



A Riveting Retreat

"As an ecumenical Christian church-community, part of the Body of Christ, we desire to be both a welcoming place of worship, and an intergenerational community. We desire to know and follow Jesus. We seek the inspiration of the Holy Spirit." Grain of Wheat Church-Community Identity Statement

The Servant Leader Team met for a three-day retreat in early August. The purpose of this retreat was to spend time listening and discerning the upcoming year for Grain of Wheat Church-Community. Our preparation for the retreat included individual consultations with the majority of the body around their experiences and hopes for meaningful connections within GoWC-C. We also read multiple books on the emergent church; the historical and current call of the church, new monasticism and the inter-connected relationship between believing, belonging and behaving. Many of our readings encouraged us to explore the missional call of our church.

Our readings and conversations led us to examine and question how we believe discipleship occurs, where we believe the church is called to focus its energy and consequently how Grain of Wheat Church-Community is being called to exist in the world. As we contemplated our church, our history, global realities and the call of the wider church we were encouraged by our history and our path forward. We have a rich history to draw upon.

Historically, GOWC-C has done a good job of existing on the edge of society and calling its members and the world to a counter-cultural, biblical vision of being. We have been a place of living a life a prayer and spiritual disciplines. We have been a place that nourishes, supports and equips the people in our body to go out and serve those in the world via their vocations.

Just like the rest of the Western Church, we are in the midst of cultural changes within our church. For multiple years we have been noticing changes in people's understandings of membership, what people need from the church and the ways in which those outside of "church" can be drawn

into what we are about. We are in the middle of exciting changes. We are collectively moving through these changes and the SLT sees GoWC-C as a vibrant place full of life. We see that nourishing and sustaining the body to go out and serve the world is a primary piece of our identity (historically and currently).

This fall we will celebrate 35 years of being a church and we excitedly look forward to continuing to live into these faithful patterns from our past. Throughout the spring and throughout our retreat we have been listening to hear "what's next?" and "what is God calling us to?" As we have prayed, talked and listened we have felt called to enter into a year of Adventurous Experimentation. This year will be a time of trying to live into the concepts of generous spaciousness and compassionate curiosity. It will be a year of inviting others to try new and old expressions and explorations of faith. It will be a year of endings and beginnings. It will likely be a year of some failures and that's okay. It will be a year where we try to simplify church obligations to create space and time for people to live out their faith in their daily lives.

We hope to journey with each of you in trying out different experimentations in faithful living. During this year our focus will be on finding practical ways of living out the ideals set out in the 13 commitments. We will experiment with different ways of connecting with God and with each other. Part of this experimentation will be putting some current practices on hold to see what new things may emerge. Two major pieces will be put on hold for this year.

- 1) Sharing and Learning meetings will not be occurring on the first Wednesday of each month
- 2) There will be a hiatus on the Ways to Belong Membership Structure.

As we enter into this year the following are some ideas on how we will proceed with our experiment:

- 1) A new gathering on the first Wednesday of each month.
- 2) The re-emergence of the Teaching Team with a focus on new ways of teaching, learning and walking with one another.
- 3) An experiment in the definition of membership (see explanation below)
- 4) Moving the GOWC-C commitment ceremony to the Sunday morning worship service. This change is to allow children and the wider community to learn about the commitments we make to God and one another.
- 5) Monthly prayer meetings

6) Encouraging the emergence of teaching times, prayer times and other types of gatherings that respond to internal movings or the needs expressed by others.

7) Having parts of the 13 commitments displayed at every worship service this year as way of helping us reflect and internalize what GoWC-C believes it is called to enact.

In April/May 2017 the SLT and DMC, with input from others, will do an evaluation of our year. We are excited to journey with each of you this year and invite you to spend this year contemplating, discussing and trying to live into GoWC-C identity and statement and 13 commitments.



Some reflections on Membership

If you talk to people who have been around GoWC-C for awhile you'll quickly find out that membership is frequently and consistently a discussion point. In recent years it has become apparent that our current membership structure no longer allows many people to express their commitment to Grain of Wheat. The Servant Leadership Team, the Decision Making Circle and the Advisory Council have spent the last year talking about how the membership structure could be changed. Although there has been much discussion no clear path on how to change membership requirements has emerged.

