



Grace Chapel | Executive Summary

by Gregg Caruso | September 2025

VitalChurch Mission Statement

At VitalChurch Ministry it is our mission to help churches thrive by cultivating clarity, purpose, and hope so that churches might display the redemptive love of Jesus for the glory of God and the good of others through five targeted outcomes:

- Gospel values embedded
- Gifted leaders empowered
- Effective governance established
- Compelling mission embraced
- Discipleship pathways engaged

We are distinctive because we are pastors with servant's hearts who've banded together to serve churches.

Definition of Terms

Vital and recurring terms in this report include:

Tenure Groups (number of years people have attended your church)

- **New Attenders:** those who have attended this church for 5 years or less
- **Intermediate Attenders:** those who have attended this church for 6-19 years
- **Pioneers:** those who have attended this church for 20 years or more

Generational Groups

- **Gen Zers:** people born between 1997-2008 (18-28 years of age)
- **Millennials:** people born between 1980-1996 (29-45 years of age)
- **Gen Xers:** people born between 1965-1979 (46-60 years of age)
- **Boomers:** people born between 1946-1964 (61-79 years of age)
- **Builders:** people born before 1946 (80 years of age or older)

Database Comparison

- For all comparisons, we will use similarly sized churches from our database. In your case, we will be comparing your church to churches with an average attendance of 400 or more.

Scope of the Report

A **mirror** and a **map** will be provided in this report. A **mirror**, in that it will reflect back to you what 894 of you said in the online survey, (which produced 147 pages of data). Additionally, the 25-member VitalChurch Discernment Team was able to meet with 203 people in input sessions, including Pastor Emeritus Bryan Wilkerson and former Pastor Joshua Clough. With a current average adult attendance of 1,500 in Sunday morning services, we have a response rate of 60%,¹ which is considered statistically strong and sufficient for our team to interpret the data in order to provide an accurate **mirror** of the current reality at GRACE—to develop a **map** forward for God’s preferred future.

After the survey data was analyzed and the input sessions were completed, our Discernment Team held a three-hour online meeting to pray and synthesize the survey data with what we heard in the input sessions to develop this report.

¹ A 60% participation rate in an online survey is generally considered strong and sufficient to interpret the data, especially when compared to typical online survey response rates, which average between 33% and 44%.

Strengths to Build On

1. You have a legacy of God's faithfulness.

One of the most often repeated commands of God throughout his Scripture is "Remember." It is in remembering God's faithfulness in the past that we build trust in his goodness in the present.

In 1956, this church began in a rented facility with about 75 people attending.

From that time, GRACE has experienced a 70-year story of God's steadfast faithfulness: in times of growth, in times of change, in times of uncertainty, in times of anticipation, God has been faithful. The concluding words of Psalm 100 could serve as the collective praise of GRACE as you reflect on your history:

*For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

The collective experience of God's goodness in and through this congregation **is** your greatest strength and is the primary foundation upon which you should build.

Additional Strengths:

2. You are a multi-generational church.

Though the Boomers represent the largest generational group, GRACE is a multi-generational church. This is increasingly the case with New Attenders. For example, while Millennials represent 18% of the overall population, they represent 34% of New Attenders.

Generational Pattern of New Attenders					
Zers	Mill	Xers	Bmer	Build	Totals
14	84	77	66	3	244
6%	34%	32%	27%	1%	100%

3. You value the Word of God and Christ-centeredness.

GRACE is dedicated to Christ-centeredness and values the Word of God. 49% of the congregation stated that sermons/Bible teaching keeps them coming and 65% stated that being spiritual fed is what they value most. As one congregant stated, in a sentiment often repeated, "GRACE stays true to the word, and to biblical preaching."

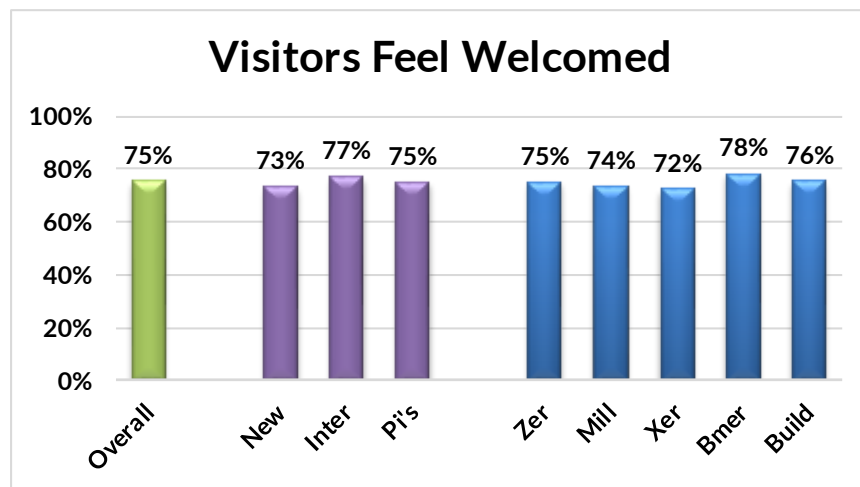
What do you value most?	Overall	New	Inter	Pi's	Zer	Mill	Xer	Bmer	Build
Being spiritually fed	65%	55%	66%	72%	36%	46%	62%	76%	76%
Finding a sense of family/fellowship	21%	28%	21%	16%	54%	31%	20%	16%	14%
Having my family's needs met	7%	11%	6%	4%	7%	16%	9%	2%	2%
Finding a place of service	7%	6%	7%	8%	4%	7%	9%	6%	8%

30-50% Over 50%

4. You participate in the mission of God.

Author Christopher Wright states in his book *The Mission of God*, "It is not so much that God has a mission for his church in the world, but that God has a church for his mission in the world." As a people, GRACE values joining God in his mission in the world to reach people with the hope and the help of the gospel, and you are willing to be activated into a lived-out faith!

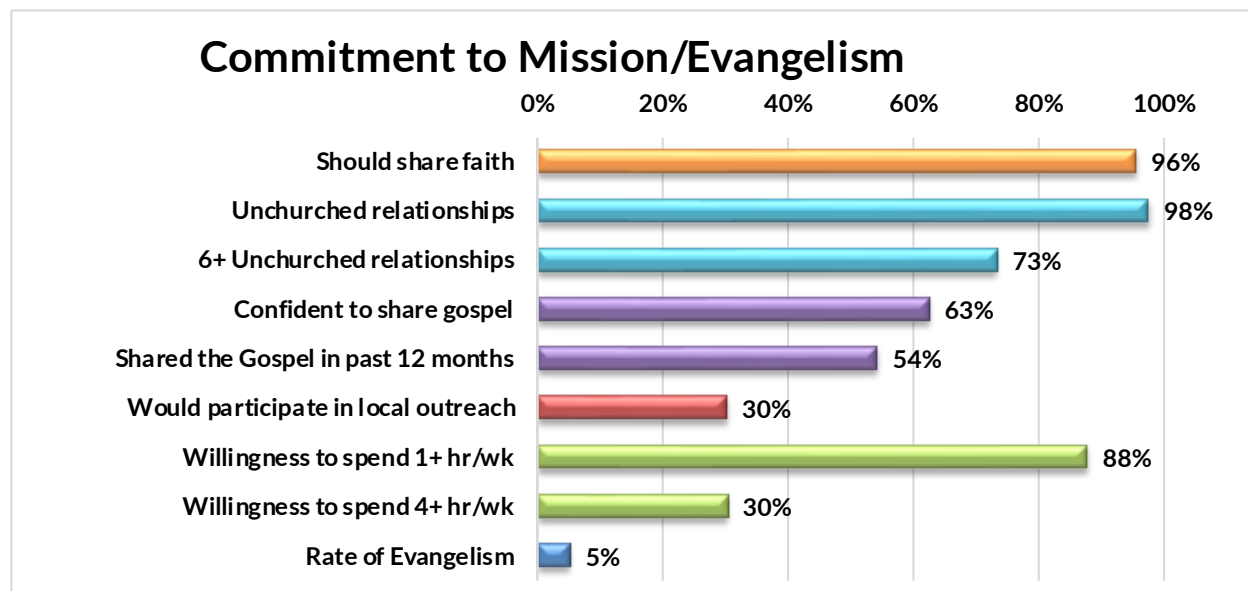
- In terms of welcoming new people into GRACE, 75% of people believe visitors will feel welcomed into the life of the church (9% above our database average).



- Environments that centered on welcoming people into GRACE (Sunday Greeters, Nursery, Hospitality, Teach Team, Welcome team, Elementary) were rated highest (79% or higher).
- And serving others outside of the church (Global Missions 78%, Care Ministries 75%) were also highly rated in the ministry assessment.

