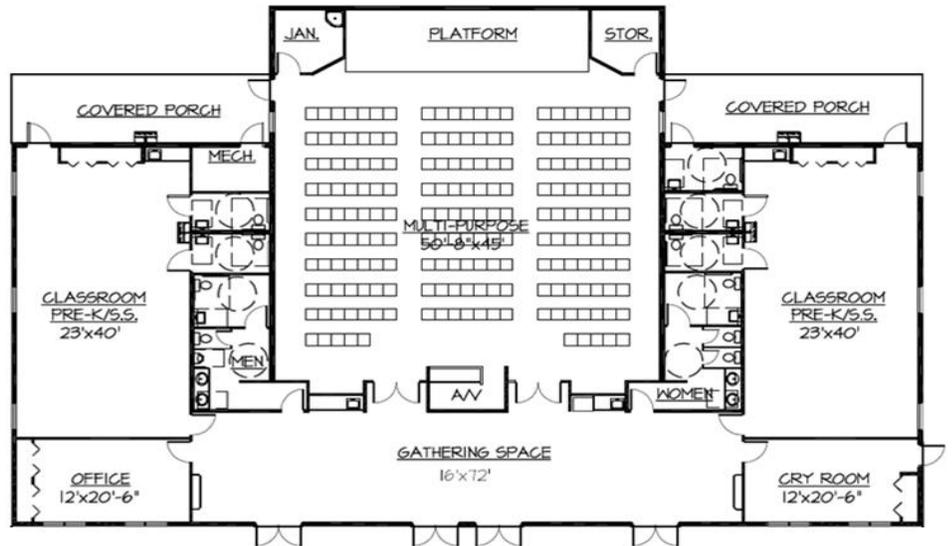




We Are Stepping Out In Faith To Build A Church Home

Lately the members of our church have felt a bit like Peter standing with one foot hanging over the edge of the boat as our Lord is inviting us to walk to him on the water. After 10 years of ministry together our core group of 65 people finds itself taking a big step of faith at a key moment. We have purchased property, and we have submitted plans to build the first phase of our main church campus (a 7,760 square foot multipurpose building). We will soon have the permits to turn the sod, and we also have skilled laborers and a licensed contractor willing to work on a volunteer basis. As a result we anticipate completing a \$1.25 million building for under \$1 million. We have over \$200,000 on hand, we are firmly cleared for a \$300,000 mortgage, and we are trusting the Lord to provide for each phase of this project.

The theme of our project is **“Reaching Beyond Ourselves.”** This motto reflects our desire to



In this new facility our church family will be better equipped to...

- welcome guests and to worship God together
- teach God's word to kids & help teens to develop a living faith in the Lord
- host a variety of Bible studies, growth groups, and Grace Institute classes
- share the gospel with unconnected people in our community

extend God's love beyond the walls of a building, and it also acknowledges that we cannot accomplish this endeavor on our own. So we are inviting family members, friends, partner

churches, and others to make an investment with eternal dividends, and **we trust that God “is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think”** Ephesians 3:20 (NAS).

The Community Of Wesley Chapel, FL Is Growing



10 years ago God led Pastor Jeff and Heather Olsen to begin a new congregation in FL.

Wesley Chapel, FL is located just NE of Tampa along I-75. Over the past decade 7 local schools, 3 regional malls, a new hospital, a new state college, and several other major projects have been added to this community. God has placed our future church home near a large regional park, 3 public schools, and a future interstate exit. As we see the ongoing growth in this area, **we see the potential for a growing, vibrant ministry of significant impact.**

Our confidence going forward is strengthened by the ways God has sustained us in the past. While mission work is never easy, we are happy to report that God's word is bearing fruit and lives are being changed. As we share the good news of Jesus we want to build a better community where people are encountering grace, experiencing growth, exercising their gifts, & extending God's love. We are grateful for God's faithfulness & the support of others.



Q&A With Pastor Robert Overgaard (CLB President '86-'01)

At this moment when we are about to invest significant resources, commit to a major mortgage, and provide extensive volunteer work, we decided to talk it over with an experienced church leader to gain his perspective on the long term task of establishing a full service local congregation. Pastor Robert Overgaard has helped us to see ourselves in a way that is both encouraging and challenging. We would like to communicate these insights to you and invite your support by sharing a brief question and answer exchange.

