

Mission 2020: Priorities and Principles for the future of GCC Summer 2009

The Mission of Grace Community Church: Grace Community Church exists to glorify God, applying the gospel of grace to every aspect of life for her members, their children, and the people of northern Albemarle and its surrounding communities.
(GCC elders approved in 2004)

Vision Statement

Grace Community Church belongs to Jesus Christ. We aspire to serve Him faithfully and prayerfully. Our teaching is grounded in God's word and our worship celebrates His grace. We seek to be an outward focused church that brings the Gospel's life changing message of hope to our neighbors, community, and the world. We remind one another constantly of the Gospel's promises. We encourage small group involvement to foster Christian growth and authentic relationships. We understand that ministry and service can take a variety of forms and encourage one another to find creative outlets for expressing God's grace.
(GCC elders approved in 2004)

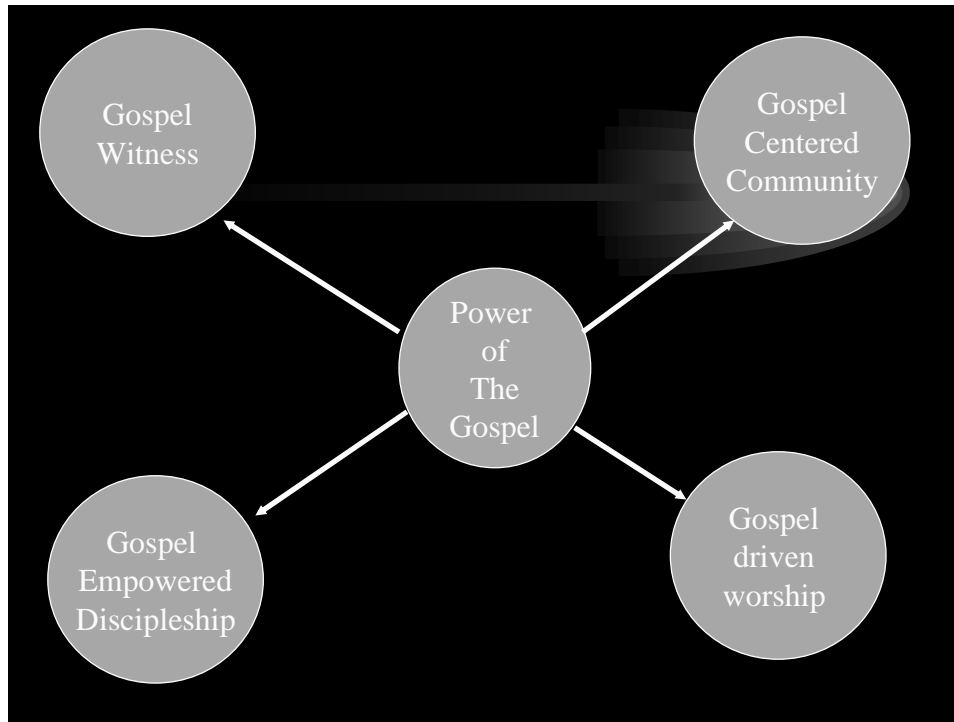
Introduction:

The statements above, along with the four core values of Gospel Witness, Gospel Empowered Discipleship, Gospel Centered Community and Gospel Driven worship summarize our church's goals, flavor, and direction. As we experience terrific opportunities for growth in the coming years, these Biblical principles guide us and give light to the various strategic decisions that we make.

It has been said a number of times and in a number of ways, but the continuing expansion of the National Ground Intelligence Center, the construction of the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the ongoing build-out of the UVA Northfork Research Park present us with unparalleled opportunity for GCC to be on the forward edge of the Kingdom's advancement among "the people of northern Albemarle county and its surrounding communities"

Through a strategy of thoughtful usage of our current assets- staff, volunteers, and facility, in a spirit of prayer and faith, we dream of making a wider impact for Jesus Christ as our community grows. **In the near future this greater impact will require some realignment of worship times, ministry offerings, and staff responsibilities..** Additional ministry staff will be needed to manage ministry expansion and to facilitate enfolded new people into our church. **At a point in the future, it will mean offering remote site worship services which grow into churches themselves.**

Here are some ways our GCC core values shape the future as we embrace the future opportunities presented to us.



