

## **Grace Episcopal Church, San Antonio, Texas Report on 2015 Pre-campaign Feasibility Survey March 21 & 22, 2015**

As representatives of the Capital Campaign Division of the Stewardship Department of the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas, we would like to thank you for your hospitality while we conducted the pre-campaign survey at Grace Episcopal Church. Our interview dates were Saturday, March 21, and Sunday, March 22, 2015. Serving as diocesan consultants, Ted Burkhardt and Kirk Mason interviewed a total of 44 families representing approximately 76% of the congregation (58 potential pledging units from 2015 Stewardship Statistics Report). Additionally, 10 online survey invitations were distributed to members with 3 fully completed, bringing the total interviewed to 81% of the congregation or 89% of the 53 pledging units. We have summarized the most frequent answers to the questions from the 47 surveys in our comments below.

Of those interviewed 19% consider themselves founding members, 44% from three to six years, with 32% joining within the last three years. Only two families fell in the less than one-year category. With 17 new families in the last three years, Grace has experienced a 29% growth whereas the diocese is seeing an annual decline of 1.4% each year. Also of note, 88% of these families have indicated a long-term giving commitment to Grace Church.

These people represented virtually all the ministries and activities at Grace Church. Moreover 94% are active in one or more areas with participation focused in outreach through Take it to the Streets (57%) and Monroe May Elementary (34%). Within the church, Sunday involvement is unusually high with 47% serving on Sunday Setup Teams, plus those on the Music Team, Altar Guild and Prayer Teams. Leadership has definitely created an environment where everyone can build relationships and find a home where they feel called to serve.

### **THE IMAGE OF THE CONGREGATION**

The respondents all portray the congregation as “young, relaxed, friendly, and diverse yet welcoming.” This is more than a feeling of friendliness; respondents say there is a genuine family atmosphere that creates, “an authentic community of intense love and spirituality.” Visitors find the congregation not only vibrant, accepting, supportive, and nurturing, but also unique, down to earth, laid-back and fun with a young dynamic pastor, great music, a heart for outreach, and a love of noisy children. They see a growing mission-oriented church with a casual atmosphere and a contemporary and inviting worship service.

### **THE STRENGTHS OF THE CONGREGATION**

The strength of this congregation is in the people of Grace Church. If one word were used to describe parishioners, it would be “committed.” They are committed to God, each other, and the hurting world they see around them, and they give generously in their stewardship of time, talent, and money. They love to quote, “relationship not religion” as their focus, and know their mission is outside Sunday services as they build relationships that will “connect people to Christ, self and others.” Determined to serve, they are forward-looking, flexible, and eager to

take on new tasks, helping everyone become involved. Described as a congregation of doers, they seem focused on fellowship to build community within the church, on service to reach into the world and build relationships with others, and on authentic worship to strengthen and mature their relationship with God. This congregation actively and enthusiastically participates in worship. The music is a crowd-pleaser described as contemporary, encouraging, and simply put, “great!” Equally important is Jay’s message that is biblically-based, relevant and relatable to all ages. He brings the Gospel to life and sends all out to practice what was preached. It is seen as a true Christian community, with real believers who are serious about church, worship and service.

## **THE WEAKNESSES OF THE CONGREGATION**

The weaknesses described were very specific.

- **“Need our own space.”** Many cited the necessity to setup and tear-down, having to share the space, being hidden behind gates, no room for large events throughout the week, no area for outreach and service to the community.
- **“Need more people.”** There is a concern that, “we still don’t bring in new people well” and we are not growing in the numbers needed to support our mission. Some feel the church needs better communication and marketing to spread the word about Grace and pull in more seekers. Others noted an irregular attendance pattern in the current membership. Still others suggested a return to nametags to avoid any disconnect, and although described as “friendly” in the Strengths above, some mentioned that members do not recognize or engage new people in conversation.
- **“Need stronger youth group.”** This issue has been heard by the leadership team, and is being addressed through the hiring of Clark Niles as youth ministry consultant. A similar need was voiced for a stronger college age, young adult group.