For this year, we are choosing to embrace the fact that many roads are open to us. We are choosing to put current and future ideas of

membership on hold and to do a year of experimentation. We will spend this year learning about the relationship between believing, belonging and behaving and study the experiences of other churches who are also on the path of learning how definitions of membership are expanding and changing. We will spend this year asking people to spend time finding ways to live into the GoWC-C identity statement of members' commitments. We hope that as we create space, by removing attendance obligations, our church-community will continue to find ways of authentically expressing and nourishing their personal faith and the faith development and expression of the wider community.

This year people will be asked to spend the month of September reflecting on GOWC-C Identity Statement and the 13 Commitments. At our Commitment Ceremony on Sunday, Sept. 25 anyone who believes that these commitments are a way to the richness and fullness of life that God intends and is willing to try to live into them is invited to be a member.

Teaching Team Revival

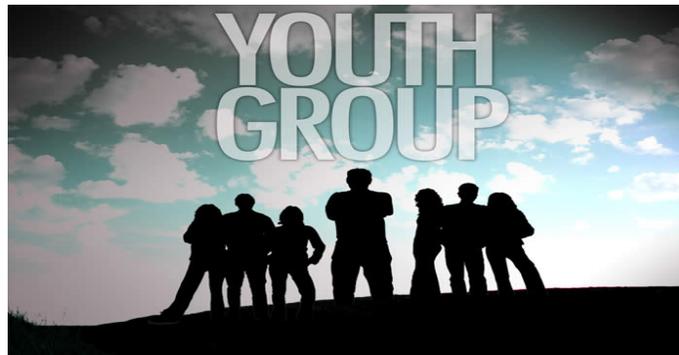
The Servant Leadership Team is excited to announce that a new edition of the Teaching Team will be starting this fall. For some time now, the GoWC-C Teaching Team has been on hiatus. The Worship Team has graciously taken on the homily scheduling duties, but has not taken on other duties. With many thanks to the Worship Team, the SLT is excited to revive the GoW Teaching Team.

A big focus of the teaching team will be to act as a think tank and instigate other teaching opportunities within GoWC-C. In addition to scheduling homilies, the team will come up with ideas, approach community members (and others) to get the ideas rolling, and offer support to whoever is taking any kind of leadership role in these activities. Examples of teaching times could include book studies, bible studies, a possible book club and bringing in speakers for workshops. While evaluations of homilies has traditionally been part of the Teaching team agenda; for this year, we are asking the teaching Team not to include evaluations as part of their role. Evaluations as part of the process of strengthening our homilies, needs further exploration.

Another new activity we would like to try out is themed homilies. An example of this might be to have two homilists do three weeks on baptism, or perhaps 3 homilists do five weeks on what the bible says about finances. We envision this possibly happening during Ordinary Time, so that Advent,

Lent, Pentecost etc. would all still be celebrated using the Lectionary. This was an idea that came out of the Worship Team, and the new Teaching Team would need to decide whether to follow through on this, or to do something different.

The team will need different gifts, so we encourage those who do not see themselves as teachers to also be a part of this. We will need ideas people, administrative people, mentoring gifts and excitement for learning. And of course, those with teaching gifts may also apply.



Youth Connector (Sarah)

The youth program will continue much the same as last year, with a large group event once a month and the Youth & Young Adult Can I Ask That? lunch with Craig once a month. We're going to try something new this year and add a "Dinner at the Deckerts" once a month, where youth will be invited to come as they are able to connect with the Deckert family and each other over a casual dinner. We will also keep our ears open for volunteer opportunities, especially at the St. Matthews-Maryland Community Ministry, with whom we connected last year. Our goals are to nurture community amongst the youth and to create a safe and comfortable space for the youth to ask big questions, have fun, and be themselves.

Behind the scenes, my goals as Youth Connector are to develop ways to encourage the mentors in their role with the youth, and to work on new (and old) ways to help youth as they navigate the transition from youth to young adult. We all want youth to feel connected at Grain of Wheat, and I hope to increase support for youth as they graduate and explore their roles as adults in Grain of Wheat.