Assessed Ministry	Rating	Participants Rating
Sunday Greeters/Ushers	82%	
Nursery (worship services)	81%	79%
Hospitality/Café	81%	
Welcome Team	81%	
Tech Team (Audio/Visual)	81%	
Elementary (Grades K-5, worship services)	79%	79%
Global Missions	78%	76%
Care Ministries (AA, Food Bank, Stephen Ministry, etc.)	75%	
Facilities/Church Services Team	75%	
Women's Ministry	73%	82%
Worship Music Ministry (worship services)	72%	77%
Student Ministry (Grades 6-12)	72%	68%
Small Groups (Life Groups)	71%	77%
Sunday Worship Services (overall experience)	71%	73%

- Additionally, there is a high commitment to mission/evangelism. 96% say Christians should share their faith and 98% have non-Christian friends.
- In terms of mobilizing people for ministry, 88% are willing to volunteer an hour or more a week supporting mission of the church and **30% are willing to spend 4 or more hours per week volunteering.**



Also of note, 71% of the congregation values and/or is open to change. GRACE is willing to faithfully follow Jesus, create environments that invite people in, and serve others outside of the church—even as it means change must happen.

GRACE, with a 76-year history of seeing God's faithfulness, is a multi-generational, multi-site community that values being Christ-centered and is rooted in the Word of God.

Further, the congregation is willing to put God's word into action to join the mission of God by serving others, sharing their faith, and inviting people into welcoming ministry environments. All of these should be celebrated and built upon in the season ahead.

And because of those strengths, and the value you place on joining God in his mission in the world, it makes sense to look at anything that might hinder your ability to do so—for God's glory and the good of the people he has given you to love. Next, we will examine other aspects of your current reality.

Introduction

As noted previously, Jesus, through the Apostle John, addresses seven churches in Revelation 2-3. Theologians emphasize that, while there are specific instructions given to each of the seven congregations, these messages also contain universal truths and warnings applicable to all churches throughout all generations.²

The instructions to each of the seven churches follow a similar pattern and are delivered in the words of Jesus. These remarks all begin with a unique description of Jesus Christ that is drawn from the imagery in Revelation 1, where John encounters the risen Christ³ and "*fell at his feet like a dead man*" (Rev 1:17).

From this repeated pattern we can deduce that the ultimate objective for each of the seven churches, as well as for you GRACE, is a fresh encounter with the risen Christ that will result in a renewed and hopefully intense season of humility, worship, prayer, and repentance as needed. We are reminded of Martyn Lloyd-Jones' commentary on the Sermon on the Mount where he advises us to keep showing up at Matthew 5:3, which says, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"⁴

² Seven is a very meaningful number to John. There are seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, etc. This repetition emphasizes the comprehensive and divinely ordained nature of all the events described in Revelation. Seven is based on the 7-day Sabbath cycle in the OT, reflecting the 7-day creation week culminating in Sabbath rest. We see this in Revelation, which culminates in God's ultimate rest and the fulfillment of his plan for humankind.

³ This is even more impactful as we consider that John was likely Jesus' best friend during his earthly ministry.

⁴ Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Eerdmans; 1 v. ed edition 1997:17.

Hindering Factors



With that introduction we will now move on to a more specific and data-driven rationale of what has been hindering your vitality here at GRACE. While you have a plethora of strengths to celebrate and build on, this report will reveal some very real and current threats that should not be ignored. VitalChurch would applaud the wisdom and humility it took to seek outside input into your current situation and what would best prepare you to conduct a search for the next Senior Pastor of GRACE.

In our reports we often use the language of **Taproot** and **Branch Root Issues** to identify the current challenges to your church's vitality. We use this language because it is our intent to identify systemic issues as opposed to surface issues.

The VitalChurch Discernment Team—through analyzing the data, conducting input sessions, prayer, and with decades of experience—sees a **two-pronged taproot issue** as the *primary hindering factor* at this time. This issue will need to be owned and addressed with humility, confession, repentance, prayer, planning, and patience—even as you take the time to celebrate and build on your many strengths.

Taproot Issue: *The data and input sessions indicate that GRACE Chapel has drifted toward a state of institutionalization including an unhealthy focus and dependence on the Senior Pastor as the primary driving force in expansion. This has resulted in several key areas of church life that require clarity.*

Churches never intend to drift, yet we see it happening in almost every New Testament church. Drift usually occurs over time through a series of micro-decisions that eventually move a church away from its early enthusiastic and mission-oriented launch and growth phases. However, like the Laodicean Church (Rev 3:14-22), our Lord is faithful to provide a merciful and rectifying promise when he states:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.” (Rev 3:20)

Taproot Rationale = The Mirror

What Is Institutionalization?

Every organization over twenty years old is subject to encroaching *institutionalization*. Institutionalization in a church occurs when organizational maintenance, traditions, personal preferences, and outdated systems begin to take precedence over the church's original mission—which often leads to congregational complacency. The revolutionary message of Jesus requires ongoing revolutionary strategies regarding how churches stay impassioned about knowing and growing in Christ, as well as engaging with unchurched and de-churched people.

"You don't have to advertise a fire!"

-Leonard Ravenhill⁵

There are six key areas where institutionalization is encroaching at GRACE, and we will examine each one in this section of the report.

1. Demographics
2. Priority of Evangelism
3. Concerning Scores in Spiritual Growth and Discipleship
4. Perceived Lack of Openness to Change
5. Disappointment with the Quality of Fellowship
6. Indicators of a Senior Pastor Focus

⁵ British evangelist, revivalist, and author (1907-1994), who focused on the subjects of prayer and revival. He is best known for challenging Western evangelicalism to compare itself to the early Christian Church as chronicled in the book of Acts.

1. Demographics

• Average Age

The average age of the survey respondents is 57 years. In America about 4,000 churches close a year and one of the principal conditions is called “aging out.” The first warning sign of aging out is when the average age of adults in the church passes 55 years.



Demographics 1) Average Age



The average age of survey respondents is 57 years.

Those over the age of 60 make up almost half (48%) of the survey respondents.

Average Age	
Overall	57
Lexington	58
Wilmington	54
Watertown	56
Foxboro	53
Online	65

• Tenure Analysis



Demographics 1a) Tenure Analysis



❖ **New Attenders** have attended 0-5 years

❖ **Intermediates** have attended 6-19 years

❖ **Pioneers** have attended 20+ years

Interpretive Guidelines

New Attenders

- 40% plus generally indicates a growing church
- Should be the largest of the three groups
- 30-39% usually indicates a plateaued church
- Less than 30% usually indicates a declining church

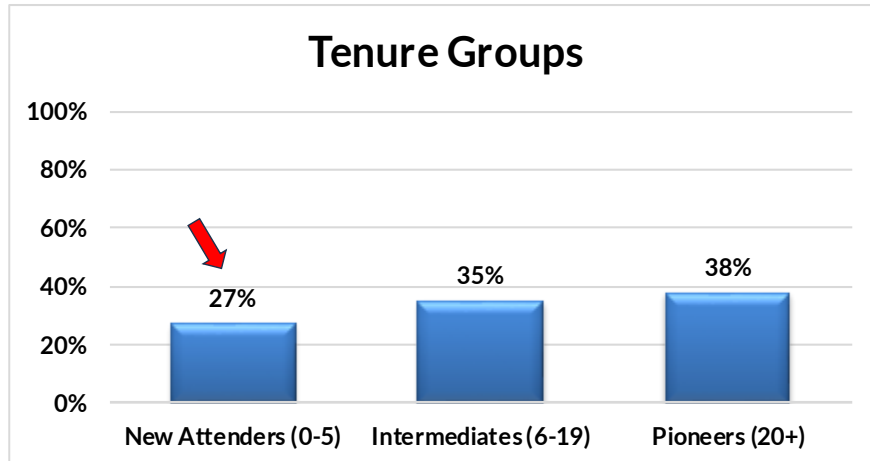
Intermediate Attenders

- Ideal--smaller than New Attenders but larger than the Pioneer Group
- A low figure usually indicates a pattern of poor assimilation or history of strife especially if the smallest of the 3 groups

Pioneer Group

- Ideal--less than 25% and smallest of the three groups
- Probable serious pathology if 40% or more

GRACE Tenure Groups:

**Demographics 1b) Tenure Analysis**

With only 27% **New Attenders**, GRACE is likely slowly declining. With 35% **Intermediates**, data suggest that people who began attending 6-19 years ago have tended to stay. With 38% **Pioneers**, and that being the largest group of the three, there is evidence of institutionalization, with concerning levels of Pioneer influence and control.

New Attender Rates	
Overall	27%
Lexington	24%
Wilmington	32%
Watertown	40%
Foxboro	33%
Online	32%

Based on the data from the individual campuses it appears that Watertown is the only campus that is growing—and Lexington appears to be declining at the fastest rate. (We did hear of some people opting for one of the smaller campuses in search of deeper connections, being closer to home, and having more serving opportunities.)

2. Priority of Evangelism

When asked the question, “Were you a Christian when you first attended this church or its activities?” A full 93% of survey respondents answered Yes.

Yes	807	90%
No	40	4%
New	30	3%
Not Sure	17	2%

By combining the data from several questions, we can identify how many survey respondents began attending GRACE prior to making their faith commitment.