Many issues are not unique to a new startup like Grace Church, but can be heard from most mature congregations such as: “Because our numbers are small it is sometimes hard to find volunteers” for outreach programs, or “those gifted in welcoming new folks or teaching Sunday school in the Children’s Ministry” area. There are a few who feel “more focus should be placed on spiritual maturity” to help deepen the relationship with Christ.

## **THE CONGREGATION’S LEADERSHIP**

Grace Church is blessed to have a church planter/vicar who is described as awesome, fantastic, passionate, and eloquent. In simpler but just as loving terms he is also described as “welcoming, friendly, out-going, natural, genuine, funny, humble and crazy comfortable” to be around. The Rev. Jay George is an exceptional purpose-driven leader who is focused on building relationships, inspiring participation, delegating responsibility and encouraging those around him. He is aware of his abilities and listens to the advice of others always flexible in planning, and is open to innovation and trying new things. Anchored in a compelling vision, he is devoted to the people of Grace Church, focusing on pastoral care when needed, and he is really “good at Sunday stuff,” too! But he is probably most admired for his “life-applicable” sermons that are a combination of preaching, teaching and storytelling which connect to all ages and backgrounds. As one respondent said, “While I see Jay as the ordained leadership, it is clear that he surrounds himself with other leaders so it is not a one-man operation, but rather a group working with the congregation to lead us to the next level where we can serve God.”

These equally talented, involved lay leaders are described as, “professional, committed, loving, passionate, selfless, and energetic with a heart for service.” Committed to growth and the mission of Grace Church, they are from different walks of life, but working (walking) together in tireless service. Like Jay they are described as approachable, willing to try different things and always encouraging people to participate. The Bishop’s Committee (Leadership Team) is perceived as a younger group, dedicated, detail-oriented and called to serve. Along with the Vision Team they are considered open and transparent, and are praised for including the congregation in determining what is wanted for the future of Grace Church and what is needed at “Project GraceLand.”

## **THE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN**

The Vicar, the Bishop’s Committee and the Vision Team have done everything right in communicating the vision and the potential to be found in stepping forward in faith in God’s call upon this church, say respondents. Unlike most church feasibility studies, every parishioner we interviewed was aware of the vision and most of the details of the Master Plan. Over 65% indicated they participated in the March 1, 2015 Barbeque at Graceland

When asked if they agreed with the order of the four priorities (Families, Mental health, Environment, and Students or the poor) as established in the first survey, 89% said yes. Without a doubt addressing needs of families is clearly understood and of highest concern. Further clarification for the other three priorities should be discussed as the plans develop.

For the second survey asking the Question: “What do you want in a multi-purpose building at GraceLand?” the responses showed 85% agreement. But, although they agreed, a variety of suggestions was offered including: adequate storage, sacristy, computer/sound room, athletic fields, gardens, flexible sized rooms that can be used for adult meetings not just dedicated for Sunday school space, and a cry room & changing areas in bathrooms. This shows outstanding engagement and ownership by all respondents and the need for the planned building group dinners scheduled for early summer.

