

WHAT IS NEXT FOR GRACE?

*Our watchwords for the next season of Grace are **'team'** and **'prayer'**.*

Last year we celebrated 20 years of Grace, a time in which we have known significant blessing and growth. As we look ahead, we are keen to lead this church into the next 20 years in way that is sustainable and which causes each member to flourish.

TEAM

For the last 17 years, the eldership team that leads the church has been led by a lead-pastor. Over the next two weeks Tom will be stepping back from this role, though continuing to serve until July (date TBC). As we step into this new era, the leadership of Grace will be very much team led.

We have had no suitable applications for the role of lead-pastor, and whilst in the medium-long term we are open to the Lord's calling of someone to this role, we do not want to be treading water or waiting for some future eventuality, nor for this to be the focus of our energy and vision. We strongly believe that God has placed within our church, by his grace, the men and women that will cause us to flourish in all manner of ways.

So, for this next season, we will be team-led. The team of Micha, Clive, and initially Tom, with Robin continuing to sit in and support, will lead Grace as a plurality. Whilst our eldership has always been a 'plurality,' the team has been led by one person. This will look slightly different as we continue. It is a wonderful New Testament image, and it is also something that we have worked hard to develop over the last 12 months; this team is harmonious, collaborative and non-hierarchical, it has no voice louder than any other. Whilst there will be clear roles and responsibilities on this eldership team, it will be a very clear plateau in terms of authority and lead. We strongly believe that this is not just a backstop or plan B, but a model that will impact our church in positive ways.

One of the most exciting things in all of this is what we hope it will catalyse. Church is a body, and one of our key values is body/team ministry. A number of you have already offered to serve and support this church in various ways as we come into this new phase; we are so grateful for your enthusiasm and faith and for those that have said 'as you guys are stepping out, we would like to step in.' We firmly believe that relying less on particular individuals and finding greater dependence on each other and on the Lord will strengthen us.

We are truly grateful for your patience during this period and are committed to seeing restoration, healing and hopefulness arise as we gather around Christ together.

PRAYER

Many of us have felt a burden to pray in recent months. We believe that there are practical and essential steps to be taken as we move into this next phase, and we want

to take those steps carefully and clearly. But we also do not want to neglect the spiritual reality of our situation; churches are always in a life and death spiritual battle in which our primary weapon is prayer. Like Christ's church throughout all places and ages, we are discovering that our weakness is an opportunity for his power to be shown through prayer. Paul makes it clear that one of our greatest needs as the people of God, is prayer: *With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people* (Eph 6).

There will be more opportunities for prayer in the coming weeks and months. We ask you to join this vital battlefield, to stand shoulder to shoulder and call upon the name of the Lord.

STRUCTURES IN GRACE

We are working to develop clear structures and roles that will strengthen our church.

Internal

Ministry Leaders.

At points during our history, we have periodically gathered our Ministry Team leaders for fellowship, prayer, vision and communication. This is a forum that we particularly want to invest in on a regular basis. We want your input and desire to build a broader, core-team of ministry leaders in Grace.

Other roles

We are working to appoint someone to help us with some key church administration and communication. This will be vital as we seek to have a more joined up approach to church life and to develop clearer lines of communication.

External

Local Churches

One of the greatest privileges we have as a church is to be able to look across South Wales and see a significant number of churches that are led by people who have either been part of Grace in the past or have been trained through our Learning Community. Equally it has been a joy to have local churches input to our church, with Rhod Thomas from Tondu and Simon Dalton joining us recently on Sundays. We are looking to actively build upon these mutually-strengthening relationships in the months to come. Local leaders within the Advance movement are also meeting to find ways of becoming more connected as churches in the area. We are excited to see where this will lead.

External Voice

The ordinary way that churches are routinely supported within Advance is by welcoming a 'Significant Voice' into their leadership and wider fellowship. We have started to develop a strong relationship with Stephen Jack, who leads Harborough Community Church in Leicestershire and is our significant voice. He is a seasoned and trusted church leader, and we are grateful that he is able to invest increased time with us over the coming year, particularly as we step into a season of transition. He will bring prayerful wisdom, encouragement, and an external perspective to help strengthen, guide, and support the life of the church.

SOME SPECIFIC GOALS TO AID OUR JOURNEY

Better communication: Whilst we are generally quite clear on what is happening this week and next, we want to be better at our longer-term communication, we are already putting steps in place to make this happen.

Creating greater clarity regarding structures, organisation and information: Grace often operates like a family; we are very relational and that is a strength. However, we also recognise that this can sometimes lead to a lack of clarity. With this in mind, we are committed to ensuring that key information is communicated more clearly and consistently across the church.

We are proposing to hold bi-annual church sessions to provide updates on, amongst other things, vision, direction, and finances. Alongside this, we will be committing to more consistently updating our website and social media channels as a way of keeping everyone informed and connected with the life of the church.

QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT BE ASKING

What is the time frame for this next phase?

We'll be transitioning into a team-led approach over the next two weeks. We have deliberately not put a time frame on this next phase, as the focus will be on building foundations for long-term sustainability; we also want to be very open to how the Lord might lead us as a body in this new season.

