

VISION FORWARD



IS 2021 A YEAR OF REVIVING?

“Be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). This is our vision and theme for 2021, Elim Grace. And there’s an excitement and anticipation in my spirit already. I believe God IS on the move and something IS happening in our midst. And I do not mean that only in terms of growing attendance.

Our attendance is seeing a steady trend upward. People are coming (back) excited to be in church together! We may not be where we were pre-covid strictly in terms of numbers, but I believe we ARE growing and are in fact a spiritually healthier congregation now than we were before covid — by the grace of God.

I have a sense that the church at large is in a season of “returning from exile”. We are returning from spiritual captivity to false gods back to “the love you had at first” (Revelation 2:4). Misplaced hope in

idols of our own making and choosing are being stripped of whatever power they held over us as the people of God and the Holy Spirit is reorienting us again to Jesus and reordering within us our desires for Him.

We must understand, and never forget, that what is best for America is the church of Jesus Christ, and what is best for the church of Jesus Christ is her wholehearted devotion, love, worship, allegiance, and obedience to Jesus Christ *alone*. So, returning. Reorienting. Reordering. *Reviving*. This is, in fact, ALWAYS the first step in revival: a reviving in and of *the people of God*. And the first step in “reviving,” it seems to me, is repenting. Before the old wells of revival can be dug again, what has stopped them needs to be removed (see Genesis 26:18).

So this year, Elim Grace, we are taking a stand on the living Word of God and we are surrendering ourselves to the Spirit of God. What awaits us is a reviving and, by God’s grace, revival; a church restored and sanctified; the lost saved and spiritual

captives set free; the gospel proclaimed with signs and wonders that confirm the gospel; and more.

Along with all of this there continue to be the good works which God has prepared for us to do: First, Second, and Third goals.

FIRST GOALS (essential):

- Launch church wide Bible reading campaign
- Launch 2+ discipleship campaign
- Attack our mortgage

SECOND GOALS (anticipated):

- Begin Celebrate Recovery small group/large group
- Offer the Alpha Course
- Offer the Alpha Marriage Course

THIRD GOALS (possible):

- Continue our Forums for Unity
- Strengthen Serve Oswego projects
- Build a preaching class

While most of these are self-explanatory, a few comments:

FIRST GOAL: 2+ discipleship campaign — In the winter of 2019, my friend was looking to grow his faith and asked if I could recommend any men's devotionals. I found one and was texting him the information when I felt the Spirit prompt me to do the devotional with him. I bought two copies, one for him and one for myself. While we weren't perfectly consistent, it provided both of us the opportunity to once every week or two bring up something that struck the other in that day's devotional. This has helped us stay accountable to each other, as well as grow our friendship. It is our plan to continue this into 2021.

In the same way, I want to encourage all of us in Elim Grace to participate in a "2+ discipleship campaign". As the name suggests, this will involve you inviting or joining one or more in pursuing some kind of faith building exercise, meaning a daily devotional, a multi-week devotional, a book, weekly conversations, etc. The person(s) you join could be your spouse, your children, a friend, your small group, your Bible study, a friend who's simply exploring faith and Christianity, etc. The opportunities are many! The point is to be in relationship with others and building each other up in the faith.

FIRST GOAL: ATTACK OUR MORTGAGE — Our current facility will be 13 years old this year. We held our first service in it in November of 2008.

At that time our mortgage was \$1.3 million. As it stands today it is \$150,000. We have faithfully and aggressively paid it down. And we want to continue that.

In short, we have regularly paid it down at a rate of \$70,000 a year. At that rate we will cut our remaining balance in half by the end of 2021. However, my prayer is that we can miraculously pay it all off this year! Why?

It's my conviction that we are to begin to plan and move towards expansion. In fact, this was my conviction last year at this time. The year, of course, took an unexpected turn, but through it all a team continued to work on getting preliminary plans, drawing, and figures together.

The plan is to continue this work while paying down our current mortgage. Once our mortgage is paid off or close to it, we will begin to take concrete steps towards the expansion of our facility, which would likely include a new sanctuary, new classrooms, and new offices.

Of course an expansion of space is because of an expected expansion of ministry. Our facility is used constantly both for in-house ministry and to serve like-minded people and groups from our community

While it may seem strange to some to talk about expansion in a COVID or post-COVID world, so is talking of revival in such a world. If God were to send revival, how would that work logistically? Where would they all worship and sit to listen to God's word? How could they all fit, if God chose to do again what He's done throughout history and save hundreds, if not thousands, at one time? But is COVID and its restrictions any impediment to God and His purposes? Or is He not God of the impossible and the creative and the new? He is!

So we will walk and live by faith, not by sight.

SECOND GOAL: The Alpha Marriage Course — It's been a few years since we've offered the Alpha Marriage Course and it is my hope to bring it back this year with my wife, Alissa, and the help of a team. The Marriage Course is a 7 week course and is excellent for couples at any stage and in any

season of their marriage. For any couple looking to grow their marriage, this is an excellent opportunity to do so.

