of the Church Council and in consultation with the Senior Pastor, a full time Executive Administrator will be hired. A comprehensive job description will be developed by June 1, 2017 and the position will be filled by September 1, 2017. The Administrator will make a full report to the congregation on the status of congregational systems by January 21, 2018. "Systems" to be addressed include, but are not limited to, employee job descriptions/performance evaluations/compensation/care/other HR issues; communication among staff/congregation/schools; facility maintenance and upgrades; budgeting/financial trajectories/income development/expense management; coordination of calendar/room usage/outside groups; development and maintenance of communication systems; staff development and any other systems that encourage and support all the ministries of Grace.

2. Discipleship in Spiritual Gifts and Stewardship: Under the leadership of the Board of Elders, and in consultation with the Senior Pastor, and using resources through the PSD Stewardship Committee, a congregation-wide discipleship emphasis in the areas of spiritual gifts and stewardship will be developed and implemented. This emphasis will include, but not be limited to, Bible classes, small groups, sermons, and printed/e-mail materials. This plan will be developed by July 1, 2017 and implemented by September 1, 2017.

3. Worship Renewal: Under the leadership of the Board of Elders and in consultation with the Senior Pastor, a Worship Renewal Team will be established. This team will research worship practices that fit Grace's values and are responsive to the worship needs of our culture (C2). They will also do creative experimentation with worship elements that seem like good matches with Grace Congregation. They will communicate any rationale for new worship elements and provide a feedback loop for the congregation. This team will be created by

May 1, 2017. The team will provide a summary of their recommendations to the Elders for implementation by May 1, 2018.

4. Relational In-reach and Outreach: Under the leadership of the Church Council and in consultation with the Senior Pastor, an AV team will be developed who will provide weekly 60-second video interviews at the beginning of the worship services. These videos will include a variety of generations and all aspects of Grace's ministry. The focal point of these interviews will be their experiences with "Building relationships for eternity one person at a time". Questions for these interviews could include, but are not limited to: "How were you 'invited' into the ministries of Grace?" or "How are you experiencing God at work in your Life?" or "What does it mean to me to be child of God?" This team will be developed by May 1, 2017. The 60-second interviews will be implemented by June 1, 2017.

5. Clarifying Senior Pastor Retirement Plan: Under the leadership of the Board of Elders, and in consultation with the Pastor Transition Team and the Senior pastor, a retirement plan including, but not limited to, the overall process with specific dates, and a transition plan following retirement, will be communicated to the congregation by June 1, 2017.

CONCLUSION:

We ask the congregation to vote on accepting or rejecting this report by March 5, 2017. If the report is accepted, the District commits to "walk alongside" Grace Lutheran Church for a minimum of one year to help in implementing the prescriptions. Grace Lutheran Church will agree to support their pastors in the coaching process as well as other resources identified for their encouragement and professional development.

The Transforming for Mission team recognizes the courage exhibited by the pastors, leaders, and members by engaging in this consultation. The team wishes to emphasize the serious nature of the challenges that the congregation faces now and in the future in this changing world. There is a call to respond, not with fear, but with continued prayer, innovation, resolve, and nourishment in God's Word. The same Lord who has been with you in your past will continue to be with you in your future.

We thank you for the opportunity to consult with you and it was a blessing to be the recipients of your personal sharing. Our prayers are with you as you consider these prescriptions and we hope to be working with you as you touch the people of your surrounding community with God's love.

- Rev. Ted Hartman – Team Leader
- Rev. Tim Eaton
- Marty Hartman
- Gary Norton
- Lizabeth Norton
- Carolyn Sims