



*"To everything there
is a season, a time for every
purpose under heaven."
Ecclesiastes 3:1*

Grace Fellowship Church Shrewsbury SUCCESSION PLAN

**One Generation
commends Your
work to another,
they tell of Your
mighty acts. They
speak of the
glorious splendor
of Your majesty!**

Psalm 145:4-5

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The next chapter in the story of Grace Fellowship Church Shrewsbury

Grace began in 2007 when Jeff and Tracy Smith and a group of approximately forty-five others began meeting to prepare the launch of GFCS at Shrewsbury Elementary School.

Grace Fellowship Church was born, and over the years has been richly blessed by the Lord with growth in almost every way. In 2012 the York Regional Dream Center came into being and ministry began to flourish on the hill in an unprecedented way.

Many church congregations age with their leadership. In other words, churches often lack an intentional effort and plan to prepare and release the next generation of leadership to lead with them, and eventually in their place. The Elders of Grace are committed to making sure that we are seeking the Lord in identifying, equipping and releasing those in the next generation who are clearly called to the work of the Kingdom of God at Grace.

We are ready for succession

Grace Fellowship Church Shrewsbury is entering a season of succession! After over 25 years in leadership, Jeff and Tracy Smith feel it is now the time for them—and for Grace Fellowship—to begin a new season. Furthermore, the Elders and Senior Leaders all affirm their faithful and consistent leadership and confirm it is the right time for succession. This season is further confirmed by our recognized spiritual overseers and the next generation of leaders at Grace.

Succession and its benefits

Succession is a Biblical (see GFCS Document "*Principles from Biblical Instances of Succession in Leadership*") and healthy process in any church, movement, or organization. It acknowledges that as time moves on, the world and the people within it change.

While requiring careful consideration, succession is a God-given opportunity to empower and release the next generation of leadership in the church. It is an opportunity to enhance the vision and values of the church, but also to utilize others who will lead in new, creative, and compelling ways. The Elders agree that the church should not "age out" with its leadership. Many congregations fail to identify and release next generation leaders due to generational differences, issues of control, etc. and, as a result, the church often loses relevance and sometimes even dies with its aging leaders.

Succession should ensure continuity of calling and values, yet give room for changes in methods and approaches. It is about identifying those with the character, knowledge, commonality of values, and skills to lead a church into a new season. Succession also provides an opportunity for growth and multiplication.

Explaining Our Process



During sabbatical this past year, Jeff and Tracy felt it was time to begin a more intentional process for succession. While Jeff has been actively succession planning for over six years, God made it clear during sabbatical that it was time to move forward with a clear and deliberate process. In years past, Jeff and the Elders have prayerfully discussed many candidates for the future Lead Pastor of Grace Fellowship Church including Alex Gilbert, Matthew Von Stein, Mark Fair and Ben Lawrence. Upon return from sabbatical, there was an intentional thrust to seek God's will regarding both Mark Fair and Ben Lawrence as candidates for this position.

Both of these Godly men entered into an intentional season of personal discernment, as well as discernment in fellowship with Pastor Jeff, the Elders and others. It became clear to each of them, in different ways and at different times that neither of them were to be the future Lead Pastor of Grace. This process of discernment took many months of seeking the Lord.

While engaging in this process, it became evident that there was yet another man to consider for this role. In listening to his preaching and seeing indicators that apostolic gifting and visionary leadership were clearly in place, Pastor Jeff began conversations with Phil Cook about the calling that the Lord has placed on his life. Phil's candidacy was brought before the Elders by Jeff, and through prayer and a season of discernment, Phil was asked to consider moving into the role of Associate Pastor while becoming the emerging candidate for the future Lead Pastor of Grace.

Phil and Jess Cook prayerfully considered this opportunity, and eventually confirmed that they believe it is God's calling on their life and family to enter into a season of development unto eventual deployment as the next Lead Pastor of Grace.

The road ahead

It is anticipated there will be approximately a two-year period of preparation during which Pastor Phil will be further mentored and trained by Pastor Jeff and others on our team. This transition phase will have many facets, including further theological training and thorough emersion into every area of church leadership. Pastor Jeff will continue to function in his role as church father. It is likely that Phil will step into the role of lead pastor early in 2025.

However, the precise time frame may change depending on whether those involved feel complete readiness. A prayer team is being established that will meet regularly to pray for Phil and Jess, for Jeff and Tracy, and for Grace Fellowship Church during this time of transition. All those involved will be able to submit requests to this prayer team to facilitate full agreement in fervent and effective prayer.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What was the process for choosing a candidate for the next Lead Pastor?

