Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Why Grace Church? Part 1
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1983

Well this is your time, in just a moment, to ask some questions about our church, and we have set up microphones in these various aisles, and you can just pop up behind them, and I'll point to you and we'll let you ask your questions.

But before we do that, just so we can get a little bit of a running start, last year in 1982, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of Grace Community Church. Was that last year? Yeah it was last year. I haven't been here the whole time, so I can't quite always remember. So this year will be our 26th year; I've been here 14 of those.

Just to give you a little idea of background, there were several couples - in fact, I think three couples; four couples maybe - I can't remember exactly the very initial stages, but three or four or five - at the most - couples, I think all but one, or maybe all of the original ones are still here in the church, and very active. They decided that there needed to be a church in the San Fernando Valley. They were attending a church in Los Angeles area or Hollywood, and they decided there needed to be a church out in the valley where the valley was beginning to boom and grow and develop, and there were lots of houses being built and so forth, so they came out here and they met in a nursery, and started there.

The first meeting was in Dick Smith's home; Dick and Shirley Smith. You probably know she's still our wedding hostess, and Dick has ministered in multiple ways through the years in the Grace Church, including being Elder.

So they started there and they moved to the nursery, then they came to this piece of property. The Lord made this available to them at the time. And of course Roscoe is the most traversed street in the San Fernando Valley. You might be surprised to hear that, but it is. According to the traffic figures, there are more cars going down Roscoe than any other thoroughfare.

So it was really an ideal location; midway between the east valley and the west valley, north valley and the south end of the valley. In fact, it used to be called the "church with the heart at the heart of the valley". And that's kind of the way it started.

In fact, Shirley's father came to be the first pastor, Dr.Donald Aswalder. And he had pastored at other churches, and was here for I think about seven years, then he died of a heart attack and by that time they built the chapel building. And my wife and I went on our honeymoon and on our return from our honeymoon - we got married in 19 - *[pause, audience laughter]*well what year was it - 63. 1963. I am married to an older woman, do you realize that? 1963. Boy, it's been great - gets better every year. People don't believe me when I say that - young people - that it just gets better every year, but it does.

But anyway, I just had to say that because I muffed up on the date. *(Laughter)*Anyway - I'll have to send flowers or something tomorrow. But we stopped by here on our honeymoon and visited on a Sunday. And they were over in the chapel, and it was linoleum on the floor and shuffle board lines and one of the offices on the other side was kitchen, and there were metal chairs, but it was jammed with people and it was exciting. We were remarked at what an exciting church that was. Little did we know in 1963 that by 1969, the Lord would call us here. But that's what happened.

The second pastor was Dr.Richard Elvie and he came, I think about a year after Dr.Aswalder died, and he was here a couple of years and then he died of a heart attack. And so - by the way, both of those pastors' wives are in the church, Lawrence Aswalder and Emille L.V. Beecham, now remarried to Ed Beecham and they've been a blessing.

In fact, when I came here in February of 1969, it was before they had all the drains in the valley and it was the worst rainstorm I can ever remember. And everything flooded - I mean, you couldn't get anywhere and the first Sunday it just rained and beat on that roof in the chapel, and I was fairly discouraged that the people couldn't get here. And then I planned this tremendous Sunday night series I was real excited about, and then to kick that off some guy walked on the moon on Sunday night and we didn't have a Corporal's Guard in the place, you know, and so it was really - but boy, after we got kind of a slow start, it just began to really take off and it's been a wonderful 14 years, and God's given us a good ministry together.

The church was always an independent church, never really affiliated with any denominal organization. A group of people who wanted a place where they could come and worship God and learn His Word out of the Scriptures, and the fellowship and train their children - always was interested in young people the kids. When I came here, I was working for Talbot Seminary at the time, and when Dr.Elvie died, I had spoken at many of the high school camps and junior high camps and _____ Forest Home and all over - in fact, I was on the camp circuit.

I remember one of the kids said, "If we can get John MacArthur here, we can have camp every week". You know, if you heard me give my camp messages, you wouldn't recognize me. I really get carried away. But I used to do a lot of that youth kind of stuff, and we had tremendous times with the

kids from Grace Church.