> Priority of Evangelism



	All	New	Inter	Pi's	Zer	Mill	Xer	Bmer	Build
Number who were not Christians when they came	57	11	17	29	5	3	15	30	4
Still Seeking	5	3	1	1	1	0	2	2	0
Number currently attending who came with their parents and have since become Christians	7	0	1	6	2	1	2	2	0
Net conversions from the world	45	8	15	22	2	2	11	26	4
Rate of Evangelism	5%	3%	5%	7%					



Overall, the Rate of Evangelism is 5% and only 3% over the last five years.

What the data reveals is that with each passing decade evangelism has become less of a priority. **This is one of the most significant indicators of encroaching institutionalization.**

An effective conversion ratio for evangelistic churches would be 20:1 (5%+) per year.⁶

Furthermore, only 63% of the survey respondents are confident to share the gospel, only 54% have shared the gospel in the last 12 months, and only 30% are willing to participate in outreach. This is an indication of a loss of passion for lost and broken people as well as conclusive evidence of institutionalization.

⁶ According to a 2025 Lifeway Research study, the mean rate of evangelism for Evangelical churches in the U.S. is 13% each year. About 30% of churches report only 0–4%, 32% see 5–9%, 29% have 10–24%, and just 8% achieve 25% annually.

Verbatim Responses:

- “I want to avoid being too 'inward focused'. Are we more focused on ourselves than bringing people in or bringing the gospel out?”
- “I would like to see even more community outreach--I think this is happening, but I believe there are ways we can bring more of the congregation into this work with our community partners.”
- ACHIEVE: “continued spiritual growth and advancing the Gospel to the unchurched”
- “I would like to see a community focused on serving others and spreading the gospel.”
- “I would like to see us being involved in the community and casting more vision around living our mission out in the world”
- ACHIEVE: “outward focus on community needs, reaching out to the unchurched.”

Consider this observation from Tim Keller:

The Christian church in the West faces the first post-Christian, deeply secular culture in history. It has not yet developed a way to do evangelism with the secular and the ‘nones’ that really gains traction and sees many people regularly coming to faith.⁷

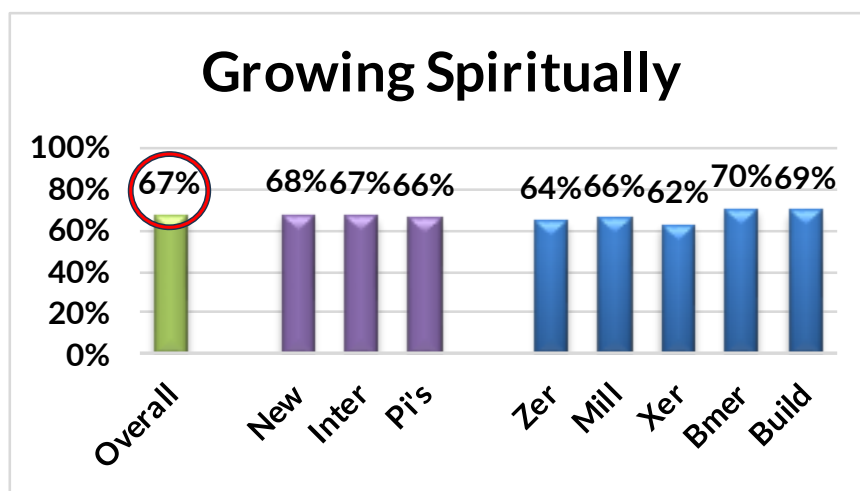
⁷ Keller, *The Decline and Renewal of the American Church*, 2021-2022: 77.

3. Concerning Scores in Spiritual Growth and Discipleship Awareness

95% of survey participants have been Christians for more than 10 years, and 89% have been Christians for more than 20 years. Churches that tend to be composed of well-churched believers can find it difficult to see members and attenders commit to traveling on a well-defined discipleship pathway. That may be why a score of only 67% across all Tenure and Generational groups say they are growing spiritually at GRACE. (This means 33% say they are not currently growing spiritually.)



Low Scores in Spiritual Growth



The VitalChurch database average on this question is 74%.

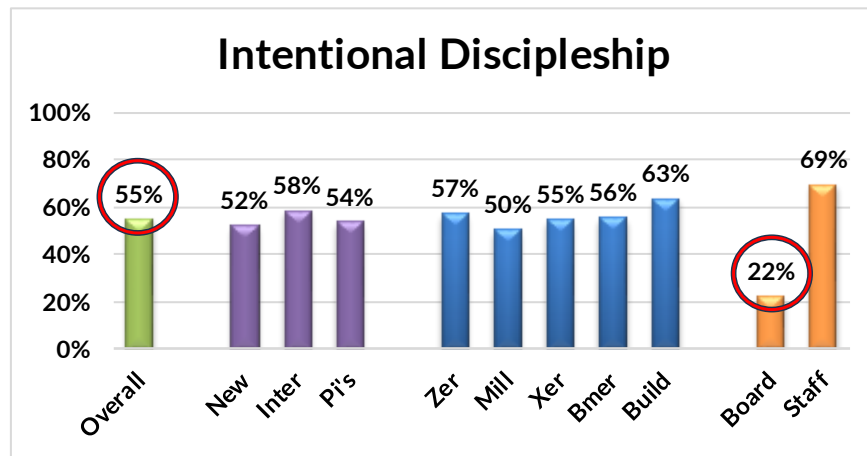
On the chart on the following page, only 55% of survey respondents think there is intentional discipleship happening at GRACE. And it is notable that only 22% of the Elders think intentional discipleship is happening.

Dallas Willard defines *discipleship* as the process of becoming like Jesus Christ from the inside out, learning to live life in the kingdom of God, and being transformed by God's grace. A modern term for discipleship is "spiritual formation," which indicates a combination of head and heart transformation.

Churches that have effective evangelism are often very organized with well-developed Discipleship/Spiritual Formation Pathways.



Low Scores in Discipleship Awareness



Pastor Tim is working diligently to get GRACE excited about spiritual growth and intentional discipleship.

4. A Perceived Lack of Openness to Change

Overall, survey respondents felt that GRACE is reasonably open to change (Congregation: 71%, Board: 67%, and Staff: 56%). However, respondents were mixed when asked if the Elders were open to change, as shown here:



Elders Open to Change?



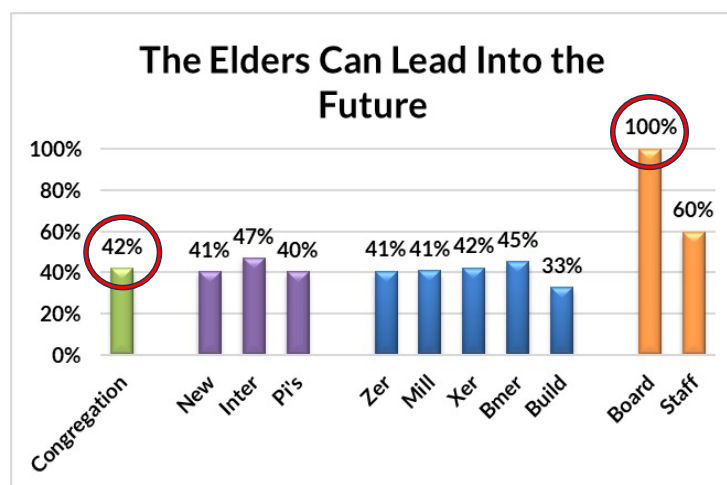
		Congregation	Board	Staff
	Progressive Total	49%	100%	38%
Radicals	Eager to try a variety of new things	11%	33%	7%
Progressives	Likely to ask if the change will bring new ministry opportunities that should not be missed	38%	67%	31%
Conservatives	Likely to be concerned how the change will affect the good things the church currently enjoys	36%	0%	43%
Traditionalists	Likely to ask, "Is this change necessary?"	15%	0%	19%
	Conservative Total	51%	0%	63%

While the Board (of Elders) view themselves as very open to change (100% Progressive), the Congregation views the Elders as more Conservative (51%), by a margin of almost two to one.

Additionally, overall confidence in the Elders is low (42%), which can be seen in the graph below. Again, any score less than 70% is cause for concern.

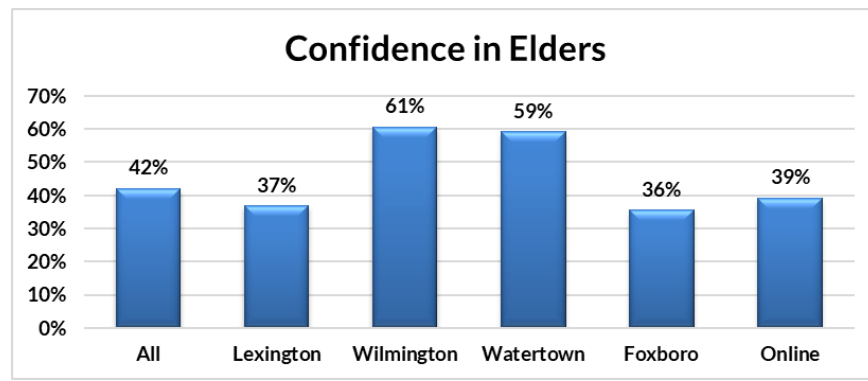


Elders Lead Into the Future?