Question from Grace Community leadership: Pastor Overgaard, in view of your 60+ years of ministry experience what would you consider to be the most strategic next step that a congregation like ours could take to become a stronger center of spiritual ministry in our community?

Answer: Luther was asked what he would do today if he knew he would die tomorrow. He replied, "Plant a tree." I take it he didn't value solving some current crisis as the most important thing he could do. What he valued most was *making a positive long range difference going forward.*

Following this line of thought, the most strategic practical step for a congregation in your situation seems to be the one you are taking as you prepare to build a house of worship. It comes as a shock to some, but it takes about 30 years to build a new congregation in a new community that is self-sustaining (paying its own way and growing its own leaders), strong enough to nurture its own body life, and able to maintain a well-rounded mission that reaches beyond itself. This means that the first target is to become a congregation of 150 to 300 people. This kind of fellowship of believers in a residential setting needs a physical home.

Q: We have worked for 10 years to build a solid core group of believers, to gather significant financial resources, to purchase land, and to complete plans. Despite many generous efforts, we still need around \$500,000. This is a crossroads time for us. Can you suggest a way forward?

A: I suggest that we think this through together. When we hit the wall, it is a good time to go back to the basics. We need to review where we have been, where we are going, and what we have to do to get there. Let's count the cost again: what difference does it make whether or not you build? In the most profound sense how can you be sure that Grace Community Church is a compelling project worth investing your lives in for 30 years?

It is always important for us to be aligned to God's purposes. Jesus set the course for the new born church when he said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." What is this church? Essentially it is a local church. It is a body of believers in a given community modeled along the lines of the synagogues that were scattered across the Roman Empire. It is the resulting congregations with elders and with people gifted of the Holy Spirit. It is a "gathering" that gathers on the Lord's Day. When God's purposes dominate

our every step, we can trust God to provide the resources.

We also need to keep aligned to God's spiritual design for the church. The church is not just a crowd. Above all the church is a fellowship of believers where the Word is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered. The means and methods we use must be compatible with the purposes of God. The results will not be superficial. People come to faith in God through Jesus Christ, and they are transformed to the image of His Son. There is a change of relationship to God and a change of mind about most everything else (repentance).

When a congregation is spiritually mature and strong, it will be a center of faith and life where believers walk with the Lord, mature in Christ, edify each other in the Spirit, and become a body to which new people can be added by the Spirit's call, all to the glory of God. As followers of Christ we should be doing all manner of good that we are able to do, but the strategic need is for spiritually strong congregations attuned to God's purposes, available to Him as an agency of redemption and maturity in Christ, able to resist evil and advance good, and able by grace through faith to make a difference.

Q: 30 years? Isn't that a discouragingly long time to come to maturity?

A: I'm sure a lot of parents think so! A congregation may be doing effective ministry from the first day onward, but if we want to establish a true center of ministry in a new community from scratch it may well take 30 years. This has been true of most of the congregations in our fellowship started since 1950. For example, one of our congregations that started in Minnesota shortly after 1950 had an unglamorous but spiritually vital first decade. It received significant outside help in its first building project. Several more years down the line it started to break out with a larger building in a new location, followed by a new sanctuary and more facilities in years to come, and finally expanding into a second campus. The highest risk of the congregation ever reaching its current maturity was in the first two decades.

Q: Surely all of us have seen exceptions to this 30 year rule, right?

A: As always it is the exceptions that confirm the rule. If we pin your hopes on the exceptions we are likely to discover that it is precisely *those exceptional forces that we don't have!* We will pin your hopes on fantasy. Let God do the exceptional things. He usually does. But when the planning is in our hands to build the tower, we must count the cost to ourselves.

Q: We feel we have a realistic vision of building a healthy congregation as you described, and we are eager to reflect on how God might lead us

according to His Word. Yet our work load is skewed toward the operation of temporary worship facilities, and we are experiencing "growing pains." With this in mind we have taken major steps toward a permanent home and we are amazed that God has brought us this far. Still we need another \$500,000 to construct the first phase, and this seems to be beyond ourselves. Sometimes we feel the only way to move ahead is to "walk on water!" In your opinion what are the next steps?

A: There may be two steps: 1) Set aside time for special prayer; 2) Ask for help from those who have resources. If going forward is God's will for you, God has resources.