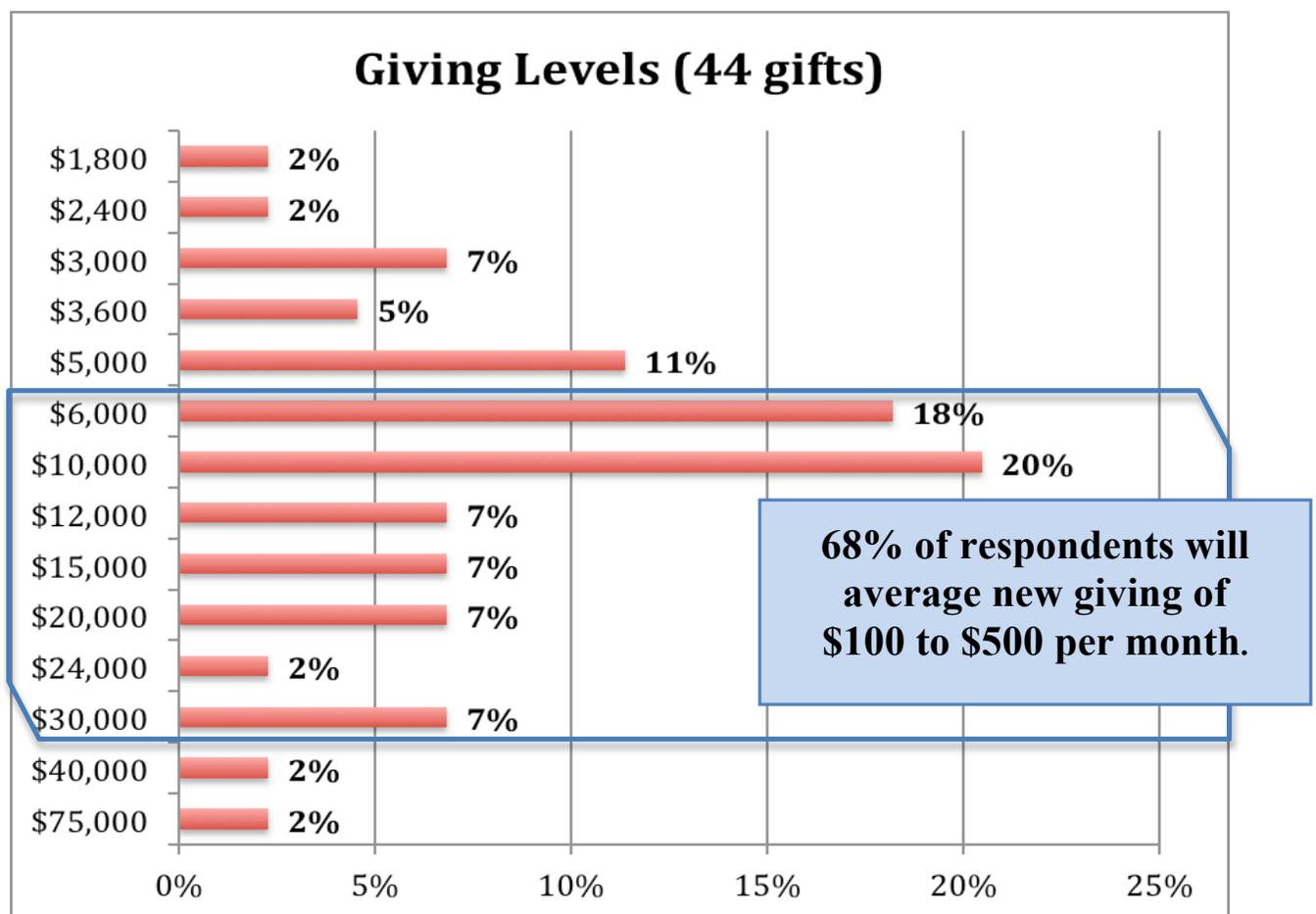
Leadership received a resounding vote of confidence that the scope of the project is correct with 91% responding in the affirmative. Everyone knew of the matching gift, and no one felt the congregation match was impossible. Instead there was an even split between “Yes” and “Maybe.” That is not to say there is not concern and doubts on the “how” of it, but they have great faith, and believe all things are possible with prayer, hard work and God’s help.

During the interviews there were two factors that seemed to turn the respondents toward believing the goal was possible. This was witnessed by the positive reaction to the giving chart: the longer five-year timeline for giving and the presentation of monthly gift amounts. These gift levels are not offered from capital assets, but from the parishioners’ annual income. For almost all these monthly gifts will exist beside house and car payments, new clothes, and an evening out. They are committing to sacrificial giving in the truest sense. To capitalize on this, the website must provide an online monthly (or even weekly) automatic giving option as convenient as Grace Church’s annual giving. There was no indication these gifts will affect the church’s level of annual giving.

## THE RESULTS

Each respondent was asked to identify what amount he/she would be willing to give in a lump sum or over a five-year period. With little hesitation 94% (44) said they would give, and indicated an amount or gift range. It was emphasized that there was no pledge or commitment at this time, but that their answers were important in helping make a more accurate estimate of the giving capacity of the congregation. At the same time they were asked if their responses could be released to leadership, and 51% answered in the affirmative with only 8 preferring anonymity.