With the Elders indicating a strong confidence to lead into the future (100%), the Congregation has a different view. This demonstrates a lack of awareness, attentiveness, and communication on the part of the Elders, which can certainly inhibit followership related to changes proposed by the Elders in this transition season. (It should be noted that the lower confidence level could, in part, be the result of disappointment related to the recent short-term pastorate—with congregants inadvertently placing the blame on the Elders. VitalChurch has experienced the Elders as caring deeply about the past, the present, and the future of GRACE.)

The confidence in the Elders is varied across the campuses:



*Staff and Elders are **not** included in these percentages.*

The Wilmington and Watertown survey participants have much higher confidence in leadership (yet still well below 70%). Nevertheless, the Elders have work to do in earning back the confidence of the GRACE congregation.

5. Disappointment with the Quality of Fellowship

There were two online survey questions related to *Quality of Fellowship*:

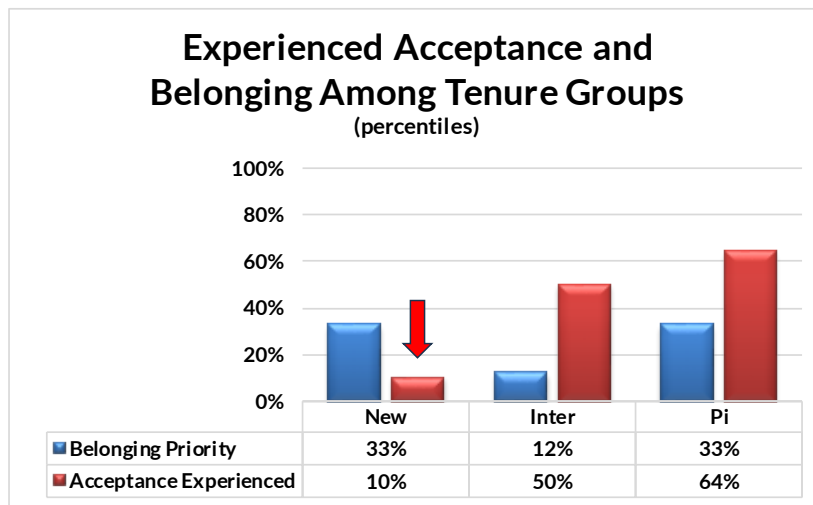
- 1) How important is it for you to find acceptance and belonging at GRACE? And,
- 2) How much are you experiencing acceptance and belonging at GRACE?

(The scores given are percentiles derived from comparison to other large churches in the VitalChurch Ministry database.)

On the chart on the following page, we see the New Attenders (0-5 yrs) are in the “Low Normal” range in the priority of seeking acceptance and belonging (33%) and are experiencing quality of fellowship in the “Low” range (10%). This would seem to indicate that New Attenders are not experiencing acceptance and belonging at the level they desire. They are telling you that they’re not being actively sponsored into the life of your church.



Disappointment w/ Quality of Fellowship



What we see is that the New Attenders have hopes and expectations for acceptance and belonging (33%) more than the Intermediates (12%) and equal to the Pioneers (33%) yet there is a 23%ile difference in what the New Attenders are experiencing.

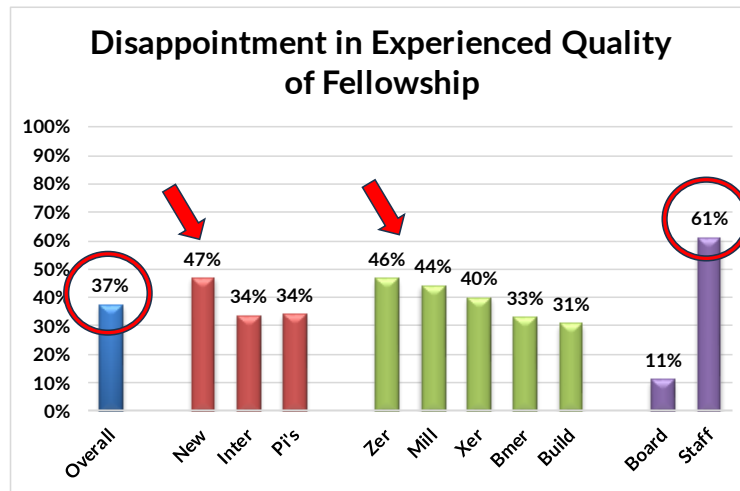
It should be noted that all three groups are in the “Low” range of prioritizing finding acceptance and belonging at GRACE. The Intermediates are experiencing quality of fellowship in the “Normal” range, and the Pioneers are experiencing quality of fellowship in the “High Normal” range. Their experience of acceptance and belonging is higher because they have been around for 6+ years, and they now feel their acceptance and belonging needs are being met. However, their desired acceptance and belonging is still not a highly-motivating priority.

Interrelatedness is also a factor. Interrelatedness measures relatives attending GRACE who live in different households and is a factor that affects how people experience fellowship in the church. GRACE has a 22% rate of interrelatedness. When the percentage is 20% or more, a church’s ability to effectively incorporate new people tends to be compromised—primarily because at the conclusion of a service, related people tend to bunch-up instead of greeting and being available to help sponsor New Attenders into the life of the church.

The chart below measures the number of people who rated their “experienced” quality of fellowship as being lower than the level that they said they wanted (i.e., their “experienced” score being less than their “prioritized” score).



Disappointment w/ Quality of Fellowship



Notice that the rates of disappointment among congregants are highest among the New Attenders and younger generations (Gen Zers and Millennials), which makes these groups more susceptible to moving on from GRACE if the disappointment is not remedied.

The 61% of Staff who are also dealing with significant disappointment with their experienced quality of fellowship is an indication of some ongoing disunity, discontent, and feelings of disconnection that will need to be addressed.

Representative Verbatim Response:

- "Need to see church move from simply friendliness to actually helping people develop friendships."

Note: We at VitalChurch Ministry have been told that Pastor Dominick is doing an excellent job of rebuilding the Connections Ministry. And it should also be noted that survey respondents who belong to small groups enjoy a much higher quality of fellowship (82%ile!).

6. Indicators of a Senior Pastor Focus

Like at most churches, the Senior Pastor is often the visible face of the church and GRACE has experienced exceptional preaching for the past three decades, which has been a primary draw for most of the current congregants. Certainly, the intent of the previous two Senior Pastors has not been for GRACE to be Senior-Pastor focused. Nevertheless, the data indicate that GRACE has become a pastor-focused church, with the nuanced expectation that a great sermon as part of a great service will be the primary driver of expansion.

The degree that this is true is shown by what each campus reports regarding what keeps them coming to GRACE:



Indicators of a Senior Pastor Focus



Keeps You Coming	Sermons	Fellowship
Overall	49%	25%
Lexington	50%	22%
Wilmington	48%	30%
Watertown	48%	27%
Foxboro	33%	40%
Online	68%	16%

In a vital church, the percentage of what keeps congregants coming between sermons and fellowship would be about equal (50:50). Overall, as well as at almost every campus, Sermons keep people coming in most cases by a 2 to 1 (or more) ratio. Foxboro would be the exception, with their desire for Fellowship outpacing a congregational focus on the sermon.

When this dataset is combined with the previous data related to Acceptance and Belonging (above)—which indicates that GRACE members and attenders are primarily in the “Low” range regarding their priority of seeking acceptance and belonging—it becomes clear that the sermons have become the main driver of expansion at GRACE.

Conclusion

When all six datasets are considered, they reflect as a Mirror a level of plateaued spirituality, convenience, and routine for many members and attenders—which affirm the Taproot Issue that GRACE has been drifting toward a state of institutionalization. There has been a slow replacing of the organic, interconnected life of the church with practices and routines that are insufficient to foster evangelistic zeal or the deep, authentic community that both believers and non-believers seek—and that Scripture envisions.

Areas Requiring Further Clarity

We will now identify four key areas that need further clarity. Our recommendations that directly address these key areas will be included, with the objective being to disrupt institutionalization and boost church-wide vitality. We call this a **MAP** forward towards God's preferred future for Grace Chapel.

"Clarity isn't everything, but it changes everything."

-Will Mancini

The four key areas of clarity needed at GRACE are:

1. Leadership CLARITY
 - a. Staff Care and Development CLARITY
 - b. Elder Role CLARITY
2. Mission & Vision CLARITY
3. Communication CLARITY
4. Campus Strategy CLARITY

1. Leadership CLARITY

While leadership at GRACE is not at a crisis level, there are several areas related to leadership that will need CLARITY during this transition season. As mentioned above the overall confidence in the Elders is low (42%). It is also important to note that almost half (48%) of the survey respondents (about 400 people!) would welcome leadership training—which is a very encouraging sign!⁸



Therefore...

⁸ While not addressed specifically in this report, only 30% of the survey respondents said the church and its leaders are good at resolving conflict. This will necessitate consistent instruction on biblical conflict resolution.

Recommendation 1: Develop a Leadership Pipeline.