Gospel Witness: “We seek to be an outward focused church that brings the Gospel’s life changing message of hope to our neighbors, community, and the world.”

It is very important to us to be used as a church in assisting people to come to a life transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. Two main ways people come to Christ at Grace is through the “front door” method of inviting them to church, and through the “side door method” of inviting them to small groups. This reality guides our thinking for the future. Additional events to provide bridges between us and those in our community who do not have a church home, will continue as well. These bridge events often lead people through the “front door” of the church.

Gospel Empowered Discipleship: Intentionally training believers for growth in grace, through faith and repentance, in the context of relationships with other Christians.

We don’t desire merely to have a church larger in numbers, but to be a church where people are provided for and encouraged to take the opportunity to grow deeply in their faith. The men and women who met Jesus were transformed by that encounter. We desire to have this kind of impact as well. Discipleship groups will continue to be fostered, and small group leaders will be trained in some discipleship concepts, to help them influence their groups in spiritual growth.

Gospel Centered Community: Our mission statement says “We encourage small group involvement to foster Christian growth and authentic relationships,” and we make it a core value of “committing to grow in authentic, loving, and transparent relationships with one another as a context for giving and receiving grace”, and “making healthy small group life a center of church life, ministry, and pastoral care.” This ministry of small

groups is critical to our future. Developing an expanding number of effective small groups is important to our health as a church both now and in the future.

Gospel Driven Worship : We hold as a core value, “Vibrant worship that engages every member - heart, soul, mind, and strength - rather than leaving them as spectators”, and “worship that invites repentance and belief in Christ throughout the service.”

Some principles we agree on

As our leaders have considered these matters since January of this year, here are some of our guiding principles which have effected the strategic decision we are presenting:

- ❑ **No sacred cows-** Though we have been around almost 12 years now, our elders still think of us as a “mission church”- willing to change direction to meet our mission and vision more effectively. We are unwilling to stick with business as usual if that strategy interferes with our effectiveness in meeting our vision.
- ❑ **Mid sized Church:** For the years ahead, we see it as wise to plan, strategize, and staff with both volunteers and paid staff to be a midsized church (with between 400-500 worshippers on our current campus). This allows for the size to accomplish many exciting ministry goals, without losing the family style feel we have now.
- ❑ **Facility:** We don’t see a major expansion of our worship space as wise stewardship for the coming years. This doesn’t preclude us from building a larger worship facility someday, but suggests that for the time being, maximizing our current space for growth is important. Thus we will seek to realign building uses and ministries, and as needed, pursue smaller construction projects for office and classroom space as needed. Moving more activities and groups from high usage times on Sunday is one method for doing this.
- ❑ **Church planting:** We want to pursue the goal of become a sending center for several new congregations. A primary strategy for this will be the establishment of remote worship sites in key locations (which emerge into healthy, self sustaining congregations). Thus we can have the community impact of a much larger church without the large ministry footprint. (See more about this on page 6.)

Some key strategic decisions:

The vision mentioned in the beginning is guided by some of the overarching principles agreed to above.

Service time and Sunday School program shift

We propose, and seek feedback to this proposal, to move to a 9:15 and 11:00 format for the fall. The 9:15 service will feature a smaller footprint Sunday School in which children ages 3-5th grade will be dismissed to Sunday School classes during the sermon. The 9:30 sermon time Sunday School classes will have consistent weekly teachers (instead of rotating ones) and high quality content. Children's church for ages 3-3rd grade will be offered at 11:00 service (as is now the case). Thus, no adult or youth Sunday School classes will be offered under this plan as it currently exists.

Surprisingly, this change will actually enhance our impact in the lives of children under fifth grade because fourth and fifth graders don't currently have children's church, and only 1/3 of ALL CHILDREN AT GCC attend Sunday School. By using excellent Sunday School material during the 9:15 offering, all children through fifth grade are well served.