And so they asked me to come on that basis and fill the pulpit a few times, then I was on the staff at Talbot Seminary, and so I did. And that was at the end of 1968, I preached a couple times; then I went to South America. I went down to minister for a couple of weeks in Chio Ecuador HCJB and we went down the Mcooma in the jungles and we had a marvelous time. And then I came back, and they asked me to come back and preach a few more times, and I think I preached the first time here in November, and by February I was here permanently. So the Lord really moved in a wonderful way, and that's been 14 years coming up this next month.

So that gives you a little perspective and the church has maintained its strength of leadership and its commitment to the Word of God; and the fellowship and the family ministry through all those years. So that kind of gets you up to date.

Now I'll just turn it over to you, and you can ask any questions you want. Don't be bashful. I don't mind any question you want to ask. Okay? So don't all rush at the same time, alright? Okay?

TOM: John, my name is Tom Hevner, and I'd like to know what property Grace Community Church owns, and who has the right to say what are supposed to be used, and what it's supposed to be used for.

JOHN: Good Tom. When we first came here, Grace had bought this where the chapel is, and where that little education building is here, you know, that runs out where the nurseries are and stuff. And they had those two buildings and that green lawn out there. And then the back of the parking lot, from just halfway into the parking lot clear to Cantara Street was all chicken coops. And some of them were just dilapidated and ruined, total ruined condition; others of them were lived in by bums, old bums. And there were beat up old trees and garbage and it was a dump.

It was the worst - for example, if you were to drive down Roscoe Boulevard to the corner here at Ventura Canyon, you know that lot on the right? You know those really kind of dilapidated houses on the - well it was worse than that. It was a real bad thing.

But a man who was in our church owned that property or bought it, and gave it to the church on a no-interest long-term kind of thing, so we really had control of that. And then when I came, there were two pieces of property available, really, from that freeway to that freeway on Roscoe Boulevard; there were only two pieces of property available - one was on this side of the church and one was on the other side of the church, within proximity. And then the one down the street where we have a parking lot came later.

And so they were able to get this piece of property. That came later. But first we bought the piece on that side where the gym and the fireside room and the education building is. In fact, the property used to end about three feet outside the chapel. That was it, and it was a big, vacant lot. And I remember when we brought that property and we put a sign up: "This Property is Under Grace" - big sign, you know, facing the street. And that was a big purchase.

And then went ahead and bought a couple of the properties on the back side that had houses on them. And we mowed down those houses - there used to be old houses on the back. So we own all of that and all the way to the wash, as you see it right now. We also owned the house immediately adjacent, where Debbie Stone is living and kind of headquartering the special ministries.

We also purchased the second house, if you go past the gymnasium and you go through that wall there, down that little street, the first house we've always wanted to get a hold of because we like to have those for residences for missionaries on furlough. We haven't been able to get the first one; the people haven't wanted to sell. The second one became available, we purchased that, that is now Hospitality House and it's used to house missionaries. So whenever missionaries come on Furlough, we take care of their housing for the whole time they're here. And many, many people contributed to that. It was a marvelous project, we had a lot of fun going in there and putting new floors in and painting everything and recarpeting the thing - I even got involved in it and just enjoyed it so very much. So that's a hospitality house for us.

Just as a footnote, I don't know if you've ever seen it out here on the wall in the lobby, but there's a little thing that the church received the Valley Beautiful award for the most significant contribution to the San Fernando Valley and upgrading the beauty of the area. This was really a very kind of dilapidated and bad area, and it was improved by our development here.

Then, we could see on the horizon a need to expand, and we noted that that property across the street - again, the only piece of property between that freeway and this freeway on Roscoe and there it was right over there. And so we were able to negotiate for that for a very good price, and we bought that and developed that into a parking lot.

And in order to accommodate the neighbors so they wouldn't feel like - in fact, one newspaper article called us "the church that ate Sun Valley". And we didn't want people getting worried about that. So we canvassed - our Elders themselves, the Elders actually went door to door in the entire community and said, "What would you like us to do; we're gonna upgrade it, we're gonna knock it" - old beat up houses over there too and rat trap kind of things. And they just said, "Well, we'd just like some consideration". So we put in basketball courts there, we put in basketball courts here, you probably have not all seen it, but on the far corner of that there's a little park area with a picnic table and so forth; we did that for the community as well because they said they wanted that.