It's been said that leaders either lead or they leave. Having a leadership development pipeline running beneath the surface at all campuses will train emerging leaders to focus on the integration of spirituality and leadership. A leadership pipeline will also help the current leaders think and plan proactively about homegrown leaders for all types of leadership roles. Without a leadership pipeline, church leaders often approach leadership deployment from a reactive posture rather than a proactive one.

Churches that consistently produce leaders have a) a strong conviction to develop leaders, b) a healthy culture for leadership development, and c) strategic constructs to systematically and intentionally form leaders. All three are essential for leaders to be developed through the ministry of a local church.⁹ A leadership pipeline can also cultivate gospel-centered leaders for the marketplace—men and women who draw their inspiration, motivation, and servant leadership aptitude from their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Knowing what competencies you are seeking to cultivate will also help you develop resources to counter GRACE's low survey scores in spiritual growth, discipleship, and the disappointment with the quality of fellowship. While the multiplicity of resources listed throughout the church website along with the Discipleship Planning Tool are excellent first steps, there is a need for a well-defined and relationally-supportive discipleship pathway. In her book *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, Ruth Haley Barton describes the journey that moves Jesus' followers from *chaos* to *calling* to *formation*, and ultimately, to *flourishing*.

Therefore, consider these starter resources to read and apply:

- *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* by Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck
- *The Multiplication Effect: Building a Leadership Pipeline that Solves Your Leadership Shortage* by Mac Lake
- *The Making of a Leader* by Bobby Clinton (and explore the resources at bobbyclinton.com)
- *Leadership is an Art* by Max De Pree (and explore the resources at depree.org)
- *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* by Pete Scazzero (and explore the resources at emotionallyhealthy.org)
- *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* by Ruth Haley Barton
- Consider a partnership with Redeemer City to City's Faith and Work Initiative.

⁹ Adapted from Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development*, B&H Publishing 2024: 14-15.

"We are called to stand in for God here in the world, exercising stewardship over the rest of creation in his place as his vicereagents. We share in doing the things that God has done in creation—bringing order out of chaos, creatively building a civilization out of the material of physical and human nature, caring for all that God has made. This is a major part of what we were created to be. Work has dignity because it is something that God does and because we do it in God's place, as his representatives."

-Tim Keller

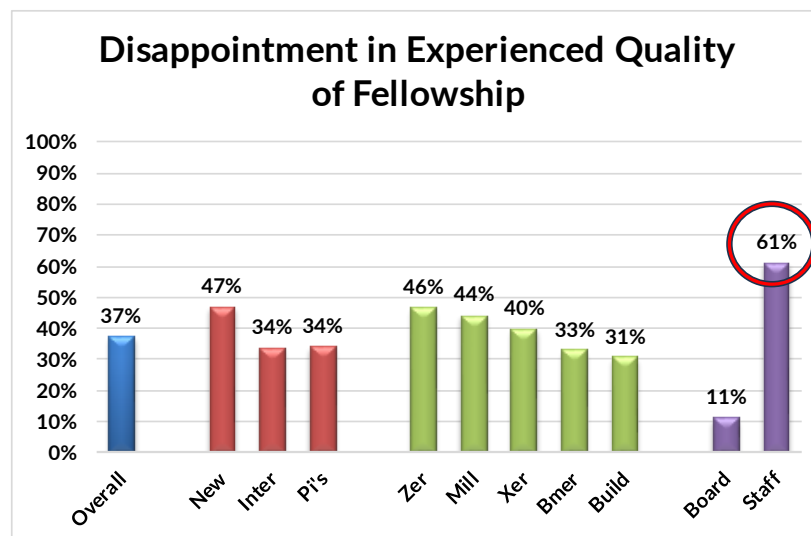
a. Staff Care and Development CLARITY

While most staff report cordial relationships with the elders who have been assigned to be a listening ear and encouragement to them, as well as their immediate supervisors, it is notable that there doesn't seem to be sufficient focus on or practice of intentional staff development (i.e., ongoing spiritual formation and lifelong learning related to their gift-mix and calling).

As noted previously, among all tenure and generational groups, the Staff are experiencing disappointment in their experienced quality of fellowship the most at 61%. That's three out of five staff members who seem to be struggling with various levels of disappointment.



1a. Staff Care & Development Clarity



Therefore...

Recommendation 2: Initiate Next-Level Staff Care and Development.

Recognizing and investing in their pivotal roles will yield significant benefits including fostering an environment where the staff feels, seen, heard, valued, supported, appreciated, and developed.

Verbatim Response: One staff member stated, “they [the leaders] don’t know me” and that “positivity seems to be valued above all else” and that (almost) any negativity gets “beat down.”

VitalChurch recognizes that some of the following may already be happening:

- Schedule regular staff training workshops to help staff migrate from functioning primarily as ministers to functioning primarily as team builders and equippers (Eph. 4:12).
- Update role descriptions as needed and, with input from their supervisor, determine professional goals/objectives for each calendar (fiscal?) year.
- In addition to consistent developmental performance reviews, schedule and conduct periodic mid-career assessments to determine both the needs and aspirations of each staff member and consider professional development options.
- Develop initiatives that prioritize spiritual, emotional, and mental health well-being. Schedule wellness workshops, prayer and planning retreats, and make counseling services available as needed.
- Foster an environment where staff feel safe sharing their joys, concerns, and suggestions. Regular check-ins and feedback loops will help to create an enthusiastic, honest, and supportive atmosphere.
- Create communication feedback loops between Executive Team, the Central Ministry Team and the Staff Teams. A structured, consistent process will facilitate two-way information flow, foster trust and unity, which will promote continual organizational improvement.
- Determine a timeframe wherein each staff member will be offered a planned sabbatical.
- Schedule consistent occasions to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of staff members, reinforcing their value and contributions to the larger church community.

Also, from all that we have seen and heard in input sessions, it appears that Pastor MacDonald’s role is quite overwhelming. It may be wise to consider staffing a second Executive (or Administrative) Pastor, allowing Pastor MacDonald to focus on strategic planning, staff development and care, and ensuring the church's vision is implemented effectively. The Administrative Pastor would be focused on managing the church's day-to-day operations, including finances, facilities, and administrative staff.

b. Elder Role CLARITY

There is a perception that the elder team has operated primarily as a corporate board. While corporate oversight is essential for every organization, there is the opinion that, historically, the elders have tended to defer instead of taking a more active role in the spiritual oversight and leadership at GRACE.

Verbatim Responses:

- “The Board of Elders is supposed to be the spiritual leaders along with the senior pastor.”
- “The Elders must be the leaders with the pastor, not the Executive pastor or Director of HR, as is the case too often. We primarily are a church, not a business.”

Therefore...

Recommendation 3: Update Your Governance Structure.

This will be especially helpful before you conduct a lead pastor search. Scripture has a lot to say about organization and governance. Governance work is God’s work. God governs (see Psalm 22:28; 47:8; 99:1f; 115:3). God invites and instructs his people and their leaders to do the same (see Genesis 1:26-28; Exodus 3:10-12, 1 Tim 3:1). Governance is a spiritual discernment and strategic process that seeks the mind of Christ for the whole church. Good governance leads God’s people towards God’s purposes for God’s glory and their good.

VitalChurch recommends a policy-based governance model,¹⁰ which combines high freedom with high accountability for the Senior Pastor, and releases the elders to focus on **doctrine**, **direction** (vision), and (church) **discipline** (as needed).

This model encourages the church to recognize the authority of the Elders and the Elders to be the servant-leaders required in Scripture. In this model church polity, biblical leadership qualifications, nomination process, means of congregational input, and a detailed grievance procedure should all be updated and clarified.

Delegate the oversight of all ministries to the Office of the Senior Pastor which is accountable to the Elders and oversees general church policy, doctrine, biblical discipline, budget assumptions, and the legal responsibilities of the corporation. Together with the Senior Pastor, the Elders form a plurality of leaders, sharing responsibility as spiritual overseers of the congregation. All are charged with the responsibility to defend correct

¹⁰ We encourage the Carver model of Policy Governance.

doctrine and refute those who contradict it—however, special honor is given to those who excel in preaching and teaching (see 1 Tim 5:17-19).

As noted previously, only 42% of the survey respondents believe the current Leaders have the ability to lead the church into the future. As a result, the Elders will need to strengthen the confidence in their leadership. To restore this confidence, the Elders will need to:

- Listen to the heart cries of staff, members and attenders and take seriously their biblical concerns.
- Clearly, regularly, and creatively communicate with members the *WHY? HOW?* and *WHAT?* of ministry decisions.
- One of the most important subjects that members need in order to maintain leader confidence is a consistent explanation and accounting of how the monies are being spent.
- When trust is adrift it can be difficult to regain. The opposite of mistrust is not trust, but care.

It is vital for the elders to rebuild the credibility and trust in their roles by casting a godly transition vision, shepherding the flock, administering church discipline as needed, along with prudent financial stewardship.

Therefore, consider these starter resources to read and apply:

- *Leading Leaders: Empowering Church Boards for Ministry Excellence* by Aubrey Malphurs.
- *Leading Without Power: Finding Hope in Serving Community and Called to Serve: Creating and Nurturing the Effective Volunteer Board* by Max De Pree (Actually, read everything you can by him.)

