

Greetings First Christian Church and Grace Chapel,

As our congregations move forward with a six-month discernment process, it is our number one priority to excel at communication and to seek to be transparent. We are prayerful that we will be faithful to follow God's spirit as God leads.

On Wednesday, August 4th, the "yoking committee" (four members from First Christian Church, four members from Grace Chapel, clergy from Grace Chapel and First Christian Church, and Suzanne, our church consultant) met to outline next steps.

**Some immediate changes you can expect will include:**

Shared worship. There will be two weekly Sunday worships including 9:00 AM contemporary in the fellowship hall and 11:00 AM traditional in the sanctuary. We will continue to share Sunday school and are working diligently to provide multiple offerings for children, youth, and adults.

Starting this Sunday, August 8<sup>th</sup> the Sunday school options are:

- The Open Door class, facilitated by Greg Gossett and they will meet upstairs in the classroom off the staircase closest to the fellowship hall.
- The Work of the People, facilitated by Theresa James, and they will meet in the Fellowship Hall.
- Children will meet in the children's wing. During August, Reverend Sara Hilgenberg will be the primary teacher. However, starting in September she will introduce a curriculum designed to be taught on a rotation which will include teachers from FCC and GPC. If you would like to volunteer with the children's ministry during the Sunday school hour, please email Sarah at [sarahilgenberg@fccsanangelo.org](mailto:sarahilgenberg@fccsanangelo.org).

We are also working on planning a third adult Sunday school option that will be facilitated by Reverend Esther Berg. Sunday school starts at 10:00 AM.

**What to expect in the next 6 months:**

By early September you will receive a "question-and-answer" document that is designed to help us move forward throughout this process. If you have a particular question you would like us to consider, please email TJ or Esther.

Then, over the following 8 to 10 weeks we will be entering into an "**experimental phase.**" We hope to gather data, share responsibilities, try new things in worship/program life/decision making, and create a feedback loop and evaluation. We pray that you will be flexible and seek an opportunity to experiment with a faithful heart. We will be asking for your input regularly in this phase. Please be sure to share your thoughts and ideas even if you think others have already communicated similar thoughts. We need to hear from everyone to accurately assess and understand how God is inviting us to move forward.

After we complete the experimental phase, we will then start the "**exploration phase**" which will last 6 to 15 weeks. Finally, we will conclude with the "**effect phase**" that will last 9 to 24 weeks.

It is our hope to go through this process to help us better understand how God is leading our congregations to do ministry. At the end of our six months, regardless of the outcome, we will gather to celebrate all that God has done and continues to do.

### **Who does what?**

Finally, below is a list of the team members serving on the “yoking committee” and a brief update on the roles of Esther, TJ, Mary Beth, and Suzanne.

- Grace: John Ballard, Randy Gardner, Victor Probandt, and Rebecca Webb
- FCC: Trish Aylor, Carla Hallman, Jon James, and Shirley Robison
- Esther is a Presbyterian pastor and missionary who has been hired to work alongside Grace Chapel. She will help lead in worship (including occasionally preaching), teach Sunday school and other Bible studies, work closely with the Session (GPC leadership) and the yoking committee, be available for pastoral care and counseling, and many other traditional roles in pastoral leadership. The gift Esther brings is a consistent presence from the Presbyterian tradition.
- T.J. will continue to serve as the primary pastor for FCC and preach regularly for combined services. Like Esther, he will be responsible for pastoral care and counseling. We imagine that the pastoral presence of TJ and Esther will intersect with members from both FCC and GPC. TJ will continue to work with leadership from FCC and work closely with the yoking committee.
- Mary Beth is a Presbyterian pastor who has standing in the Tres Rios presbytery and will serve as the “moderator of session” which is required by the Presbyterian denomination. She also brings a great deal of wisdom and experience in church leadership, will act as a sounding board, and is a consistent voice throughout this process, as she has a long history with Grace Chapel.
- Suzanne is the consultant hired by this session and church board and will work closely with the yoking committee to lead us throughout this six-month process. She is currently serving a shared congregation in Jacksboro, TX that is connected to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the PCUSA denomination. Often, she will assign tasks for the yoking committee to execute (experiment with) and she will guide us through a healthy process to best understand how God is leading. She will mostly work remotely but she will do some hands-on work periodically in San Angelo.

We believe these roles will continue to evolve and expand throughout this process. As we see necessary changes, we will seek to communicate them in a timely manner. Ultimately, we are excited to have multiple clergy who are committed to serving for the good of the Kingdom and to walk alongside us for the next six months and beyond.

Blessings,

Rev. Esther Berg (GPC) [rev.esther@gmail.com](mailto:rev.esther@gmail.com)

Rev. T.J. Shoop-York (FCC) [tjshoop york@fccsanangelo.org](mailto:tjshoop york@fccsanangelo.org)

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