

THE GRACE PLACE WELLNESS UPDATE

Spring 2024

 Lutheran Church Extension Fund
> Grace Place Wellness



Lent is a wonderful reminder to anticipate what God has in store! It has great value. The forty-day journey is a wonderful opportunity for the believer in Jesus to find and take time to rest and reflect in Him. As they made their way to Jerusalem, one image of the disciples is their contemplation at the words of Jesus. Three times Jesus plainly told them God's plan. In Mark 10:33-34 Jesus says, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him. And after three days He will rise."

Lent is a time to slow down and

consider our unworthiness before God, always remembering our worth is found only in Jesus, who has forgiven our sins. When I was in the parish, my Ash Wednesday practice included not only the imposition of Ashes, but following communion, I stationed elders around the sanctuary, armed with wipes, to remove the ashes with these words, "Christ has cleansed you, you are free!" The people had just received the Sacrament, reminding them of the power and promise of forgiveness in Jesus. For my congregation, it was intended to be a reminder that even in the darkness of Lent, we know there is the Light of Life. Jesus never leaves us in the depths of despair. He willingly bore it all for each of us. His journey to the Cross is a

powerful reminder of the new life He has given us. "Ponder anew, what the Almighty can do!"

Martin Luther once quipped, "Strange, though I am saved from sin, I am not saved from sinning." For me, this captures the tension of Lent. We know we are free from sin and death, and yet, try as we might, we continue to struggle with sin. In spite of this, we know how the story ends! Jesus' promise enables me to reflect and rest in Jesus, even in the darkness of Lent, even when the devil taunts me about my sins. Luther also said, "So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: 'I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf."

His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is, there I shall be also!”

This is the promise we cling to. His suffering and death had great purpose. Lent is a time to remember the price which was paid for our new life. There is a place for somber recognition of the horrible cost in the suffering and death of Jesus. Yet, His willingness to die in my place brings renewed joy as we take time to stop, rest in His promise and reflect on the truth of our new life in Him.

If you’ve ever seen a small child laughing at a funeral, it isn’t meant as disrespect. It generally indicates

an inability to grasp the depth of the occasion. As a believer in Jesus, while we understand the solemn nature and benefit of the forty-day journey, we can’t help but smile, at least on the inside, because we know that His death was not in vain. We know His victory over sin and the devil. His suffering and death have great purpose. It carries with it an iron-clad promise for those who trust in Jesus, fully realized as we celebrate the Resurrection. The real value of Lent is that it prepares us as it points us to the unspeakable joy of Easter! So, journey well. There’s Light at the end of the road!



THE GRACE PLACE PODCAST

You may have heard Grace Place Wellness has a new podcast. With co-host Rev. Tom Eggebrecht, SVP of Ministry Solutions, we are exploring church worker wellness, beginning with a review of the Lutheran



Wellness Wheel and the issues facing many of our church workers. Stay tuned for our upcoming episodes featuring wellness tips, special guests and a focus on keeping our LCMS church workers healthy and well. Follow along at lcef.org/gpw-podcast.

CLARITY PROCESS



Among the offerings of LCEF’s Ministry Solutions team, of which Grace Place Wellness is a part, is the Ministry Clarity Process. This process helps congregational ministries in strategic planning and has

assisted hundreds of congregations across the LCMS. Grace Place Wellness has created an assessment which will be offered to enrolled congregations. The goal is to assess the health and wellness of the ministry and how they could best include wellness goals in their overall strategic planning. This is one area we may employ Grace Place Wellness retreats.

SABBATICALS

Few in our churches understand the real value of a sabbatical, especially in our current times. With increasing expectations, higher stress levels, and an alarming rate of burnout, offering workers a sabbatical is extremely beneficial. We have all heard about the shrinking pool of church workers becoming shallower every day. A ministry sabbatical is an investment in the long-term care of church workers. It is an opportunity for church workers to rest, relax and renew themselves to be better equipped for ministry. It adds longevity to ministry, not just for the worker, but also for the ministry.

A sabbatical is not a vacation, but a focused time for renewal. It's an opportunity to explore, learn and be refreshed. Some have used a sabbatical to visit other ministries—a luxury not often experienced when you are in the midst of serving. Some learn new skills or reconnect with family and friends. Some have spent part of their sabbatical time serving others in a new way, in their community and beyond. Some have used the sabbatical to care for self, which is necessary.

One pastor, who recently returned from a sabbatical, writes, "The most positive aspects of the sabbatical were the quality sleep and exercise we got to enjoy,



the wonderful educational experience and time I got to spend with my best friend, my wife." With the full support of his leadership, this pastor shared that since his return, he has been energized, as have his leaders, and they have been more productive in their outreach.

LCEF has just begun a new Grace Place Wellness Sabbatical Fund which will allow us to assist workers in need of sabbaticals. I would be happy to share more about this with you.

Visit lcef.org/ministry-sabbatical for our guide to help workers and leaders plan their sabbatical.



