

# THE GRACE PLACE WELLNESS UPDATE

November 2023

 Lutheran Church Extension Fund  
› Grace Place Wellness



Rev. Bart Day, LCEF President & CEO; Rev. Dr. Darrell Zimmerman, Retired Executive Director, Grace Place Wellness and Rev. Dr. Greg S. Walton, VP, Ministry Solutions, Grace Place Wellness.

## Welcome to the first issue of The Grace Place Wellness update!

Let me take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Greg Walton, and I have been serving Grace Place Wellness for one year this month. I pastored two congregations in Georgia before being elected as District President for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) Florida–Georgia District, where I served for 13 years before completing my terms. It was then I joined Grace Place Wellness.

This past year I was privileged to work alongside Rev. Dr. Darrell Zimmerman, the now-retired former executive director of Grace Place Wellness. He was an excellent mentor, and I learned a lot. In fact, I mostly learned that I

have much more to learn! Darrell retired in June of this year and is enjoying spending time with his wife Carol and his family as well as on the golf course.

Since its founding by Dr. John Eckrich in 1999, Grace Place Wellness has been passionate about supporting church workers and helping them find restored joy in ministry. Dr. Eckrich and Dr. David Ludwig began their work by taking workers on retreats and teaching them about self-care. This continued in new and wonderful ways under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Zimmerman. However, when COVID hit, retreats were forced to stop, and regaining momentum and

interest has been a challenge. We will continue to offer retreats when requested and integrate them into Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) Ministry Solutions events. However, we also began to explore new avenues to provide care for church workers.

### Avenues of Care

The first new avenue is ministry sabbaticals. A ministry sabbatical, which differs from an academic sabbatical, is primarily for rest and renewal. Church workers are often so devoted to their vocation that they neglect their own self-care. Perhaps the illustration of a modern-day steam clothes iron will help. Many of these devices come with an automatic shut-off switch. It will automatically shut down if it runs too long or gets too hot. Church workers don't come with that switch, and the result of running too long or getting too hot is burnout. A ministry sabbatical, based on God's rest in Genesis, is a way to provide time for church workers to step out of the routine of their role and get needed rest and refreshment. This could include study and exploration, but especially rest. You can find more information about sabbaticals and some planning guides by visiting [lcef.org/graceplace](https://lcef.org/graceplace).

The second area I want to highlight is church worker support teams. Grace Place Wellness has always

## OUR MISSION

Grace Place Wellness nurtures vitality and joy in ministry by inspiring and equipping church workers to lead healthy lives.



done an excellent job providing care for retreat workers. It is five days of encouragement, self-reflection and coming to a better understanding of personal wellness needs. Often, once a retreat is over—within a few weeks to a few months—workers are caught up in the hectic pace of ministry, neglecting what they learned and finding themselves in a similar place before going on retreat. The problem is we treat the symptoms but often neglect the root cause, which is the ministry environment.

We are beginning to work with congregational leaders to understand the benefit of awareness and care for church workers in a ministry setting. Often, ministries are so focused on getting ministry accomplished that they forget about the ones leading the charge. When we find declining numbers of church workers, it is important to support and retain the ones currently serving so faithfully. There is always value in showing appreciation and support to God's servants in ministry but never more so than right now! Grace Place Wellness is developing training and information for ministries to understand the needs and provide support to their workers. We have learned that happy and healthy workers are better equipped to lead happier and healthier ministries.

### Supporting Wellness

LCEF Ministry Solutions, of which Grace Place Wellness is a part, has recently launched a monthly podcast on wellness to reach a broader audience and share about the Lutheran Wellness Wheel. Plans include inviting guests with

wellness expertise to join us for conversations which will assist church workers in reclaiming the joy of ministry. The goal of Grace Place Wellness is to positively impact the lives of church workers and their families, so they are better able to serve our Lord and His Church. However, we need your help.

One great way you can help is by recognizing and encouraging your church workers. Show these servants of Christ your love and support. Sometimes a simple note of thanks goes a long way to inspire a church worker. You can find more ideas at [lcef.org/inspire](http://lcef.org/inspire).

The work of Grace Place Wellness is increasingly critical as we continue to see stressed-out church workers putting in long hours and in the midst of many people, feeling so lonely. You can help simply by showing them you care. LCEF is your ministry partner, and Grace Place Wellness is here to help you lift up church workers for healthier and happier ministries, as together, we continue to connect people to Jesus.

Your partner in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Dr. Gregory S. Walton".

**Rev. Dr. Gregory S. Walton**  
VP Ministry Solutions  
Grace Place Wellness