And then we saw the fact that we were growing even more. And down the road where the far parking lot is, again, some of you may remember it was another terrible area with garbage and junk and weeds head high. And somebody came into an Elders meeting - I'll never forget it. He said, "You know, we've been checking the books, and we have a $330,000 surplus". This was about six years ago, I guess - "We have a $330,000 surplus." And so the men said, "Oh that's great to hear that; I don't know how we overlooked that". It was sort of at the end of the year audit. And they said, "Well let's see if we can buy that property down there."

So the men called a real estate person, he found out who it was listed under, and they went out and they made an offer of $300,000 for the property and the guy accepted the offer in one day.

The next day, we had another Elders meeting and the treasurer said, "I made a terrible mistake, we don't have that money. It was a bookkeeping error - we don't have any money". The next day, a developer came in and offered them 50 percent more than we offered, something like $450,000 or whatever, and had a whole plan already submitted and approved for a development of condominiums in the area. So the Lord led us in our folly. And if we had been one day later, at the most it was two days, we would never have been able to purchase that property. So it was marvelous, and the Lord did provide the money. So we bought that property, and we developed that in a very nice way, which again improved the community.

Then behind the wall of that parking lot down there, there's a house immediately adjacent which was just another place. I remember a bunch of our kids cleaned it out, a couple of mine helped, and it was unbelievable. It was lived in by a people that I don't know how people could live like that; it was absolutely the most shocking thing you ever saw. And again, head high weeds. So we went in and cleaned it out, and right now the Letti's are living there temporarily until they can get into their home, and it's gonna become another hospitality house. And if you haven't seen it, you need to drive by it. Our staff and all the people in our church have fixed that thing up - it is absolutely beautiful. In fact, just knock on the door and say, "Hey, we go to Grace Church", and just say to the Letti's, "We'd like to see your place". And go right on in, they'll just love that. They're that kind of people - really. But you should drive by. The folks have landscaped it, it's incredible. In fact, the neighbors have come up and said, "Who owns this place? What is this? What's going on here?" And so it's been good.

Then, behind the parking lot again down further, there are a couple of lots and an old kind of shack house, and we own that too. The plan ultimately, Lord willing, would be to begin to develop that area that we own for an elementary school. Now it is saleable, and if we got a better piece of property somewhere else to develop the elementary school, we might make a choice at that point.

Then when we bought that piece down there and we made that offer thinking we had the money, we also at the same time - it was two pieces; it was that piece and the triangle across the street. You

know when you go down Roscoe and you come to that big vacant lot that's kind of a triangle? We own that whole thing up to the back of the houses going up this way. We own all those houses down that little street, those old houses, that entire triangle, which now we'd like to develop practically - we don't wanna put a lot of money into it- but we're looking into possibly making it into an athletic field for our schools and for all of our kids' programs. Soccer fields, softball field, and a lot of things like that that aren't really expensive to do, and we could also park on it if we needed to. I think that's about it. That's the property we own.

Now when it comes to what is done with our property, when it comes to whose decision it is to purchase those things, that is a decision always made by the full Board of Elders. All purchases of property, disposition of property and use of property is a determination by the total Board of Elders. We're not, at this point, because of prices being what they are and so forth, we're not in the midst of acquisitioning property. And we're not, we don't buy stuff just to make investments. In fact, the Elders said from now on what we'd like to do would be to have - if we want to buy other hoses, and it's good to think about the future, one of the things that we need if our Bible Institute grows is housing for them. We'd really like to get a hold of a place where we could put up some housing for them, or buy the apartment house down the street would be great, or something like that.

But I think the last time I talked to the men, they felt about this issue that if we were gonna do that, then maybe individuals within the church could make that purchase as an investment, and then turn over the use of the property to the church. So that's probably the way we would do that now. We haven't purchased property in quite a few years.

Oh, we own that little tiny house on the corner down here. And we own the lot that goes around it. It just came available very, very cheaply, eight or ten years ago. And we didn't know, but what we might be able to develop back in that area, but we're holding onto that at this time too.

And I would just say that if we got into a situation where we needed to put something together on this end or we needed the money, we are not, we don't have a problem with liquidating any of those things. It's not a good time to do that right now. Because everything is, you know, it's the buyer's market and it's not - if we don't have to, we don't wanna do that. Okay? Good. Steve?