Let's talk in a down to earth way. A new phase calls for a new understanding. A simple way to begin is to start with more simple economic times. Capital works just like land, but in another form. In a simple agrarian society, people who have land can grow a crop. In the same way that land opens up the possibility of production, a church home can open up possibilities for outreach and growth.

This is a normal and potentially very fruitful expansion of your ministry. A full service church needs a home to allow for the diversity of its ministries in which God calls us to serve. But the capital needs are greater than you can afford. You may be able to get a mortgage, but when you start from scratch you can't get access to enough capital to enter into the kind of ministry that will lead to a full, healthy multi-

generational church. You have to keep on keeping on and seek ways to reach the hearts and minds of the people God has prepared who have more room in their giving plans to serve the Lord, but haven't yet been exposed to this need. They want to give because they live in the realm of grace and are open to the particular call of the Holy Spirit.

Q: This perspective is encouraging. What additional thoughts do you have?

A: Years ago one of our congregations in New York launched a very substantial building program for the size of the group. Before long the financial waters were rising so that this small congregation became like a child wading into deep water. The congregation found itself standing on their tip toes with the waters of debt lapping at their ears. One of their elders, who was himself very generous in his giving came to see me as the district president and asked if I thought the people of the district would help. As he set the scene for me, he said words to the effect that, "We may have been foolish in practical terms to build a building of this high quality in our upscale neighborhood, but even so, I don't think God will abandon us in our efforts to serve Him." What a blessed assurance to know that the God who is building his church is a God of mercy and grace, able to mend what is torn, fix what is broken, renew what is downcast and do "beyond all that we ask or think" to extend his reign of grace.

It Is Important For Us To Move Forward At This Time

Time is of the essence for us, and **we are asking God to provide another \$500,000.** We want to reach out to the many new families that are moving into this area, and we are compelled by Christ's love for the lost to begin as soon as possible.

Continuing to meet in portable settings could hinder the growth of the congregation, and it may discourage some of the members who might feel fatigued. It is also not good stewardship to pay \$20,000 per year in order to rent a school that we only have access to for a few hours a week.

On the other hand in our new facility, we would have the opportunity to expand our ministry and to host an established Christian preschool that could provide income to the church.

Furthermore, we have connections with several groups who are ready and able to help with aspects of construction on a volunteer basis.

Nevertheless, we are fully aware of the truth found in Heb. 3:4 that "every house is built by someone but God is the builder of everything." For this reason we are committing this project to the Lord in prayer.



Elders Don Cole, Jeff Olsen & Arnie Nordaas

We Are Grateful For Your Prayers

As God prepares a place for our ministry, we trust that He will also prepare our leadership team for a growing ministry in this place. We believe that God has important plans for our church, and we would invite you to pray for us. Please pray for God to send workers to join our church family in sharing the good news of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus Christ. "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" Matthew 9:37-38.



Note to the tech savvy!

We have posted our plans to build a church home at www.ExploreGrace.com. Feel free to download a pdf and email it to select friends. If you know people who might have room in their giving plans to include this need and who are more comfortable with print media, you may wish to serve the mission to which God has called us by printing it out and giving it to them.

Your Support Is Greatly Appreciated

Thank you for prayerfully considering this opportunity to invest in God's Kingdom and to partner with us in this project. Although we live in a time when an increasing number of people in the United States have no relationship with God, we believe that the establishment of gospel proclaiming congregations is at the center of God's plan to fulfill the Great Commission.

Looking for help on a building project leaves us wondering how God can do this. We don't know. Some individuals may find they are at a special moment when they can make a generous one-time donation. Many people might be willing to give what to them is a larger gift, and this gift together with the gifts of others will make the difference. In addition, there may be times when a congregation has mission money it might wish to direct to an important

project or when it has the ability to collect a special offering. We know this must be a "God-thing." Just as we ask God in prayer for things we hardly know how to pray about, so we are letting the church know of our need.

With such a large goal we can identify with the words of Paul when he wrote "We are not saying that we can do this work ourselves. It is God who makes us able to do all that we do" II Corinthians 3:5 (NCV).

If you are able to partner with us as we impact lives for generations to come and help families find peace with God, we would greatly appreciate your generous support. You can make a secure donation to our "Building Fund" at www.ExploreGrace.com. You can also mail a gift to "Grace Community" at 5450 Bruce B Downs Blvd #331 Wesley Chapel, FL 33544.

Check out a 4 min video at www.ExploreGrace.com or www.FB.com/exploregrace