CHURCH WORKER SUPPORT TEAMS

Grace Place Wellness has not abandoned retreats. We are in the process of reformatting the process, and we will share more about that in the future. One concern I share is that often we held retreats, made a wonderful impact on a couple, sent them off with God's blessings, only to learn within a few months that the stress returned. Truthfully, ministry stress will always be a factor. The issue, in many cases, was while the worker experienced change, the surrounding environment had not. While leaders were happy their worker and spouse were able to experience the retreat, it didn't necessarily show change on the whole ministry.

Since January, I have been visiting with Circuit Visitors gatherings in several districts, to herald the need for church worker support teams. These teams are made up of lay people in the ministry who serve as intentional advocates for the church workers and their

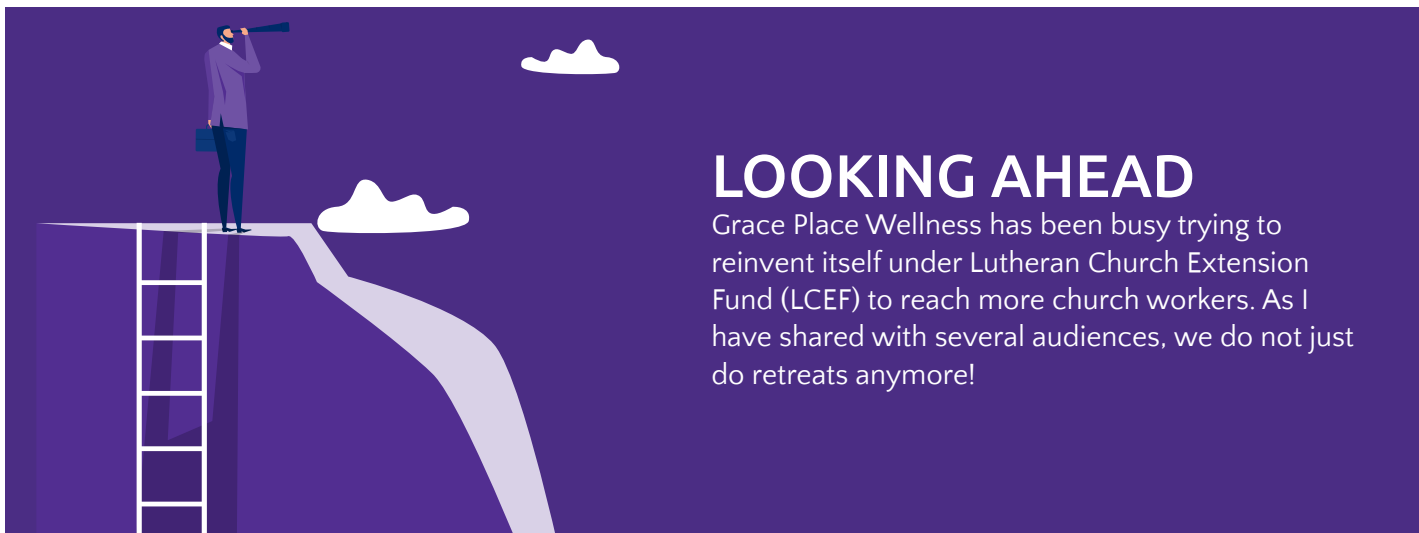
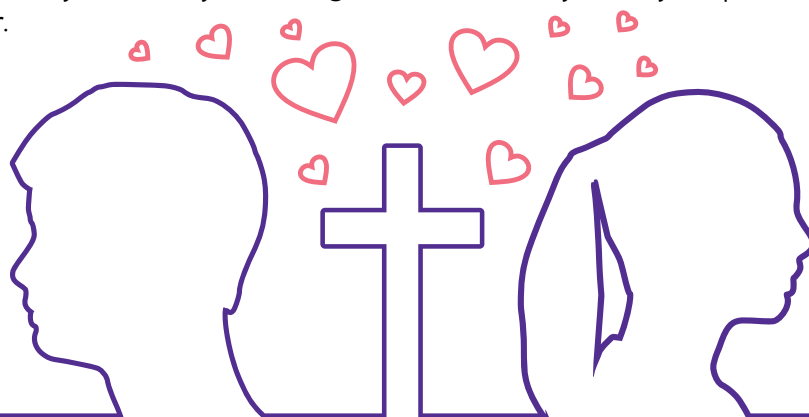
families. They ensure healthy communication and expectation levels are maintained. When a ministry begins to understand that church workers are one of the most valuable investments they can make and how simple care giving can make a huge difference, it could positively impact the health of a ministry.



NEW AREA OF MINISTRY BEING EXPLORED: THE PASTOR'S WIFE PROJECT

The role of the pastor's wife is one of the most complex areas of ministry. While they do not have a call, they are often pivotal to the overall ministry. Frequently under scrutiny for either being too involved or not involved enough, these women have a very unique and important role to play. Finding ways to provide care specifically to these women is an important way for Grace Place Wellness to impact the wellbeing of pastoral ministry. I am currently working with several other entities on this project.

These are exciting days for Grace Place Wellness as we explore how God can use this ministry to encourage joy and vitality in ministry. We are grateful and thank you for your partnership as we serve the church together.



LOOKING AHEAD

Grace Place Wellness has been busy trying to reinvent itself under Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) to reach more church workers. As I have shared with several audiences, we do not just do retreats anymore!



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