With Tom and Laura leaving we are losing one full-time worker and one part-time. How will we cover the roles that they are leaving?

Micha will continue in his current full-time role; Clive will increase his role from 1 to 4 days per week as elder, Robin will continue to contribute a significant proportion of his available time. Whilst recognising the differences in availabilities and capacities, we want to note that all elders have an equal voice.

We are also benefitting from significant time being offered by so many others among you and from so many who have offered to take on new roles and responsibilities, this already includes some key areas like administration.

How do our trustees fit into this next phase of life?

Our trustees are an integral part of how our church functions; we want to benefit from their expertise and strengthen the ways in which elders and trustees co-labour. This will also involve looking at and improving our charity structure, which is in need of updating and renewal, this is already being looked at and the process will begin as soon as possible.

What are our values? Have they changed?

No. Our values as a church are as they have been. You can access the document, 'Our Values' on our website. These are key values that we are leaning into at the moment and are based upon our foundational document, 'Grace Distinctives'.

What about vision for the future? Where are we heading?

Whilst this document outlines some of the structural changes occurring at the moment, we realise you may still have questions about this church's vision for the next year. Over the next 8-10 weeks we will talk more clearly about where we will be heading in terms of vision, what you might expect and what we hope God might do among us. Rather than structural changes, this will focus more on aspirational and directional hopes for the coming year.

How will pastoral care be developed?

Our pastoral care is primarily worked out through our Revive groups, our SJT groups and our elders. Whilst this will continue to be the case, we want to develop our pastoral care and are delighted that Kerstin is going to continue to give a portion of her time each week to help us as a church to care for one another well. This will involve both hands on pastoral care, but also helping us to think through our pastoral model. Our aim is that no one is overlooked, and that care be strengthened through shared responsibility.

A more detailed Q&A is included below. We will be meeting next Sunday evening (26th April) in Hope at 7.00pm for a time to seek the Lord and answer any follow up questions you might have. Please submit any questions you would like answered in advance using the Churchsuite form provided.

SOME MORE DETAILED Q&A

1. Change in Leadership

Q: Why is Tom leaving?

A: Tom has accepted a call to serve at God First Church Cheltenham, meaning that he, Laura, and the family will be moving in the summer. Whilst we are sad to see them go, we are incredibly thankful to God for their 17 years of faithful service among us, and we fully support them in this next step of their ministry.

2. Leadership Going Forward

Q: Why move to leadership by a team of elders now?

A: This transition is both a response to our current situation and something we believe is right for the future:

- It reflects a shared model of leadership and eldership seen in the New Testament
- It reduces reliance on a single individual
- It strengthens continuity, support, and accountability

We see this not as a compromise, but as a positive and prayerful step forward.

Q: Who will lead the church going forward?

A: The church will be led by the team of elders, who share responsibility for teaching, leadership, spiritual oversight, and pastoral care.

Q: Who is ultimately in charge?

A: Rather than one individual leading, the elders will lead together, equally sharing responsibility and accountability beneath Christ. While there will be well-defined roles on the eldership team, decision-making will be collective, with all main decisions taken together.

Q: What changes will I see over the next few months?

A: In the next couple of weeks, Tom will be stepping back from the role of lead pastor but will continue to serve and be an integral part of the eldership for the remainder of his time with us.

Over the coming months, you may notice a few changes, including:

- Greater visibility of the eldership as a team, rather than leadership being more centred on one individual
- Increased involvement from different ministry leaders across the life of the church
- A growing sense of collaborative decision-making and shared pastoral care

Some of these changes may feel gradual, but they are part of a deliberate move toward a more sustainable model of leadership.

Throughout this time, our priority is to ensure continuity, stability, and care for the whole church family.

Q: Will this affect the direction and vision of the church?

A: No. Our mission, values, and core beliefs remain unchanged. This transition is about how we lead, not where we are going. We remain committed to the same calling and priorities as a church.

3. Governance & Structure

Q: Will there be changes to church governance?

A: Alongside the leadership transition, the elders and trustees have started to explore a move to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) structure.

This is a recognised UK charity structure, commonly adopted by UK churches, which can help simplify governance and bring greater clarity to how leadership operates.

Q: What would this mean for elders and trustees?

A: In a CIO structure, it is quite common for all or most elders also to serve as trustees. This would help to:

- Coordinate spiritual and legal responsibilities
- Reduce duplication
- Enable clearer, more unified leadership of the charity overall

We will communicate clearly how this would work in practice if plans develop along these lines.

4. Looking Ahead

Q: How can we be involved as a church?

A: We encourage everyone to:

- Remain constant in prayer, seeking the Lord in this new season
- Support and encourage those stepping into new leadership responsibilities. We are grateful for their constancy and commitment at this time
- Be engaged and involved in serving one another in the life of the church

Q: Will there be the opportunity to develop a more clearly defined church membership?

A: Yes, this is an area we want to explore in the coming season

Q: Will we be learning as we go?

A: We recognise that any transition brings learning. We will regularly meet as a wider group of ministry leaders, seek feedback from everyone, review how things are working, and adjust and innovate as needed. Our goal is to serve the church in the best way possible. There will also be regular, periodic reviews into which we will invite external voices, particularly Stephen Jack.