

## **Opportunity Profile: Senior Pastor – Grace Presbyterian Church Houston** gpch.org

### **Context**

Grace Presbyterian Church of Houston is a member of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. ECO's mission is "Building Flourishing Churches That Make Disciples of Jesus Christ." Grace is seeking a full time Senior Pastor to lead the church forward into its preferred future of becoming a church which makes disciples by equipping people to make Jesus visible in their daily lives.

Grace was founded in downtown Houston as Lamar Street Presbyterian Church in 1876, became Second Presbyterian Church in 1887, moved into a new larger campus in 1901 and relocated from downtown Houston to the west side of Houston in a 1969 merger with a young church plant, St. Matthews Presbyterian Church, and then became part of ECO in 2014. Subsequent to the COVID-19 pandemic, Grace averages approximately 380 people in weekly in-person attendance and has a staff of approximately 30 full time and part time employees. The annual operating expense budget is approximately \$3.7M.

A significant part of the ministry of Grace is Grace School which has almost 500 students in grades pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup>. This Christian school is an integral part of the church and possesses a strong reputation in Houston and offers a significant opportunity for engaging and attracting new people by leveraging the church/school relationship in greater ways.

Grace started as a suburban congregation but has seen a change in some of its surrounding neighborhoods with regard to socio-economic and ethnic diversity and in many respects, Grace is located on a fault line between prosperity and poverty. Grace is seeking new ways of both serving these communities and drawing them into the Kingdom of God.

Grace's stated mission is "Making Disciples by equipping people to make Jesus visible in their daily lives". To accomplish this mission, Grace's focus has been to move people towards a belief that they are not only called to go to church on Sundays but are called to be the church in their daily lives where they live, work and play. In support of this mission, during 2019, Grace embarked upon a planning process on how to move to a more robust disciple making culture. Upon completion of this process in February 2020,

Grace's governing body, the Session, adopted a plan which affirmed the mission of making disciples by equipping people to make Jesus visible in their daily lives and established a long-term vision of saturating the 40 square mile area surrounding Grace with the gospel. The values and strategies resulting from this process are as follows:

## **Our Disciple-Shaping Values**

**Biblical integrity** not cultural conformity:

We believe God's Word is not a trend but rather a transformational means to a beginning. The Bible is the unrivaled authority for faith and life that intrigues, invites, challenges, and calls us to an adventurous relationship with Jesus.

**Worshiping** not observing:

We believe worship is not a spectator sport, but rather a participatory privilege; we strive to fully engage the magnitude and majesty of the Lord as we celebrate Him whole-heartedly.

**Multipling** not dividing:

We believe God's math always adds up—therefore, in living out the Great Commission we become part of His larger equation. It is our hope to see everyone at Grace be a disciple and to disciple others.

**Contributing** not consuming:

We believe we are called to be people of blessing—therefore, "in view of God's mercy," our generosity is a response not an entitlement. We desire for generosity to be a way of living not simply a form of giving.

**Trailblazing** not maintaining:

We believe we should expect God to show up and show off and living with great expectancy compels us to be intentional leaders in expanding the Kingdom of God.

## **Our Disciple-Making Strategy**

**Worship:** Participate together in worship that glorifies God and forms disciples.

**Equip:** Help our Grace family and our neighbors learn about and experience a life of discipleship.

**Serve** the Lord by serving our neighbors with love and with intentional acts of service and prayer.

In support of these strategies Grace has adopted six key initiatives. These initiatives are:

**Worship:** Worship that glorifies God and forms us as disciples.

**Equipping Hour:** A curriculum of courses that equips us for a life of discipleship.

**Disciple Groups:** Groups of three to five people who disciple each other before multiplying into new groups.

**Serve:** Serving our neighbors with love and with intentional acts of service and prayer.

**Outreach Groups:** Groups such as Alpha that provide a space beyond our walls to bring people into conversations about faith, life, and God.

**Neighborhood Communities:** Positioning people to connect relationally in neighborhoods to demonstrate the gospel to people in a particular place.

Grace has begun the implementation of these six with a focus on the first four: worship, equipping hour, disciple groups and serve.

Worship – Grace has combined its traditional and contemporary services into a combined services that utilizes both traditional and contemporary elements of worship and that places a high value on a worship service that invites participation rather than observation. The elements of the service are designed to support the preaching of the Word and reflect the belief that worship is the heart of discipleship.