STEVE: I would like to, I've got a couple questions. But can I ask two or one?

JOHN: Try me with one and we'll see.

STEVE: Okay. I'm just concerned that a long time ago with the Board of Elders, after a meeting you put within the Bulletin notes from the Elders. And I was just wondering what the policy is. Because I myself never know when the Board of Elders is meeting, and if it should be put in the Bulletin so more people really know what's really happening and was being discussed because maybe some people

would be interested.

JOHN: Yeah that's a good question. The Elders meet the second Thursday, is it second Thursday after the first Sunday?

(Laughter)

First Thursday after the second Sunday. Okay. I always go, I just don't know when it is.

(Laughter)

The first Thursday after the second Sunday. Always meet over there in the upstairs of where the youth are, and it's open to anybody, welcome to come any time. What Steve's referring to is we used to run a little list of things - we ran it in our paper that we mailed out. And we stopped mailing the paper out because the cost became really prohibitive for that, and so we increased the character of our Sunday Bulletin to absorb a lot of the material we were putting in that paper.

But I think it's a very valid suggestion that periodically we should run a little note in there about what the Elders aren't doing. It isn't that monumental; basically we've got a comet by the tail and we're just trying to hang on for dear life. But it would be very helpful to the church family to keep people aware of that. And since we don't have the regular paper coming out to keep them up-to-date, I'll suggest to the Men, then - that's a very helpful suggestion - that we periodically put out, a little thing called Notes from the Elders. In fact, we could do that off the monthly meeting without a problem at all.

STEVE: What I'm also thinking of is putting a notice in the Bulletin saying the Elders will meet on this Thursday at this time in room like 206, so that people do know that it's meeting, so that if someone wants to come and they -

JOHN: Sure. Just remember it's the second Thursday after the first Sunday.

(Laughter)

First Thursday after the second Sunday.

(Laughter)

Whatever. First Thursday after the second Sunday, okay. That's all you have to remember, and it's that way every month. 6:30.

STEVE: Can I ask my second question? You asked about the strengths and weaknesses of Grace Church. I'm just curious, what do you feel are some of the weaknesses of this church?

JOHN: Well, I think that's a hard question to answer in one sense; in another sense it's very easy to answer. The weaknesses of the church are basically manifest in every single thing we do, because we aren't - no matter what we do, all we oughtta be, right? But - and I say this with all honesty, and I'm not just trying to be biased in favor of Grace - I don't know of any church that has more effective range of ministry than this church does, or more committed people, more faithful people. More people really with their hearts devoted to the Lord than this church has.

The weaknesses come in our humanness, in our inability to be all that we oughtta be. Now we know what we oughtta do and the people in the Ministry know what they oughtta do, and even the lay people you folks know - and everybody's out there doing it. The limitations come in our own humanness.

I don't really believe that I could sort of pinpoint and say, "Here's an area where we're absolutely oblivious and we're just not doing anything". I think we're really - because the input comes from - see, we have about 33 pastors on the staff, and we have 50 Elders, and we have all these other leaders and Deacons - 200 something deacons, 200 something deaconesses; all kinds of workers and people involved, and the ideas just keep coming; they just never stop. And so the dimensions of ministry are perceived, I think, and we've tried to move into all the dimensions that we feel are important.

The weakness comes when we aren't able to fulfill all the things that we really would like to see God have us do. I have a lot of things that I wish we did - I mean, I wish our Bible Institute would be able to have a place to house students; I think it would make a profound difference on what we could do, if we could bring students in and house them and kind of control their environment 24 hours a day and disciple them in that way.

There are a lot of things that I'd like to do that there are reasons we can't do. But basically, I thank God for the strengths of the church, I see the weaknesses in our own human weaknesses.

Charles.

CHARLES: Yes. I'd like to know how the Elders are selected, and is there a difference between the way a teaching Elder or a ruling Elder is selected, and is in fact there distinction between the two made?

JOHN: How are Elders selected. That's a good question. First of all, to define an Elder biblically, an Elder is a man who is in leadership in the church. And his leadership falls into two categorizes. According to Acts 20, to the elders at Ephisis who met Paul in the area of Myletus, he said this: "Feed the flock and take the oversight".