As stated above, the process of succession planning has been unfolding for over six years. While a broader external search for the next Lead Pastor of Grace has been considered, it is the belief of the Elders of Grace that "home-grown" leaders are often the best choice for succession in every area of ministry. Much prayerful discernment has gone into this process, with an intentional effort given to bringing a balance of the five-fold gifts into the pulpit and seeking Apostolic gifting in the next Lead Pastor of Grace. The Elders and Senior Leaders of Grace clearly see this gifting in Pastor Phil, and are excited for the next season of his development as God reveals more. Leadership uses the five "C's" as a guide in determining readiness and gifting for every role at Grace and the Dream Center: *Calling, Character, Competency, Chemistry and Capacity*. In each area, we have determined together that Pastor Phil clearly shows developmental indicators that he is growing and excelling in what is needed for the Lead Pastor role.

How did the Elders arrive at the selection of possible candidates and then narrow it down to one?

Grace Fellowship Church is deeply relational. In other words, we highly value how the Lord works in the context of organic and natural relationships that He prompts us to pursue. Each candidate that was considered has a deep relational connection to Grace, with lots of opportunities for interaction, discernment and observation. The Elders invited each candidate considered, in one way or another, to listen with them and seek the Lord in His calling for their lives. It has become apparent over time to Pastor Phil, his wife Jess, the communities that he currently leads, and the Elders of Grace that he is clearly the candidate for this role that God has identified.

Why is a two-year transition necessary?

As with any new role—especially those that involve significant responsibilities—a time of training, familiarization, and preparation is needed. This is particularly the case with a large church like Grace. The new lead pastor will need to understand all facets of leadership and engage in each area of ministry to gain a more thorough understanding of the whole.

As church father of Grace Fellowship Church, Pastor Jeff will continue developing the core leadership team and serving as the lead elder. The time frame above will enable a strong team to be developed to support the local church and ensure ongoing pastoral care and leadership. Grace Fellowship has always been led in team. The Elders are committed to seeing this team approach and a multiplicity of leadership handed off to the next generation. While the final decision making authority regarding the next Lead Pastor belongs to the Elders, they together acknowledge that “good leaders listen”. Therefore, throughout the developmental process, the Elders will continue to listen to members of the Grace body for confirmation of Phil’s calling and readiness.

Will the Lead Pastor's job description be the same as it was in the past, or is it being amended? Will the nature of the role be changing?

In broad terms, the nature of the role and job description will remain as they were historically. As things develop, modifications will inevitably be made as the Lord reveals more about what is needed and as Pastor Phil's unique leadership style emerges.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy my true son in the faith: grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Timothy 1-2

Who will give oversight to the new Lead Pastor?

Oversight for the new Lead Pastor will be provided first by the Elders and Pastor Jeff, but also by the current Overseers of GFCFS. Keith Yoder of Teaching the Word Ministries and Ben Abell of Grace Fellowship in Timonium, MD will continue in their oversight roles. Keith Yoder has served as personal leadership coach to Pastor Jeff for the past 16 years and could also serve in this role for the development and deployment of Pastor Phil as well.

Will Pastor Phil be immediately leaving his roles in Student and Young Adult Ministries (Awaken and The Grove)?

No. Pastor Phil will continue to serve in his roles as Pastor of Students and Director of the Grove. He and the Elders are committed to making sure that these vital ministries have the next called and gifted leader in place before Phil would begin the process of transitioning to full-time engagement as Lead Pastor over the whole of the church.

Will Pastor Phil's responsibilities increase? How will he manage all this?

The Elders and Overseers of Grace are committed to not allowing Phil to engage in too many responsibilities. Initially, Phil will be engaging in a developmental process and moving toward a one-third role in teaching on Sundays. He will also be engaging in envisioning for the future of Grace with Pastor Jeff and the Elders. Jeff and the Elders are committed to walk alongside of Phil, Jess and their family as they see God work in developing Phil's gifts.

Is Succession biblical?

Yes. It is clear throughout scripture that a plan to multiply leadership and empower the next generation of leadership is important to the Lord's will and work. In the cases of Moses to Joshua, David to Solomon, and Elijah to Elisha there is much for us to learn about how Godly succession is to take place. For more information about these biblical examples, please see the elder issued document called "Principles from Biblical Instances of Succession in Leadership".

An additional document titled "Markers of Readiness for Succession in Emerging Leaders" is also available upon request. If you have further questions about succession at Grace, please feel free to email the Elders at elders@gfcshrewsbury.org.

