

Rev. Andrew's Weekly Email Addressing Follow-Up to Listening Sessions

May 5, 2015

Dear Grace Church Family and Friends,

Back in February, we held some parish wide listening sessions to discuss the Sunday experience here at Grace. These sessions arose because of the dramatic growth (about 40%) in attendance which we have experienced over the last 5 years. While this growth has been exciting, and an incredible blessing, it also meant our 10:30 service was often "overcrowded" by typical Church standards. Therefore, the Vestry, clergy and Worship Committee wanted to hear your thoughts, feelings and experience of our worship together.

Now that Easter is behind us, the Worship Committee, clergy and staff are back at work, digesting all of the information gathered at the listening sessions, and as we do, there are two questions guiding us:

1. What, if anything, should we do about our worship schedule?
2. What can we do to enhance the experience at Grace Church?

In response to question two, lots of great ideas emanated from the listening sessions, and we are already putting some of them into practice. Hard copies of sermons, for example, are now available in the narthex (church entryway). We are beginning to record sermons, and those recordings can be accessed on the church website. In the near future, we hope to record Adult Forums as well. One week ago, we had our first ministry presentation in church so parishioners could learn more about one of our ministries directly from the ministry leaders, and we will continue to have other ministry presentations from time to time in the future.

While these may seem like small changes, I strongly believe they will enhance our life together, and we will continue to implement some of the other great ideas as we can.

As for question one (what, if anything, should we do about our worship schedule?), that is a much more challenging question to answer. The Worship Committee recently solicited help from Joey Rick, Canon for Congregational Vitality at the diocese, and she provided invaluable insights. Knowing how well Grace Church is doing, her overriding theme was, "Don't mess it up," and the Worship Committee is taking that to heart.

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It was clear from the listening sessions that many participants do not feel the 10:30 service is too crowded. A large number of respondents like the energy of the service and do not want to lose that special “Grace Church feeling.” Many specifically noted they do not want a third morning service. Some suggested a Saturday afternoon or Sunday afternoon service.

We are not rushing into any decisions, and there will not be any changes to our regular Sunday schedule in the immediate future. But, it is important we continue our parish wide conversation on this issue as we think about and plan for the future.

The Vestry is concerned about the number of times we meet or exceed the fire code for the church building: since the beginning of the program year in September, there have been 32 regular Sundays, and we have been at or exceeded the fire code 6 times. As many participants in the listening sessions noted, parking for the 10:30 service can be very challenging. And, while attendance remains essentially the same, we have seen a noticeable drop in newcomers and visitors since the end of October. Is this because the church feels too crowded to visitors? It is hard to say, but we should all realize that we are the only church of our size in the Diocese of Washington that holds two services on a Sunday. The others hold at least three, and many churches that are smaller than Grace also hold more services in order to serve their community.

I hope you find this update helpful. As always, please let me know if you have any questions.

See you in church,

Andrew