There's two things that an Elder does; feed and lead. Feed and lead. And you find that in the Pastor Teacher. The Pastor is the one who leads the sheep, the teacher is the one who feeds the sheep. And so the Elder is a feeder/leader.

Now, what makes an Elder is not the vote of the congregation, what makes an Elder is that the church affirms him to be a man who fits the qualifications. The qualifications are listed in 1Timothy 3 and Titus 1. We have two parallel passages which outline very clearly that the qualifications of an Elder. None of them are intellectual, none of them are educational, none of them are monetary, they're all spiritual. All of them.

So what you're looking for is godliness. Mature, godly men who can feed and lead the flock. They need to be skilled in teaching or apt to teach; sometimes they can teach a one-to-one level, they don't have to be able to stand in front of the whole church and preach. There are all different ways in which the gift of teaching and the use of teaching can be made.

Many of our Elders, for example, teach the fundamentals of faith. Some of you have had Elders in your fundamentals of faith class. Some of them are teaching in the DE program, and there are many ways in which they teach. They need to understand doctrine, and they need to be able to refute the heretics and teach positively and so forth.

So you're looking for men who are spiritually mature - also the given factor is that they desire to be an Elder. In 1Timothy3 it says, "If a man desires the office he desires a good thing". So you're looking for men who desire spiritual leadership, and who by the affirmation of the church are qualified for that leadership by their ability to teach and their spiritual character.

Now, we've found through the years that these men rise to the surface. And that's - the recognition of Elders is usually very easy, to be honest with you. I mean I've found it to be so. When a man desires the office, I think that's a requisite. I don't think you wanna go to a guy and say, "Please, please be an Elder". I never wanna ask anybody to do something they're not committed and excited about doing. Cause then they're there and they're not gonna give their whole heart to the thing.

So it's only a question of evaluating those who really desire that office or who are proven. So we're looking all the time at the people in the church and seeing the development of leaders. For the most part, Elders start out as servers and Deacons and they just begin to rise through the congregation. Now there are occasions when men come from other congregations who are proven men, and on the recommendation of that congregation and our personal knowledge of those individuals, we don't take away their right to lead and feed.

But for the most part, we have 34 pastors, 34 people functioning in pastoral staff in our capacity in our church, and out of 34, 32 have come from within the church. We have 50 Elders, and of those 50 Elders, 48 of them have risen right out of our fellowship. So these are people we know and these are people that are proven.

Now once a year, and it's going on right now, you see all those names posted on the doors and things. Once a year, we write a letter, and everybody gets a letter in the church whose on the mailing list as a member of the church, and you're to list anybody that you feel is qualified for an Elder or Deacon. That comes back to us, we go through those, and then the Elders finally will post the names that they feel indeed by the affirmation of the people and the confirmation of the Elders should be presented as Elders to the people.

So the people, you people, have the opportunity to raise up or to tell us about those people that have proven themselves. And as I found out through the years in my church, we never have a name given to us for Elder that we don't know. In other words, but the time the people recognize his leadership, believe me, the Elders have already recognized it. So its not a very difficult process.

And then in an annual meeting in a couple of weeks, we'll present that whole slate to you for your affirmation. And every one of us will be listed again. Every one of us comes up yearly to be reaffirmed because we've proven ourselves to be faithful. There's no term involved. Because if a person is an Elder, he's an Elder by spiritual qualification.

Now sometimes they wanna go off of the board in terms of functioning, because the load is really heavy. And some of these men are working outside. And they're caring for their family, and they're teaching and trying to carry a tremendous load. So periodically some of them want a year off the official Board, but they don't cease to be Elders - they're sort of Elders at large rather than having a specific assignment within the Board. The only way a person would cease being an Elder would be to have been disqualified some way.

So that give you some idea, doesn't it, about how the process goes on. now the Elders meet every Sunday morning for prayer, and they meet as I said once a month, I'm not gonna tell you when because I never get it straight. First Thursday after the second Sunday, right? And they meet once a month, and that meeting goes from 6:30 in the evening to 2:00 in the morning. It's a time of prayer, it's a time of rallying around the Word, it's a time of sharing the ministry. But we can't make all the decisions in a group of 50 men. So that's broken down. There are five major areas of the church, and teams of Elders work in those areas. And they work all week long and all month long, meetings and times of prayer and getting together and so forth so that when the major meeting comes, everybody is able to report and so forth. Okay?