Giving estimates ranged from \$1,800 to \$75,000 with nineteen indicating they expected to give somewhere in between a dollar range. Using this high-low range, giving estimates total between \$446,000 and \$553,000. Combined with the matching gift, the potential total is \$1.1 million. Almost 90% expect to give this number over five years, most on a monthly basis.



The Grace Church population showed a uniquely high commitment to the GraceLand Project when compared to our experience with other feasibility studies. They came into the interview with a number(s) in mind. And, it was an unusually high gift when you realize this gift is generally coming out of annual earned income on a monthly basis. Many were willing for leadership to know how much they can support the effort. Most believe “we can do this.”

And now for the reality check:

- Five years is a long time, and there will be pledge attrition.
- Replacement pledges from new members will be slower in coming and probably not at the same high commitment level.
- Monthly pledges will be more subject to interruption due to emergencies and future needs not anticipated.
- On average, leadership can only expect to receive \$90,000 to \$110,000 in gifts each year – one-fifth of the estimated gifts.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

First, congratulations to the leaders of Grace Church for their tireless effort to communicate and involve all of the members of the congregation. The people of Grace are looking forward to their own place to call home that will provide expanded facilities and continued growth in their ability to reach out to the world and touch those who are in need and hurting.

1. Normally, we interview approximately 40% - 50% of a church population. Then, using the figure developed from those interviews we can forecast the expected larger number when the full congregation is asked to give. (See footnote <sup>(1)</sup> at end for standard calculations, which are NOT applicable to the current feasibility study.) In this situation 100% of Grace Church was given the opportunity to participate and we interviewed 80% of the congregation and 90% of the 53 current pledging units. For these reasons, our forecasted estimate of potential giving cannot follow the footnote <sup>(1)</sup> logic.
2. However, we do feel the higher range of giving at \$553,000 is an achievable goal if leadership can inspire members to step out in faith and not fear as they make their pledge. Furthermore, leadership, knowing how achievable the \$750,000 matching gift goal is, can ask each family to consider an annual percentage “step-up” in their gift as construction begins and the Project GraceLand vision become a reality.
3. With this actual gift range in mind, leadership should consider the following:
  - a. Should adjustments to the master plan be contemplated?
  - b. Is a phased in approach desirable?
  - c. Is seeking outside commercial debt advisable?
4. Any revised plans should be shared as soon as possible with the church congregation, and increased consensus should be sought through expanded publicity.
5. Once the leadership has had an opportunity to review these study recommendations and any adaptation to the proposed plan, a timetable such as the following should be considered to maximize success:
  - a. Months 1-2 – Determine campaign calendar and budget. Announce goal. Begin materials development (pledge cards, brochures, letterhead, etc.). Recruit and train campaign leadership and support committee chairs. Evaluate Advance Gift prospects.

- b. Months 2-3 – Continue to train leadership. Complete materials development. Begin advance gift solicitation. Contact planned giving prospects, if appropriate.
- c. Months 3-4 – Prepare for and launch the congregational gift division. Hold kick-off event. Begin personal solicitations and monitor solicitation efforts.
- d. Months 4-5 – Finalize all calls. Set up pledge collection and acknowledgement systems. Hold celebration event to acknowledge conclusion of the campaign and recognize the leadership and volunteers.

This information should prove valuable as you enter the next phase of your campaign. We would like to thank the leadership of Grace Episcopal Church, San Antonio, for the opportunity to work with this church family. We enjoyed our work on your behalf, and if we can be of further help, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Faithfully,

Ted Burkhart  
Kirk Mason  
Nancy Stinson

***(1) Not applicable to Grace Church. Provided only as an example of the standard calculations used for other congregations:***

*Experience indicates that, as a norm, a congregation can comfortably expect capital campaign pledges to total as much as two times (2X) annual giving pledges. Grace Churches 2014 estimated annual pledges are approximately \$235,000 indicating potential capital campaign gifts could reach \$470,000. Additionally, history in the Diocese of West Texas supports use of a multiplier of one and one-half (1 ½) to two (2) times the amount estimated during the feasibility study interviews as a possible campaign goal for a healthy congregation. That calculation would lead to a forecast (using the low estimate) of \$669,000 to \$1,106,000.*