2. Evangelism Strategy CLARITY.

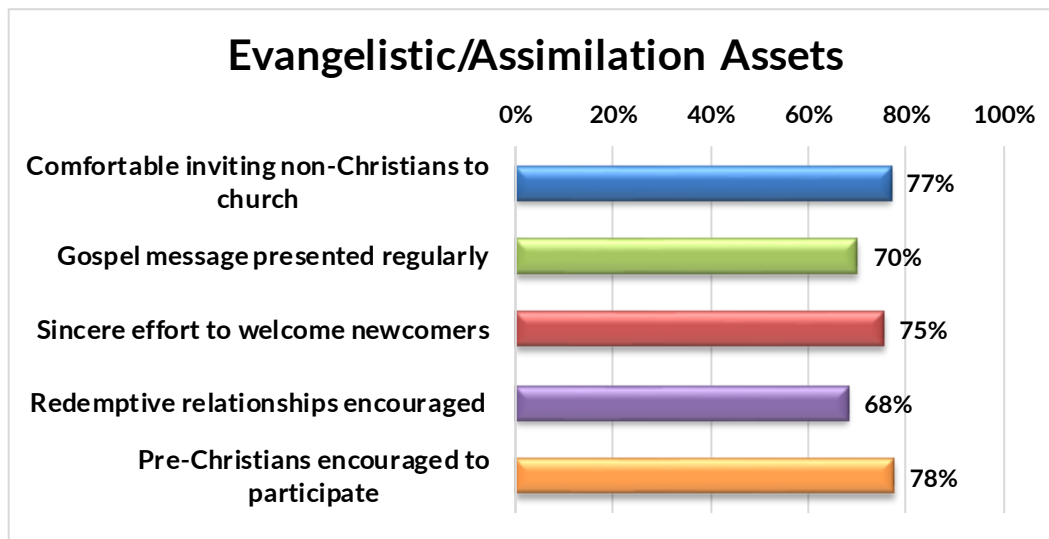
As stated, the overall adult evangelism rate for survey respondents is only 3% over the last five years and only 5% over the last 20+ years.¹¹ Additionally, (adult) conversions at GRACE have steadily declined over the last 20+ years. This data indicates that evangelism has become less of a priority over time. (This should also help you think about what GRACE needs in the next Sr. Pastor)

Therefore...

Recommendation 4: Update GRACE's Evangelism Strategy to Reach Unchurched and De-Churched People.

C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* notes that "the church exists for nothing else but to draw [people] into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time."

The results of the Evangelistic/Assimilation Assets for evangelism are weak as well:



The target value for this Asset List is 80%+.

Christian community is ultimately about God's glory being displayed IN and THROUGH the Church. Community, however, is not the final destination; it is the means with which the Church joins Jesus to live on mission (see Jn 13:35 and Matt 28:19). During this transition season, we recommend that you intensify church-wide efforts to connect with unchurched family, friends, and acquaintances in the marketplace, clubs, as well as in

¹¹ Church growth proponents indicate that a 5% per year rate of evangelism is exceptional.

neighborhoods. Unchurched and de-churched people are longing to connect with authentic and transparent people.

A missionary learns about the people and lifestyle preferences of those they are trying to reach with the gospel. Moreover, a missionary incarnates the gospel within that culture or lifestyle group. This requires humility and the sacrifice of personal preferences to serve this group in receiving the gospel. New structures and forms are sorely needed at GRACE.

Read *Center Church* by Tim Keller and prayerfully implement the following five features of a missional church:

- Contextualize the gospel by showing that the secular culture's deepest desires are met only in Christ.
- Share the gospel in the vernacular of the culture. That is, avoiding we/them language, or tribal terminology, and when meeting in public, assumes that unchurched people are present.
- Train and send people out into public life so that on their jobs, and in their neighborhoods, they live out distinctly kingdom values with convictional civility.
- Live out your faith in a counter-cultural Christian context that shows the culture how radically different society is with regards to money, sex, and power, law, justice, etc.
- Seek the peace and prosperity of the city – “*for in its welfare you will have welfare*” (Jer 29:7).

Additionally, read 8 to 15, *The World Is Smaller Than You Think* by Tom Mercer; and consider what is commonly referred to as “*oikos* evangelism,” using your consistent relational connections as a means to non-confrontational evangelism. Michael Green, in his classic book, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (1970), observes that the New Testament Church vigorously adhered to the *oikos principle* as its primary strategy for the advancement of God's kingdom.¹² Also, continue to develop Alpha classes and groups across your campuses.

¹² *Oikos* is the Greek word that is most often transliterated ‘household’ in the N.T. Today, in our non-agrarian society, the people we encounter on a regular basis has grown beyond our familial relationships. Michael Green records several different ways the gospel moved through households that accelerated conversions in the first three centuries: p322 and following.

3. Communication CLARITY

The vast majority of the churches served by VitalChurch desperately need to upgrade their communication strategy—and GRACE is no exception. Distinctive (often generational) groups chose to receive information in many ways, which can be quite challenging.

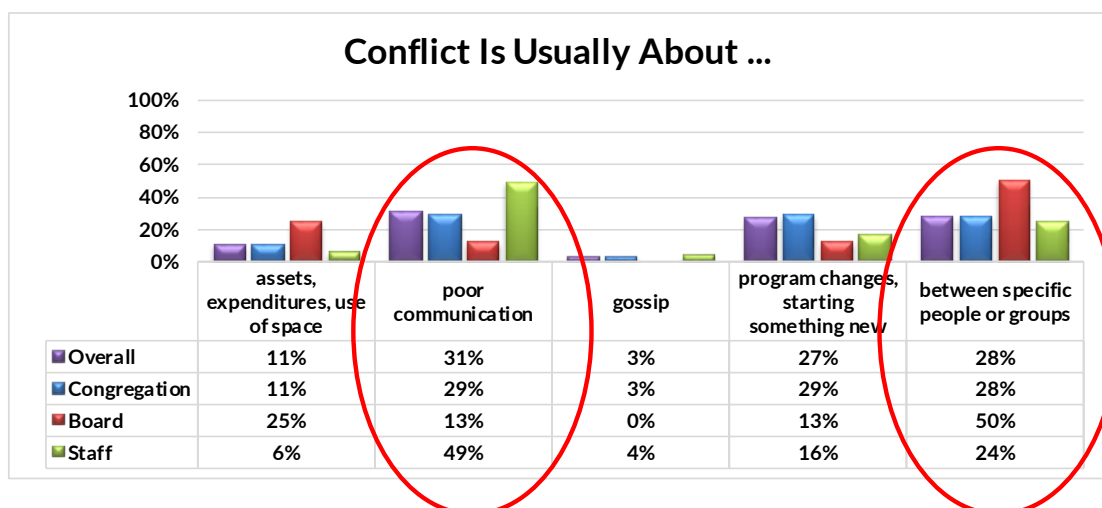
There is a recurring theme in the verbatim responses related to a lack of communication (and perceived transparency) within the church. This includes issues around the staffing and departure of staff members, including the previous Senior Pastor, the roles and titles of leaders, and the general lack of clarity about the church's vision and direction.

Verbatim Response: One staff member said, “The church leadership just wants the staff to TRUST them and their decisions—but the staff keeps saying that trust comes as the result of transparency and clear communication.”

Also, the data identifies ‘poor communication’ as the greatest source of conflict (31%) at GRACE. And notice on the chart below, half the Staff (49%), who are on the front lines, see ‘poor communication’ as the primary source of conflict. The second greatest source of conflict is ‘between specific people or groups.’ In VitalChurch’s experience this is often between generational groups. Sometimes older generations can view younger ones as upending long held traditions—and all generational groups have personal preferences that will need to be placed on the altar during this transition season.



3. Communication Clarity



Additional Verbatim Responses:

- “Poor communication”
- “More openness and transparency in what is going on behind the scenes.”
- “Real communication, more transparency”
- “Lack of communication between church leaders and members”

Therefore...

Recommendation 5: Continue to Enhance Church-Wide Communication.

There are two parts to this recommendation.

- A. Communication improvement will involve several strategic approaches to ensure clarity, consistency, and engagement across all levels of the organization and with the congregation.

Consider staffing a Communications Director who would be responsible for developing, implementing, and overseeing an integrated communications strategy that supports the church’s mission, vision, and values and manage all internal and external communications, ensuring consistent messaging, brand integrity, and effective engagement across all campuses and platforms.

- B. Another area of church-wide communication to be considered in these contentious social, cultural, and political times is for all believers to continue to learn and practice how to deeply see and hear one another—both inside the church as well as how we engage with unchurched and de-churched people.

Many people will remember the book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey, who famously said, “**Seek first to understand, then to be understood**”—which highlights the common tendency for us to listen with the intent to reply rather than to understand. When we prioritize listening and seeking to understand the other person, we create a space for genuine connection and empathy. This involves reflective listening before presenting our own viewpoint.