Average attendance at Sunday School is 1/4 to 1/3 of our children (24/78), while Children's church serves 1/2 to 2/3 of our children (40/60). This shows that we serve a greater portion of our children through Children's church than Sunday school—other than our 4th and 5th graders (*there are currently no Children's church classes for them at either service*). So if they don't come to Sunday school, 4th and 5th graders are not ministered to by us. Overall, this means that 1/3 -1/2 are not taught by us.

The 45 minutes between the services will be utilized for informal fellowship and for the promotion of small groups and youth ministry opportunities by having volunteers available for questions and answers during this time period.

Implementing this option means that GCC will not, for the near term, provide typical Sunday morning classes for middle/high school students and adults. This would require GCC to refocus it's efforts to minister to these groups through off-hour programs and/or programs at other locations: e.g., adult small groups that meet in people's homes. The option exists for some programming on Sunday morning for youth, as determined to be helpful (for example, a small group that meets during a worship service and then attends church together).

The impact will be the greatest on youth ministry, due to the loss of teaching time on Sunday. As a result there will need to be an intentional discipleship focus, that includes both content and fellowship/relationship development for middle/senior high school students. Continuity in the program over its entire middle-through-senior high school span is an important goal in light of the changes.

Given the relatively low attendance at Adult Sunday School, small groups have *always* been the center-point for adult discipleship and education at GCC. Losing Sunday School will place additional importance on effective enrolling of new attenders into small groups. Small group development, management, leadership selection and training become higher priorities. Some of what is lost by losing adult Sunday School can be offered through occasional mid-week programs with a specific focus (Finance, Marriage, Parenting, Biblical Survey etc.). These seminars could be held several times each year;

providing a variety of programs and flexibility in attendance based on the needs of our congregation.

Will the Sunday School hour ever come back? Will we ever offer Adult and Youth Sunday School again? The elders are open to all possibilities for the future, including using our building on other nights (and in fact we will plan to do this periodically), and if the Spirit leads, to add back in these ministries in conjunction with facility changes as needs dictate it. We are FLEXIBLE as to the methods and plans for accomplishing our main calling as a church.

Greater emphasis on youth and adult small group ministry

We believe that small groups are changing lives. We have witnessed conversions through the friendly influence of people in small groups. We have seen great needs met through these groups. We will want to make every effort to expand the number of and variety of small groups available both to our youth and adults.

We already have a variety of small groups and Bible Studies. Three great gifts are given to the church through small group ministry of all kinds. First, people grow in grace through deepening relationships with other believers in the context of learning the gospel (Ephesians 4:1-16). There is no model for growth in the Bible that excludes meaningful relationships with other believers. Second, people in small groups experience greater love and care than those outside of small groups. That is because in a small group we are surrounded by people who are seeking to live out the New Testament challenge to love one another. Last, the visitors who visit Grace and are enfolded into a small group get involved and stay connected at a much higher rate than those who don't do so.

The struggle with small groups has always been to train and care for a sufficient number of leaders for a growing congregation. Gifted staff energy will need to be directed to this ministry to move the church beyond the number of groups we are at now. Training and energizing both existing and new leaders is critical for the future.

Youth small groups are mentioned here because they take a more critical role in the lives of our middle and high school students now that they don't have the option of Sunday School. The content of their time will need to take into consideration components of discipleship.

Youth ministry.

As mentioned above, the Sunday School shifts mean that middle and senior high don't have a Sunday School hour. This will mean additional priority on the regularity of and quality of our youth offerings AS A WHOLE (not just small groups as discussed in the previous section) . While youth small groups offer a significant discipling opportunity and thus increase in importance, the weekly Crossroads meetings also take on added significance in the shift of offerings on Sunday morning.