I'm excited for another year as Youth Connector; engaging in this role has been a gift to me and I'm grateful to be a part of the lives of the youth and the life of the church-community.



Children's Worship

As you may have noticed, GoWC-C has been blessed with many children in the last several years. They make up about one third of the GoWC-C population. These delightful, energetic young people are learning about the world around them, their place in the world and God's plans for them. Children are naturally curious, love adventure and experimentation – all tools we at GoWC-C want to spend time using this year, growing and exploring our faith journeys together.

As part of this year, Servant Leaders also want to offer places for the children to experience community and explore who God is. There are several avenues where children are the focus: the first being Sunday morning Children's Worship activities. We will offer programming for Toddlers (1 – 2 years), Atrium (3 – 5 years), Children's' Worship (K – grade3), and Children's Worship (grades 3 – 6). We are using a variety of written material to meet the needs of the various groups and also meet the needs and abilities of those leading. A second opportunity will be the Wednesday evenings during "the Gathering" where children will have time to learn and grow through story and activity. The GOWC-C playgroup will continue this year. It is a great place to come, play together and for parents to find support in shared experiences. It is hosted and organized by parents with young children; we are hopeful that playgroup may become an intergenerational playtime this year. Another opportunity will be family focused social event, planned/hosted by various people on a regular basis through the year. If you'd like to learn, grow, and explore with the children, come join us and we'll learn about God and creation together.



Common Meals

Through many years of memories within GoWC-C, Common Meals hold a special place in our collective hearts, of time well spent together. They are a place where we not only eat together, but we have time to connect about events in our daily lives, have opportunity to meet someone new, re-connect with a friend, and have time to work and visit together while we wash the dishes and sweep the floor.

Because of steady rentals with in the West End Commons building, we are needing to step up the amount of clean up involved after Common Meal on a Sunday morning. The Health Department now requires all renters to: wash dishes meeting health code requirements (i.e. dishwasher rinse temperatures must reach 180 F rinse temperatures or rinsing in a bleach solution when we are hand washing dishes), wipe down all kitchen surfaces with a bleach solution, and sweep and wash both the kitchen and Assembly Hall floors. While we have been trying to meet these guidelines, it is now a requirement of our use of these spaces. In a practical way, it becomes more important that Seed Groups have enough people present on a Sunday morning to ensure we can meet our obligations. While we do have a Kitchen crew, we cannot rely on them to carry out Seed Group responsibilities.

Not every Seed Group has responsibilities with every Common Meal, but all Seed Group Leaders will receive the Common Meal responsibilities mailing every month. Seed Group Leader's will have information about the different assignments, which make Common Meal a success.

The first Common Meal will be a part of the Commitment Ceremony celebration on September 25. Please come and bring food to share for your family and 2 guests. Come to celebrate with us, take time to meet a new friend, re-connect with a friend and be part of community.



Finance

Our financial resources are one of many gifts God has entrusted us with. We have the power to earn money, spend money, share with others, use it foolishly or wisely and return it to God for the building of the kingdom. Within GOWCC, we use money to pay our rent and expenses, pay our Servant Leaders and Youth Connector, and support a variety of outreach opportunities. This money is a gift from individuals within the GOW community entrusted to the community and managed by the Finance Team.

Our Finance Team of Jason Unrau and Carol Gaeke-Franz are stepping aside effective June 2107. Jason has been on the Finance Team for well over a decade and has been a valued and responsible steward of our finances. Carol has been on Finance for two and a half years and has done a stellar job of keeping everything in order. We thank them for their dedicated service to the community.

During the next few months, we will need to find interested and skilled members to create a new finance team. Jason and Carol would like to work with and mentor the new members in the coming months to allow for a smooth transition. If you would like to be part of this conversation or if you would like to be part of the new Finance Team, please talk to a DMC member (Kerry, Craig, Roger, Rob, Paul, Tabitha, Lloyd, Annie) or a Servant Leader.