As this relates to theological dialogue at GRACE, a way forward, by way of a recommendation, could be a church-wide adherence to the Reformation era maxim:

“In the essentials we must have unity; in the non-essentials we must have liberty; and in all things we must have charity.”¹³

¹³ This statement is often attributed to Augustine, yet it (apparently) cannot be found in any Augustinian text. Upon further research the quotation has been found to be a common tenet quoted as authoritative in several Christian traditions, expressed in various ways, and attributed to various authors. A 17th century date is provided by Philip Schaff in *The History of the Christian Church* (Eerdmans Repr 1965, Vol. 7: 650-

Many churches, networks, and denominations hold this maxim as an important way to categorize their theological convictions. For most, the essentials refer to the doctrines related to salvation (or Soteriology—or how people are saved and how salvation is achieved).

It seems apparent that GRACE's core value of **Generous Orthodoxy** is designed to address doctrines that fall into the non-essential category and are not related to salvation—and therefore it is not necessary for congregants to divide over these issues.

The **GRACE Chapel Bylaws** (Rev. 2021, Article 2, Section 2.2) contain a very well-crafted statement:

“To this end, GRACE Chapel shall be constituted as a church, wherein all of those who love Jesus Christ and desire to serve Him may join in one common effort. Those elements that have caused confusion and division in the past within the Church of Jesus Christ shall not be permitted to destroy the unity of the body. To this end, this church shall be sympathetic and tolerant in spirit with respect to those areas of fellowship with the body of Christ in which Bible believing Christians have held different points of view. The Statement of Faith (Article 3) to which this church adheres finds its general expression in all of the great Confessions of the true Church of Jesus Christ.”

Most conservative evangelical churches would say something along the lines of: “We are a welcoming church but not an affirming church.” With that being said, most conservative churches struggle to define what it means to be truly and genuinely welcoming. VitalChurch Ministry applauds GRACE for going the extra mile in seeking to be a genuinely welcoming congregation.

The statement that we have heard most often in our interactions with GRACE pastors, elders, and staff—and surely you've heard it too—is, “Let's major on the majors and minor on the minors.” Someone else has said, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” The main thing, of course, would be the Person and work of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice to save us from our sinful condition.

653), which traces the authorship to Rupertus Meldenius, a relatively unknown theologian and author of a “remarkable” tract in which the sentence first occurs. The statement also appears in the last published work of the Moravian Bishop John Amos Comenius titled *The One Thing Needful*.

4. Campus Strategy CLARITY

At GRACE, concerns have been raised about unequal resource distribution between campuses. Some satellite campuses feel under-resourced or overlooked, while some Lexington members perceive that other campuses draw away needed support.

The first church grew as a result of people saying, “I will be faithful where God places me and love people near to me enough to tell them what God is doing in my life.” Although the first church born in Jerusalem flourished when followers of Jesus faithfully responded to the call to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). Jesus reminded his followers that their mission would not stay confined to one place, saying, “*You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8).

We see this mission coming to life in the early church in Antioch. Scattered by persecution, the community in Antioch was a vibrant expression of God’s work, rooted in the same message of Jesus but adapted to a new place and people. What was seen there was the “evidence of the grace of God” as new people in new places were reached with the gospel. (Acts 11:19-26).

In a similar way, today, the multi-site strategy offers a unique opportunity to meet people where they are to help them know they matter to God. When executed with clarity, alignment, and generosity, a multi-site strategy can:

- a. Increase reach and accessibility
- b. Provide diverse worship experiences
- c. Share resources across campuses
- d. Strengthen community connections
- e. Develop future leaders
- f. Offer flexibility and adaptability
- g. Enhance evangelism
- h. Foster a shared vision and mission
- i. Create scalable growth opportunities
- j. Expand volunteer engagement
- k. Contextualize ministry to unique cultural settings

Certainly, there are challenges present in the multi-site strategy.

Verbatim Responses:

- “It feels like the main campus gets all the attention while our needs are secondary.”
- “We don’t always feel included in decision-making.”

- *“Sometimes it feels like resources are pulled away from Lexington to support the other campuses.”*
- *“I always feel like the other campuses only get the trickle-down effect of the mother church and are never allowed to do our own things that might better benefit our community.”*
- *“I would like to have more a connection to the other campuses. We rarely get reports from other campuses or hear from the pastors in Watertown or Foxboro.”*
- *“It's become so ‘corporate’ that campus leaders have a hard time making decisions and the pastors are spread so thin they don't really know people besides small circles that they are personally involved in.”*

Therefore...

Recommendation 6: Continue to Refine Your Multi-Campus Strategy.

Develop and communicate a multi-campus strategy plan that includes linkage to the vision of GRACE, as well as launch, ministry development, and detailed sustainability plans—with markers and milestones for success for each campus.

Ensure that each phase of your multisite campus strategy is guided by a clearly-articulated and well-communicated philosophy of reproducibility, consistency, and stewardship—continually empowered by the Central Team to multiply high-quality, intimate church environments across the diverse locations. Provide appropriate resources to each campus, supporting everything from sermon prep to small group to kids’ ministries, along with sufficient tech infrastructure focused on empowering further expansion without accruing debt.

Guiding questions for establishing a multi-site strategy plan:

- How is the multi-site strategy tied directly to the vision of Grace Chapel?
- How well are we communicating this vision to our staff and congregation?
- What are the non-negotiable shared elements across campuses, and what should remain contextually unique?
- What needs to change in how we launch, support, and execute multi-site ministry?
- What resources and central services are needed to foster healthy expansion?
- What clear expectations exist between central and campus leaderships?
- Where are the service gaps, and how will they be filled?
- How should pathways of communication between central and campus staff be improved?

Are there places where insufficient or inequitable resources are being leveraged in our campus strategy?

So that all of Grace Chapel can benefit from what is happening at the campuses, how can information and best practices be shared so that all campuses benefit from what God is doing at each individual campus?

What is the pathway to long-term sustainability for each campus and how is that being clearly communicated?

Resources for Further Exploration

Books:

Multisite Church Roadtrip by Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird

Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work by Jim Tomberlin & Warren Bird

The Multi-Site Church Revolution by Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird

Articles & Research:

Leadership Network resources on multisite models

Barna Group reports on church multiplication and attendance trends

Recommendation 7: Double Down on a Season of Extended Prayer as a Congregation.

The VitalChurch Discernment Team invites you as a congregation to take a deep look inside yourselves through entering a season of listening, prayer with fasting, and repentance as needed. We encourage a thorough study of Nehemiah 1 to set the stage for a fresh season of spiritual renewal, seeking God's heart for a fresh infusion of God's grace and vision for the future.

The first thesis of Martin Luther's *95 Theses* states, "The whole life of believers should be repentance."¹⁴ Continue to cultivate a lifestyle of repentance and humility—as the Beatitudes affirm.

- This call to prayer should go well beyond regularly scheduled prayer meetings and involve prayer in people's homes, individual and corporate fasting, and concerts of prayer with extended worship.
- Humble yourselves before Christ. Surrender completely to Christ and receive his grace.
- Change business as usual. Clinging to personal preferences and expired traditions are not what it means to worship Jesus.

Now is the time to prayerfully and passionately seek God's vision and purpose for the next season of fruitful ministry at GRACE.

VitalChurch Ministry adamantly asserts that every church (and every person) has a collection of sins and sinful patterns that require active and ongoing repentance. We do not believe that you should find a call to repent demoralizing. We would like you to find it liberating and transforming—because where there is great humility, there is great grace (James 4:10).