QUESTIONER: Hi John, I'd like to start with a comment since you brought up the newspaper, I do miss it. But I have two questions. My first one is how does Grace Church perceive Grace School priority-wise, what's the relationship in regards to the Elder Board with it and what do you see as its future? I know you've already started to touch on that.

JOHN: Grace School, like every other ministry of Grace Church, is under the direct leadership of the Elders. There is a smaller committee of Elders that work directly with the school in a working basis. In other words, you can't have 50 people making decisions about something they don't' know about; you have to break it down to smaller groups. But when you have five or six godly men who are committed to that ministry, they can carry the thing. So it is under the direct control of the Board of Elders.

It is a priority. We do not prioritize our ministries in terms of ranking them as one over against another. We feel that it falls on the same line with all our other ministries to build the Kingdom of the Lord; it's equal in its priority. We would like in the days ahead, if we could, to relocate the Christian school, so that we could develop it more fully. It's a tremendously necessary thing. And with a continual breakdown of public education, we need to have the finest possible program we can have. And I wish we could have a school system rather than just one school; I wish we had five or six or ten elementary schools and a couple of junior highs all feeding into one great Christian high school. I would love to see that happen in the future. But that's a property issue. Because you've got to have the place to do that.

We have people right now who are on the inside of the city school system who are very much aware of what we want, and some of them even go to our church and should a school become available, we would immediately do all we could to pick up a school on a lease basis so we could relocate the whole thing and begin to develop it. It's a very high priority for us.

At this point, we're stretched in terms of facility here, because we have Lagas which is really growing, we have Talbot Seminary which is a very important ministry, training men for the ministry, the women's ministries that go on all week, and then we have the elementary school and the elementary school has a tendency to eat up everything. This is just the nature of the thing. Because they're here all week long, they tend to wanna dominate the rooms with their stuff, and so what happens is if you're not careful, the church can take a back seat to a school. And there are many churches that have gotten into tremendous conflict between school and church. And that is why we would never separate the school from the church in terms of Board responsibility. Because if you have one group of people trying to run a school, and another group of people trying to run a church, and banging heads because they each believe theirs is priority, you have a problem. If you put it under the same. If you put it under the same group of people, it's able to be controlled better. So we would like to see it develop more rapidly, we'd like to see it move out and into some other areas, but we're still praying and waiting on the Lord for that.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. How does Grace perceive possibly the future of any music ministry outreach, other than, you know, our traditional spring and Christmas concerts? Is that anything that's being discussed or a possibility?

JOHN: Well we discuss a lot of things about outreach. I don't know how to answer that question other than to say I don't necessarily see music as an evangelistic tool. I see music as a way for the saints to praise the Lord. I don't think we're told "sing the gospel" basically; witness and preach and so forth. So I don't, you know, I don't see that as the priority.

I do see, though, like spring concert, Christmas concert, those kinds of things, attracting people to the church. And they see something here they would never otherwise see. And they hear a message they would never otherwise hear. And that's very important.

Now, we could do a lot more of that. But it would be tremendously taxing to the staff. There's several philosophies. Many churches have very mediocre music all the time, and then they do three or four big bashes every year for the outsiders. I'm committed that the music should be excellent all the time, and that you don't just give mediocre music and then do a big deal for the outside folks, but that we do the best for the people to worship God and we do the music that will most glorify Him.

And so in order to maintain the excellence that we have week-by-week; and I don't know if you know this, but the music that you hear here, a great portion of it, half or more - probably more than half the music you hear here - is arranged by our own music staff. Clayton does a lot of it himself, we have people in the church who work with him who arrange. For example, he'll write an arrangement for the orchestra and Sharon Duval will actually take the arrangement, the original arrangement, and put it into every piece of orchestra that has to play it. Now that's a tremendous thing. And they come in on one Sunday and it's done. But the commitment they have to that kind of excellence for the glory of the Lord is very important.