Church Planting

With the shift of worship times and ministries, starting a new worship site as a church planting strategy is now at least a year out in the future. However, we endeavor to move forward in definite ways with the establishment of other churches at the edges of our ministry area (as providence directs). This would most likely occur through first the establishment of remote worship sites, which over time become churches themselves. We see these churches being closely connected with our own, and with “keys to our church” both literally and metaphorically. We are open to other methods of beginning new churches- for example church planting internships or hiring church planters who raise support to come and work to build a church, as an offshoot of Grace. A separate vision document for church planting is being reviewed by our elders, and will be available to you, if you are interested.

Staffing priorities:

Small Groups: The management of a large and growing number of small groups for all ages above 5th grade will require significant staff energy, requiring either the hiring of staff for this specific ministry, or the realignment of responsibilities and the hiring of staff to take over other duties to allow this to happen.

Youth: The management and leadership of the youth ministry becomes even more important without Sunday School, suggesting the need for additional staff resources dedicated to this ministry. Our staffing vision team will work with the staff and elders to help us to discern the best approaches.

Worship: The worship director position is being filled on an interim basis and may combine with other needs to become a full time job. It is also possible for it to remain a part time position with a future leader established in this role.

Church Planting. For remote site worship services we will seek to leverage our current pastoral staff and future staff resources. As prudent, either current or future staff pastors will lead these new congregations as they emerge. Much of that is to be determined in the future.

Congregational feedback:

How shall this new approach be communicated:

- Several meetings during the 45 minutes between services to explain and receive feedback. (Several faces up front for this; August 2 as main meeting and August 9 as follow up).
- Elders/Pastors available to meet with small groups. (Terry Burns to contact SG leaders)
- Newsletter article (To go out by email July 20)

- Opportunities to communicate directly with pastors and elder about these ideas.
- Final implementation vote at the August elders meeting. (August 18, 2009)

These changes have been approved, pending the input of our members. This means we aim to move forward with these changes, but are open to adjustments pending the feedback of those affected by the changes. We aren't asking for a congregational vote, but are soliciting congregational feedback.

While the elders are the decision makers in a Presbyterian Church (on all matters except property purchase and officer and pastor elections), the GCC elders are interested in your thoughts. How does this effect you? What concerns and questions do you have? What changes do you disagree with? Let your elders know your thoughts. Be open to the information they may have for you, as well.

Will it make any difference what we think? If you express your thoughts, does it really make a difference (since the elders make the decisions)? Yes, because it will influence how we shape future ministry offerings, and because it's not too late to make adjustments for the fall, based on concerns we hear. We can change, adapt, or reshape the proposals if we sense this is a wise option. We also want to make sure that you are "hearing us", and have understood our reasons behind the changes that cause concerns.

ACTION STEPS NEEDING ELDER APPROVAL FROM THE DOCUMENT ABOVE:

1. Establish "Mission 2020" as the theme of this approach.
2. Approve this document, as we amend and correct it, as a guiding document for our future vision.
3. Approve the following principles mentioned above (I assume we don't need to approve the roasting of sacred cattle!)
 - a. The elders approve the goal of becoming a mid sized church in on site worship (400-500). This is approved pending congregational feedback and may be amended at the August meeting.
 - b. The elders approve the facility sentences above- giving guidance to the facility team/teams. This is approved pending congregational feedback and may be amended at the August meeting.
 - c. The elders approve the vision of planting daughter congregations out of this church in the next 10 years. This is approved pending congregational feedback and may be amended at the August meeting.
4. Approve the following strategic steps

a. The changing of Sunday School to 9:15 during the sermon for ages 3-5th grade, the new service times of 9:15 and 11:00, with a 45 minute ministry time in the middle. This means no adult SS or middle/high school will be offered on Sunday AM. This is approved pending congregational feedback and may be amended at the August meeting.

b. Request the pastors, with input of the staff, to present alternatives to adult Sunday School for approval by September 30th

c. Approve the guidelines for staff development in the document and forward those to the “staffing vision team”, requesting them to take this information, and the information gathered from the staff surveys, and make recommendations to the elders by September 30th.

d. Development of a plan for the continued development of elders, deacons, and apprentices to support the growth of the church and the development of future churches.