THIRD GOAL: Strengthen Serve Oswego projects — In years past our Serve Oswego project consisted of sweeping our city streets and helping the DPW do some Spring cleaning around town. Last year COVID brought us many unforeseen opportunities and projects like: Operation Frontline, Roots Cafe in Brooklyn, the Kinship Foster Program, and more. We were ready and we responded with great generosity. I am certain that 2021 will bring with it equal and perhaps even bigger opportunities. We will again be watching and waiting, ready to move when God says, “Move”.

As you reflect on our First, Second, and Third goals, if you have any questions about any of them, please don't hesitate to reach out and to ask.

Elim Grace, I am discovering that often times the more we plan to do, the less we actually accomplish. But if we wait on God's plans and walk in obedience to Him, even when His plans seem small or little by comparison to ours, we will *always* accomplish infinitely more. He does have and He does know the plans He has for us, Elim Grace. My prayer, then,—and may it be our prayer—is that we would be given “ears to hear what the Spirit is saying” and that we would be not only hearers but also doers.

Let us move forward, then. Together.

A DESENS HOUSE UPDATE

“It's going to take a lot longer and a lot more work than you imagine.” That's what Elliot Tepper told me a few years back when I shared with him the vision of The Desens House. Elliot runs Betel, an international ministry for drug addicts since the 1970's. And so The Desens House has taken already longer than I expected. But we don't give up. The things God begins, He will finish.

Early next month we will finally be able to submit our application for funding to The Shineman Foundation. I am hopeful that we will receive what we are asking for. And I am hopeful you will join us in prayer for this. Our goal is to open The Desens House sometime this fall to four woman looking for a way out of addiction into a new life. Our vision at

The Desens House is to see generations set free from addiction one life at a time.

There are of course many other things we need your prayers for: the House Mom and her assistant, volunteers, an executive director, provision of ongoing finances and resources, favor with those who will be partnering with us, etc. Without prayer and full dependency on God I know we won't succeed, but with it I believe we will be able to do far more than we ask, think, or imagine.

One day my hope is that The Desens House will be fully self-sufficient and independent of Elim Grace Church. But even so, Elim Grace, YOU said yes when God asked us to purchase The Desens House. YOU said yes by giving your tithes and your offerings. And YOU continue to say yes by your ongoing giving and constant praying. YOUR OBEDIENT YES is making possible the future transformation of lives and generations. And your thanks and praise will ultimately come not from man, but from God (Romans 2:29).

A CALL TO FASTING AND PRAYER

Pastor Bill recently made a prophetic call for fasting. During the month of February, what's something, anything, that you could fast from and take that time to pray for the salvation of the lost? Is it a meal, social media, chess on the computer, etc.? I believe there is one thing for each of us. I am fasting social media this month.

Also, I'm calling us to pray every Thursday for revival. “A revival minute prayer” is just that, setting the timer on your phone for one minute or more and praying for revival.

I don't believe anything God has ever done on the earth has been done apart from the prayers of His people. On the one hand, our prayers bring about God's will. On the other hand, God's will brings about our prayers. For both reasons we can and should “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

REFRESHER: WHAT DO WE VALUE IN OUR LEADERS?

- 1) *Worship Jesus freely* - they easily and freely enter into worship during our services, are not those who stand back and look around

disinterested but lead the way.

- 2) *Fight For Unity* - they kill gossip, won't slander, speak the truth in love, keep each other accountable, are men and women of character, defend one another.
- 3) *Serve With A Smile* - they easily and freely serve, are easy to work with, are a delight and joy to be around, don't grumble and complain
- 4) *Look To Learn* - they are lifelong learners, creative, are part of the solution not the problem
- 5) *Move To Act* - not afraid to fail or to experiment, think inside the box (within the constraints of our time, knowledge, and resources), chase excellence not perfection
- 6) *Come First And Stay Last* - (not literal!) they are available, take initiative, shoulder responsibility, are quick to respond to needs, go the second mile
- 7) *See And Seek The Harvest* - see the vision and seek the harvest God has called us to, have a prophetic passion and insight, have a fire to reach the lost and rally others to join them.

IN THE DAY TO DAY: CHOOSING WELL

Are you faced with a hard-to-make decision right now? After getting advice from others, choose the best course in light of:

- 1) Any relevant Biblical texts
- 2) The opinion of authorities (in family, profession, church, state, etc.)
- 3) Your conscience (James 4:17)
- 4) In examination of your motives
- 5) The best use of your gifts and abilities in God's service
- 6) An assessment of your decision's impact on others

WHAT AM I READING?:

- 1) *When God Comes To Church* by Raymond Ortlund
- 2) *Lead* by Paul David Tripp

3) *The Rise And Triumph Of The Modern Self* by Carl R. Trueman

4) *The Man In The Mirror* by Patrick Morley

5) *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography* by Humphrey Carpenter

KEY THOUGHTS FROM THIS MONTH'S VISION FORWARD:

"We must understand, and never forget, that what is best for America is the church of Jesus Christ, and what is best for the church of Jesus Christ is her wholehearted devotion, love, worship, allegiance, and obedience to Jesus Christ alone."

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