

Grace United: Congregational Update – December 2021

Dear Members of the Grace Family:

This past year has been exceptionally challenging for us all. Not only have we been dealing with the far-reaching impact of the pandemic: we have also been dealing with a major transition in the life of our congregation, following the retirement of our long-term minister, Reverend Lyle Horn. It has been a time of adjustment for all of us, which is why I want to bring you an update on some of what's happening behind the scenes and where we are today in terms of Grace's journey as family of faith.

Ministerial transition

When Reverend Lyle Horn announced his retirement last year, a Transition Team was formed to help the Board of Management to determine the best path forward. It was decided through congregational surveys and other related research that Grace would be best served if it were to seek an Intentional Interim Minister to help guide Grace through the challenges of transitioning from a long-term minister to a permanent minister accepting the call to ministry at Grace.

Reverend Dr. Sharon Ballantyne accepted the call to fill this interim role at Grace. She, along with the Transition Team and many other groups at Grace, worked on a set of goals that were meant to strengthen Grace and prepare it for the arrival of our new permanently called minister. Over the past year, Grace made substantial progress toward these goals. However, there have been also some noteworthy challenges. Reverend Dr. Sharon Ballantyne had to resign from her call for personal reasons. As a result, the process of supporting Grace through its transition had to be cut short. (This process would normally have taken two to three years as opposed to a single year.)

The good news is that when the Transition Team took stock of what has been achieved over the course of this relatively short period of time, it became apparent that the progress had been significant. As a result, the Board of Management decided that, rather than seeking another Intentional Interim Minister, Grace would choose instead to form a Search Team to seek a new permanent called minister for Grace. The Search team has been formed. It's members include: Jane Bleecker, Celia Hunter, Emma Kate Jessop, Neil Lebeau, Annabel Montero Staples, Paula Pound, and Cecilia Simmons. And a liaison person from regional council, Kathleen Whyte, has been assigned to guide and assist the Search Team. The Team is now in the process of establishing its process of searching for a new minister—a process that is expected to take up to six months and will have their first meeting on December 28.

Where does that leave us right here, right now?

The Worship Committee has been working hard to ensure that we have someone available to preach every Sunday. They have already arranged coverage for the months of January and February. They are also attempting to secure the services of a long-term supply minister. The

challenge, of course, is that such ministers are in short supply. However, we remain hopeful that we will be able to find someone who will be able to minister to Grace on a more regular basis until we have a new permanent minister in-place.

Other changes

That's certainly been a lot to deal with—and there have also been some other noteworthy changes made.

- Paul Tessier, our Musical Director, has announced that he will be retiring at the end of December. We are grateful to Bev Templar for her willingness to continue to direct the choir while we seek to recruit a new organist.
- Tony Mason has temporarily stepped away from leading the Worship One band. While the Worship One service will continue in January, we will be relying on pre-recorded music from previous live streams until we can find someone to fill in for Tony.

I realize that this is a time of great challenge for Grace and for the people of Grace. What gives me comfort—and I hope will bring you comfort, too—is knowing that we have been through tough times of challenge before and have always emerged stronger and more united.

The Transition Team and the Board of Management at Grace wish you and your families a season of peace, of joy, and of renewal. We would welcome any thoughts you might care to share about the contents of this letter, and will do our best to answer any questions you might have.

Yours in Christ,
Neil Douglas
Chair, Transition Team