¹⁴ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/repentance-first-last/>

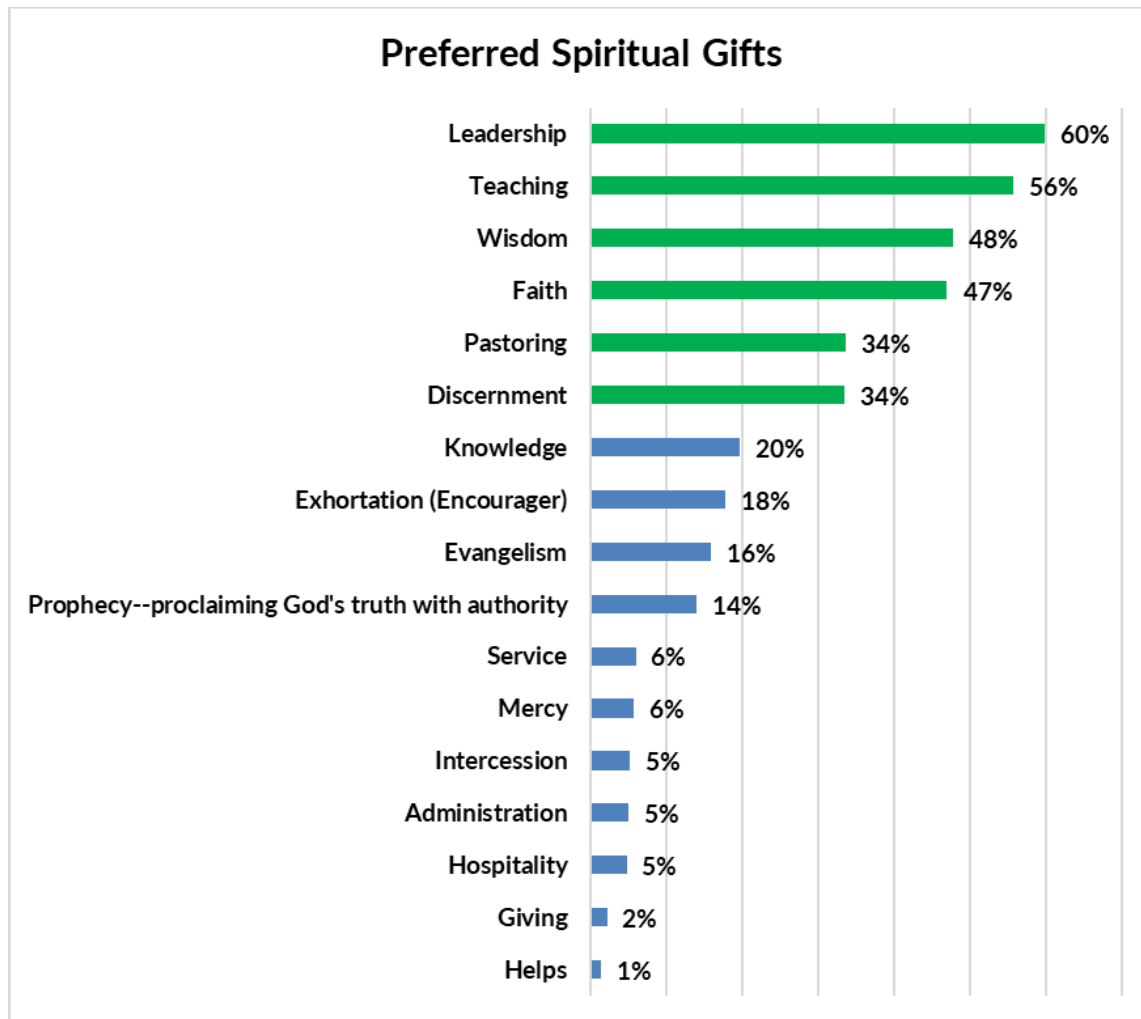
Online Survey Pastoral Profile Synopsis & and Some Practical Next Steps

As part of the survey process, questions were asked about the desired profile (gifting, abilities, interests, traits) of the next senior pastor of Grace Chapel. The primary goal was sample the perspective of regular attenders who participate in one of the four campuses or online. A secondary was to determine the degree of agreement from the various groups on what they hope the new senior pastor will be like.

Spiritual Gifts

	All	Lexington	Wilmington	Watertown	Foxboro	Online
Leadership	60%	61%	59%	54%	64%	47%
Teaching	56%	56%	56%	46%	64%	55%
Wisdom	47%	48%	52%	50%	40%	45%
Faith	50%	46%	48%	60%	40%	47%
Pastoring	34%	32%	41%	27%	35%	47%
Discernment	34%	33%	34%	25%	38%	37%

There is a consistent pattern to the spiritual gifts that current attenders want to see in their new spiritual leader. Leadership is the most wanted followed by Teaching. Wisdom is third high accompanied by Discernment, which is similar to Wisdom, in sixth place. Faith and Pastoring complete the top six choices. (By comparison, gifts such as exhortation/encouragement, service, mercy, intercession and hospitality were all chosen 18% or less.)



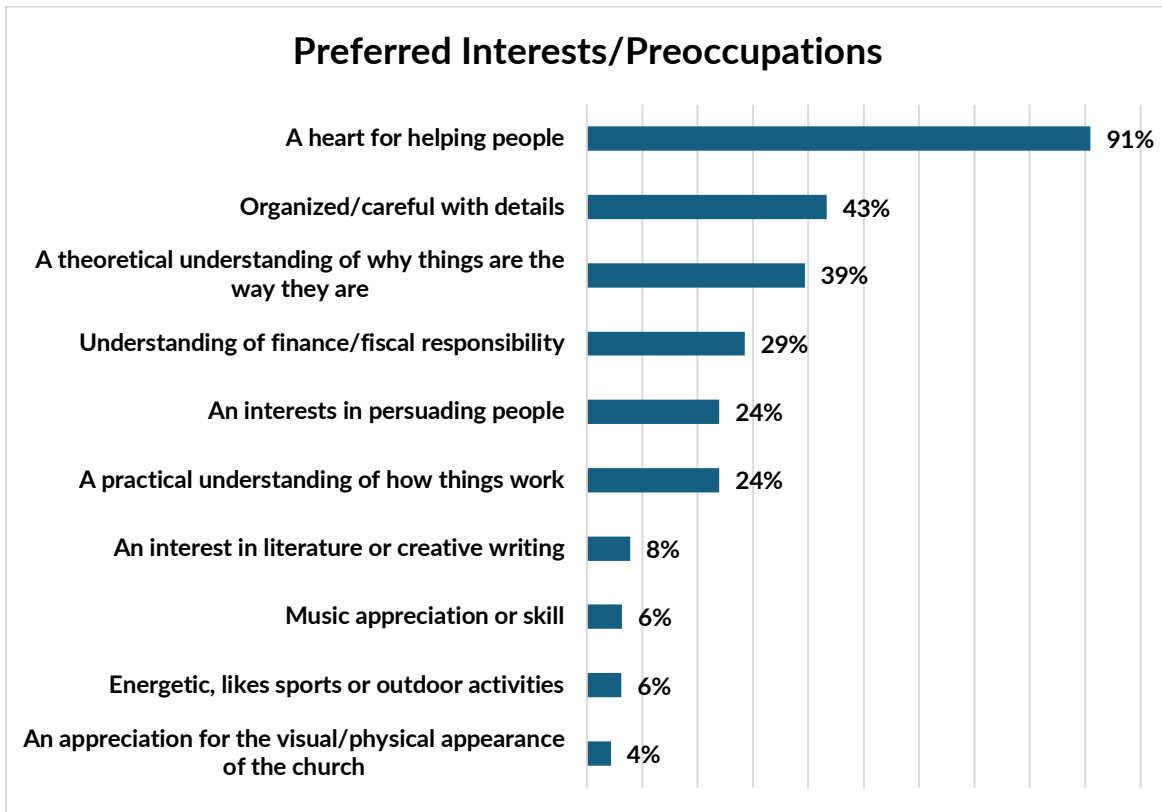
Preaching Style

Current attenders are almost equally divided between “A practical approach that focuses on what people need to grow in the Christian faith” at 38% and “An approach that systematically teaches the truths of Scripture” at 36%.

Preferred Preaching Style	All	Lexington	Wilmington	Watertown	Foxboro	Online
Practical Approach	38%	35%	44%	55%	33%	46%
Enthusiastic	18%	20%	18%	10%	14%	11%
New Insights	8%	9%	5%	5%	12%	11%
Systematic	36%	37%	33%	30%	41%	32%

Interests

When asked questions regarding what you hope your new senior pastor's interests/preoccupations will be, a clear picture emerges. "Interests" reflect what a person likes to do and/or think about, and it is clear that GRACE desires to have a senior pastor who has a heart for people.



This desired interest in helping others held consistently across campuses:

	All	Lexington	Wilmington	Watertown	Foxboro	Online
A heart for helping people	91%	91%	92%	93%	92%	87%
Organized/careful with details	43%	43%	43%	34%	53%	47%
A theoretical understanding of why things are the way they are	39%	38%	47%	49%	31%	32%
Understanding of finance/fiscal responsibility	29%	30%	24%	22%	29%	26%
An interests in persuading people	24%	25%	21%	12%	33%	26%
A practical understanding of how things work	24%	25%	21%	12%	33%	26%

Leadership Traits

When asked questions regarding the leadership traits the clear and consistent most preferred trait was “inspires the congregation.” Related to “inspires the congregation” is the fourth option, “challenges the congregation.” People primarily want inspiring leadership that can become “challenging” when it needs to be.

In combination with this trait of inspiration, it is desired that decisions be made carefully and relationally.

Practical Next Steps

1. Remind each other that Jesus Christ is the Senior Pastor and Chief Shepherd of GRACE and ask him to lead, guide, protect, and give his Spirit to you.
 - John 15:5 *I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit.* - Remember the fullness of the grace of Jesus as you move forward. It is grace that Jesus saves us from the sin that separates us from him, making us children of God and co-heirs with Christ. This is where our unity comes from. It is also grace that he calls us into his mission in the world. It is only his grace that will unite us and propel us into sustaining ministry as we remain in him.
2. Celebrate the strengths that need to be reinforced and built upon. The wisest decisions concerning your future will include respect for and preservation of the strength of your heritage that is rooted in the authority of the Scriptures.
 - Philippians 4:8-9 *Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think on these things...and the God of peace will be with you.*
3. Dialogue with one another regarding this report. Be openhanded with your personal preferences as you consider what God has for the future of GRACE.
4. Choose to accept the recommendations and begin to prioritize and implement them.
5. Pray, pray, pray, and pray some more.
 - Relationship and revelation are often directly related. As James tells us, if we are in need we should pray (together) and the wisdom and presence of God is offered to us.