Equipping Hour – In the summer of 2021, Grace launched a set of courses called Equipping People in the Community (E.P.I.C.) with three tracks, Biblical/Theological, Transformational and Missional. These courses are designed to equip people with the knowledge needed as a flourishing disciple of Jesus.

Disciple Groups – Grace has begun a pilot of disciple groups, which are groups of three to five people join together in an intentional disciple making environment. The goal of these groups is to allow participants to experience and practice being a disciple of Jesus in highly relational environment and to equip participants to multiply into additional groups.

Serve – Grace has been actively seeking ways to allow its members to physically serve those around us in the name of Jesus. To facilitate this, in 2020 Grace created a community development initiative, Friends of Westchase, in order help the community around Grace to flourish, The initial focus of Friends of Westchase has been on our neighborhood schools.

## **The Opportunity**

In the midst of transition for the past few years due to COVID and leadership changes, Grace is desiring to move to what God is calling it to be. During this time, significant progress has been made in transforming towards a more disciple making culture. Transitional Pastor Julia Leeth has been very effective at restoring confidence in leadership and has focused on caring for staff and building relational connection with the congregation while also moving forward on implementation of Grace's mission, values and strategies.

One of the transitions Grace is experiencing is move from a church that operates programs for the benefit of members to a church more focused on equipping its members to do the work of ministry where they live, work and play. This will require the Grace congregation to fully embrace Grace's vision to be a disciple making church. As Grace moves towards its identified preferred future, its strategic initiatives will need to be refined and solidified. This includes determining what is working well and improving upon it while creating new expressions of ministry and mission. Two key elements seem to be very important. One is to re-engage families with middle and high school students. Additionally, it will be important for Grace to figure out how best to be in relationship with its changed and changing immediate neighborhood.

Grace is seeking to call a new Senior Pastor who is gifted and motivated to leverage the passion the people of Grace have for their church and for Jesus in order to move towards creating a new culture of disciple making.

### **The Person**

The Senior Pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church will be responsible, in partnership with the Grace Session, to provide spiritual leadership and oversight for the congregation. To fulfill this role effectively, the right fit individual will need to be a strong but humble leader who can help Grace move forward by innovatively implementing the Grace's vision to become a disciple making church. They will be a leader who first of all listens to the Lord and listens to the church and its people.

Being highly relational, creating visibility and connections will be of paramount importance, as the people of Grace want to 'know' their pastor and be known by them. The successful candidate will not be afraid to "put their arms around people" and invite them to work together toward a shared future.

Valuing discipleship and spiritual growth - both in words and actions – will be key. The candidate will need to excel at building a team that complements their weakness, working collaboratively with the staff and people of Grace to create a future the imagines the possible. With staff they must be accessible and affirming, coming alongside while building a trusting staff environment

The ideal candidate will be a solid and compelling preacher who is biblically based while being able to appeal to multiple generations and ethnicities.

The next Senior pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church is the one who...

- Is committed to building a disciple making culture that is obedient to the Great Commission
- Seeks to know their congregation
- Unifies, shepherds, and directs the flock into the future
- Leads and inspires
- Sees opportunities in the midst of challenges

The result will be a congregation inspired to actively engage in the ministry and disciple making mission of the church.

### **Qualifications**

- Ordained in ECO or a reformed denomination
- Agree and adhere to Essential Tenets of ECO
- Education: Master of Divinity
- Minimum of seven years' experience in a pastoral role

### **Application Process:**

Grace Presbyterian Church has engaged SIMA® Partners in collaboration with ECO to assist our search process. To apply for this position, please contact Rick Heltne or Scott Palmbush (see below) and include a current resume/CV outlining your experience and relevant qualifications, including video sermon samples or links. In addition, provide succinct responses to the following questions:

1. After familiarizing yourself with the mission, values, strategies and theological perspectives of Grace Presbyterian, please comment on the ways in which your personal theology and vision for leadership are in alignment.
2. Describe your faith journey and your practice of spiritual discipline.
3. Discuss how you believe the church can successfully adapt to emerging generations while still respecting the history and tradition of Presbyterian denominations.
4. What is most motivating or compelling to you about the Senior Pastor position at Grace Presbyterian Church?

Please provide at least five references including email and phone contact information. We will not contact your references until later in the process and only upon your approval.

Please submit all materials to:

Rick Heltne, Partner-Senior Search Consultant  
[rheltne@simapartners.com](mailto:rheltne@simapartners.com)

or

Scott Palmbush, ECO  
[scottpalmbush@gmail.com](mailto:scottpalmbush@gmail.com)