



25th June 2021

Dear Gracepoint Family,

We greet you in the name of Jesus and at this time and pray and hope that you are well and safe.

As we hold one another in our Gracepoint community, we are deeply aware that the COVID-19 pandemic impacts every family, and many amongst our friends and family are sick at this time. We have set up a *Corona Virus Connect* space to find ways to support one another and begin ministries that assist each other. Sharing during times of illness is so needed. The pandemic has changed our lives, and each day we hear stories of how life has to be adjusted, as adults and children in all spheres of life are navigating uncharted spaces. Together we will come to the end of this pandemic, and our sacred stories are a treasure of joy and sadness, and how God continues to use us in the Church, to be healing and transformation that will hold many hearts and souls this time.

How do we ensure we remain agile and caring as Christians in this time? One of the central focuses of the vaccine rollout is to be together and manage our family, friends, our street, our broader communities. It is not unlike the passage in scripture that calls us to go into all the World in ever-changing concentric circles of influence, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the Earth. Our stories and ministry have a Global impact that starts at the centre of our hearts and souls, and reaches out.

Wesleyan and Methodist heritage offer a beautiful space to navigate the four areas of influence. This process is known as the **Wesleyan Quadrilateral**, how **Scripture, Experience, Tradition** and **Reason** pattern our stories and ultimately leave a legacy. Who we were before this pandemic, who we are now and what will emerge on the other side is a legacy we each write, day after day.

The core purposes of the Church and our Christian faith keep us humbled and in prayer and on a journey that God is constantly shaping.

As you know, our community has had many conversations over the past weeks. We have gathered carefully to listen and discern what the *Spirit* is doing in our community. A common thread that keeps emerging is that a **"Time to Reimagine"** Gracepoint is upon us. A journey of discovering our next as a Church, a moment to collaborate and imagine who we are and where God is leading our Church Community.

To do this work, we will embark on a collaborated congregation journey which will be shared as we discover this path. We are reminded that when the people of Israel left Egypt, they knew they were being led from a place to a promised land—entrusting themselves to one another in the journey and having faith in God for the destination.

At this time and in an uncertain world, we together hold a conviction that the Church will always prevail, and that the gates of hell will not stand against the Church because it is the bride of Christ and the witness of the body of Christ.

THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA
PBO Reg. No. 18/11/13/690

GRACEPOINT METHODIST CHURCH

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It is time to rediscover one another to hear our stories, to laugh together in new ways and to hold one another's tears. It is also time to celebrate the joys and be the place of a ***Christ Healed Africa for the Healing of Nations.***

Please find below a summary document prepared by the Society Stewards, capturing the essence of the meetings over the past while.

During July, there will be a Leaders Meeting. By the middle of July, a communication will be sent out inviting the whole Congregation to the journey to reimagine Gracepoint, ***a time and a season of new things*** as we navigate this moment in time. With regards to our Sunday Services, we will remain open, with limited Sunday worship, all depending on your worship requirements. We will remain vigilant in ensuring our spaces are safe, and our community is not in any way exposed.

Please continue to pray and join us in July for **Justice Month**? The year is almost at the midpoint, and we have seen the indomitable Spirit of resilience and care in our Gracepoint community as a courageous spirit prevails.

Wishing you God's grace and peace.

Much love and prayer,

Jacqui and Similo

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A report back on the main themes that emerged from the two (2) Congregation Meetings that took place at Gracepoint earlier this month

OBJECTIVE

To provide a safe place for the Congregation to speak and be heard as they shared their feelings and asked questions regarding the recent changes in the Church relating to the divorce of Bishop Gary Rivas and Gracepoint Lead Pastor Jacqui Rivas and the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and restrictions.

THE BISHOP'S ADDRESS

The Bishop reminded us to respect Gary and Jacqui's privacy, give them space to heal, and understand that the personal details of their divorce are their private concern and should remain as such.

However, the respective pastors were each given the opportunity to pre-record their video messages to the Congregation. The videos were broadcast at the meeting. (link to videos)

When the divorce was announced, Gary and Jacqui were suspended. Bishop Faith explained that suspension was not a disciplinary process but pastoral leave.

