

GRACE FELLOWSHIP PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Middlesboro, KY

PCA, Ohio Valley Presbytery

Pastor Search Data - September 2021

Grace Fellowship's beloved pastor Don Aven, retired in April 2016. We greatly miss his love, generosity, and leadership. As a result of his decision to retire, we continue a pastoral search for a suitable man to continue leading us through Christ in Middlesboro. The pastoral search committee feels the man that would fit best with us and our situation would be retired or semi-retired (perhaps a retired military chaplain) or a man that would be able to work as a "tent maker" or a church planter with some outside support.

Grace Fellowship is a particularized church of Ohio Valley Presbytery (PCA). The church is located in Middlesboro KY which is at the edge of OVP's southeastern border where Ohio Valley, Tennessee Valley, and Westminster (Virginia) presbyteries (all PCA) come together. Grace Fellowship, before particularization, was being directly overseen by the Session of Trinity Presbyterian Church of Ludlow, Kentucky (PCA) as a "mother - daughter" relationship. While as a mission church we did not have our own Session, God has been pleased to bring us to our new status. We now have two elected Ruling Elders as our Session and a Ruling Elder Emeritus who participates as a non-voting session member.

Grace Fellowship works to establish a Reformed church/presence presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ to Appalachia. The closest truly Reformed churches are all at least an hour away. Middlesboro is in the heart of Appalachia in what might be described as Baptist and Pentecostal country. While there are an abundance of churches in the area, more often than not, one will hear legalism rather than the gospel being proclaimed. This is an area that is so closed to the Reformed faith that the Baptists dis-fellowship their Reformed Baptist brethren. The local Baptist Bible college located about 12 miles from Middlesboro holds conferences whose focus is to speak against Reformed doctrine. Based on the experience of Grace Fellowship since being designated as a mission church in 2011, we conclude that impacting this area with the Reformed faith will be a long, slow process. Regardless of that, Grace Fellowship has more than doubled membership in the last two years. Grace Fellowship prayerfully hopes to continue to shine the light of the Reformed faith in this area until we can grow the loving grace of our Lord in Appalachia.

We desire to continue growing Grace Fellowship by focusing on God's ordinary means of grace. We use as our model the pattern of the early church as found in Acts 2:42 "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." We believe firmly in a worship service patterned after a biblical model that is expressed in the historic Reformed worship practiced currently at Grace Fellowship and Trinity. We believe that this historic Reformed worship service presents the gospel of Jesus Christ in a biblical Trinitarian manner.

Grace Fellowship members believe that the Reformed faith as it is expressed in the Westminster Standards is a clear and accurate summary of the doctrines as they are taught in scripture. Portions of the Confession and Catechisms are quoted from time to time in sermons where this helps to accurately and succinctly explain a particular doctrine that is being addressed in that sermon. In addition, each Lord's Day the scriptures underlying a portion of one of the Larger Catechism questions that sets forth what is required or what is forbidden by one of the Ten Commandments is read by the congregation. Reformed/Christian Catechism questions are also frequently used in liturgies. This is done from week to week to remind us both of what sin looks like in our lives as well as what holiness should look like. The Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed are also frequently part of the liturgy.

Christ's "Great Commission" tells us that as we are going into all the world, we are to be making disciples by baptizing and teaching. In God's providence, several families have come together in Middlesboro who desire to carry out that commission where God has placed us. Interestingly, few of the members of these families have come to the Reformed faith by being raised in Reformed churches. We have mostly come to the Reformed faith through self-study which has led us to the conviction that the Reformed faith is the best summary of the doctrines taught in the Bible. The gospel that we are committed to proclaim is not just a call to be saved (which

is typically all that you hear in this area if you aren't hearing legalism being proclaimed) but also a call to be sanctified which course we are encouraged to pursue because, as we have been reminded from our pulpit on many Lord's Days, we can say "no" to sin because it does not have dominion over us as a result of the finished work of Christ (Romans 6:14) and, indeed, God calls us to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:13-16). God's record in Acts is that He was pleased to build His Church through the use of the ordinary means of grace (e.g., Acts 2:46-47) and we are committed to focusing on His ordinary means of grace and trusting that He will be pleased to increase Grace Fellowship as He increased the church in Jerusalem. As God instructed Zerubbabel regarding the building to which Israel, the OT Church, was called, "This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). We firmly believe that this is His word for us regarding His work in Middlesboro.

One way Grace Fellowship has "reached out" to the larger community is by sponsoring White Horse Inn broadcasts on the local Christian radio station. We pray we can continue reaching out to the community with such things as White Horse Inn broadcasts. Ladies of the church remain active in the community by volunteering to babysit for the Lincoln Memorial University (LMU) Debusk College of Osteopathic Medicine Christian student organization monthly meeting and for many years the congregation has worked with an Associate Reformed Presbyterian organization to hold VBS. Also, ruling elder Floyd Johnson was asked by a local Baptist church to conduct a Wednesday evening Christian world view study class which is "The Truth Project" with Del Tackett from Focus on the Family. Attendance for those lessons was in the 40's.

We are a small, growing congregation and a church with limited financial support. It is probable that a candidate would require additional outside support in the form of a retirement income, "tent-maker" outside employment, or "missionary" style support. A part-time pastoral approach is possible. We currently meet each Sunday morning in a local Seventh Day Adventist facility.

We are a small but varied group of families, ranging from 70+ year old retirees, families with high school and college age youth, families with young children, and young married couples attending LMU or other colleges. Our hymns are accompanied by a guitarist who happens to be an LMU student.

We ask for your support in finding a man that wishes to serve with us by practicing exegetical lectio continua preaching, serving weekly communion, family integrated worship, and frequent fellowship meals and gatherings.

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