During their pastoral leave, support was offered through a Pastoral Commission. The divorce was finalized, and the suspension was lifted without restrictions.

During such a time, the responsibilities of pastoring and ministry are challenging. Work had to continue, which was carried out by the staff of Gracepoint and the leadership of Ben, Similo and Paul.

*Though the mountains are shaken
and the hills be removed,
yet my unfailing love for you will
not be shaken
nor my covenant of peace be
removed,
says the Lord, who has
compassion on you.
Isa 54:10*

STATIONS AND SUCCESSION PLANS

When Gary was appointed Bishop, he worked from Gracepoint (an office selected due to its availability and convenience). Although he was given the opportunity to deliver sermons to his community, he was no longer stationed at Gracepoint.

It has been made clear the few congregants were aware that Gary's term as Bishop had ended.

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He was faced with the MCSA policy that a Bishop does not slot back into their previous station. Various offers were presented to him, and he chose to take the opportunity in the USA. Gary is currently in Camden, South Carolina. Bb

Rev. Jacqui Rivas is stationed at Gracepoint.

Rev. Similo Sanqela is stationed in the Fourways Circuit.

Ministers are stationed for a period of 5 years – the station and the duration are discussed, and the process allows for flexibility and accountability. Stationing is discussed 18 months prior to movement. Tenures can be extended.

For further information on Methodist Processes for stationing, pastors will be engaged throughout the following months.

LOSS, GRIEF & HEALING

After the announcement of Gary leaving for the States and then announcing the divorce (the details of which will remain private), there was a deep sense of loss and grief as in a "death" experienced with the Gracepoint family.

Feelings of sadness, pain, hurt, abandonment, blame (and it's easy to lay blame), and anger has been expressed.

Gracepoint has been fundamentally affected by the divorce and the Covid-19 Pandemic. This has caused disorientation as we can't go back to the way things used to be.

The Gracepoint family and the Rivas family need time to heal.

A Healing Service was suggested.

*Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.
Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say:
Here I am. Isa 58:8-9*

YOUTH

An honest voice from the Youth spoke of the motivational struggle of attending Church whilst at the same time missing the fellowship, Worship and the excitement of Church. Enjoyment was experienced by what

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Gracepoint can offer the Youth online. It was commented that the Youth can be impacted by the response of parents regarding the changes at Church.

2 Questions were raised for consideration:

What are plans being considered for the Youth?

What can be done to bring the Youth together again?

FINANCES

Ben Msimang responded to the congregant's question of Gracepoint's finances.

The Church has been blessed despite the lockdown. Contributions are being made. Although the amount given by individuals is less faithfulness in giving is evident.

The leadership of the Church extends its gratitude to all those that continue to contribute.

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. 2 Co 8:12

THE WAY FORWARD – A NEW SEASON FOR GRACEPOINT

*This is what the Lord says:
Stand at the crossroads and look:
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is, and
walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls. Jer. 6:16*

Gracepoint would like to improve communication with church members and create more opportunities for conversations. Gracepoint is also committed to responding to the needs of a rapidly developing area.

The number of challenges Gracepoint faces cannot be solved by ministry staff alone but through collaborations with the leaders and Congregation. We are all called to consider seriously ways that have worked well in the past (and celebrate them) and new ways.

The idea of creating a survey was suggested. The purpose of the study would be to receive a broader response as to what is currently working well and what is not; what people would like to see happen; interests/involvement/activities/outreach etc.

GRATITUDE

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Gracepoint has had to adapt to a new way of doing Church due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. With all the technology and resources in place, we can connect online for the foreseeable future. The Congregation expressed their gratitude for how the ministers and staff have responded positively to the Covid-19 crisis by embracing new ways to continue their work. Praise was given to the Youth Ministry Leaders, Worship Team and Tech Team for their diligent work and continued support.

Special thanks were given to Jacqui, Similo and Paul for ensuring the community needs were addressed during the lockdown and for their continued service.

*I lift up my eyes to the hills –
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
The Maker of heaven and
Earth.
Ps 121:1*

CONCLUSION

Bishop Faith Whitby asked us to remember God's Church and the work that needs to be done. She encouraged us to commit to fellowship, prayer, good works and the journey forward.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Eph 2:10

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