Now, if you just stockpile that for big event kind of things, I think you lose something. I also feel that the heart and soul of evangelism is people bringing people. And if you're faithful to bring folks just as the year flows on, and we've always made the priority on that basis because when you bring your people we give them a visitor packet and then immediately when they get a visitor packet I don't know if you know what happens to people who get those, but there are teams of evangelism that go out to those people that week to visit them and to present Jesus Christ to them. I send them a personal letter which they receive in the mail - so they're followed up, and that's our approach. You bring your visiting people here, and you've done your part; we'll go out and if we can give them the Gospel and _____ them for Christ, we'll do that. If they come to the Lord Jesus Christ, we'll pump them into an FOF class, and after they've come out of an FOF class, usually we like them to go into what? DE class. And after about 26 weeks they think every Christian did that. But that's what we wanna do.

And so there's a very carefully laid out strategy. We want you to be responsible to bring the people - why? Because then you can follow them up. That's one reason why I'm a little bit resistant to just advertise stuff in the paper. For example, if we advertised our Christmas concert in the paper, the word is out now that it's really quality. If we just advertised it, we could just pack the place out. There's no question about that. But what would we do - how would we ever be able to deal with the people that came? And we'd get a circus atmosphere.

Even now, it tends to be a little different atmosphere than we normally have, and boy if we just had the whole shooting match in here, it's a different thing. People come for the peanut-popcorn approach, and that's what they want. And they walk away. It's much better, I think, to have people who care bring people, and then we'll follow up on a regular basis through the year. Hopefully the music will be meaningful any time they come - Sunday morning or Sunday night - it'll be the same kind of quality all the time.

So I don't really see music as a great evangelistic thrust I think you're the people that oughtta - you're the one touching people.

QUESTIONER: Does Grace have now a ministry to the cults, and if not, will they ever have one in the future?

JOHN: Do we have a ministry to the cults. Boy I hope so. We treat the cults just like all the rest of the lost people in the world. You just have to go after them. We have had training sessions in the past telling all kinds of things. We've had training sessions on how to reach Mormons; in fact, we just did in our New Years Eve service what amounted to that kind of initial training. We've done stuff, seminars on reaching the Jehovah's Witnesses, we have material available on all of that - I don't know if the prayer room still has a lot of that material stacked in there. I think if you went into the prayer room, you could find study guides and study sheets on every kind of issue that you'd face.

We're talking to Dick Baer who gave his testimony about coming down and doing a whole seminar on Mormonism to prepare our people a little more in depth to be able to deal with Mormons. We've done seminars on how to witness to Catholics. We've done seminars on how to reach the Jewish people for Christ. We really do try to do all of that that we can do.

Frankly, the best way to deal with the cults is to preach the truth. And I've never been a kind of a person who believed that you needed anything more than the power of the Spirit of God working through the Word of God. I guess I'm one of those people who believes in a, what I guess the theologians call a self-authenticating Bible. In other words, I don't need to come to you and prove the Bible is true, it's just like a lion. You don't try to defend it, you just open the cage and let it out. And it'll take care of itself.

I really believe that if we articulate the Word of God; - look, we baptize people coming out of all kinds of things. Because they are exposed to the Truth. And I think first and foremost, before they come here and hear it from me or some other teacher, they're exposed to it in the life of the individuals that they meet, and that's the dynamite that really blasts them out of their sin. But we will continue to have the kind of seminars that we think will really help the people to be able to deal with some of these issues, sure.

QUESTIONER: Okay that's great, because this is the only church I've really found where they really effectively give seminars and lectures and, you know, maybe a couple other church's do it, but I see this one really regularly does it, and that's why I asked it because I'm just kind of curious. But thank you.

JOHN: That's good. My philosophy of ministry is you just offer everything. Just hit them every which way. It's like a smorgasbord. If you ate everything, we'd think you were out of your mind. You don't need it all, you just take what you want and what you like and what you need, and so at Grace church we just keep pumping opportunities out. Like these walk through the Bible seminars, not everybody in our church is gonna take those, but the but the people who do are gonna have their whole perspective on the Bible changes. And we just offer that.

Now we're talking now about another one on the Minor Prophets; I'll walk through the Minor Prophets. You say who wants to know the Minor Prophets? If you say that, it's because you haven't read them. Tremendous stuff there.

But we are always looking for new ways, developing new techniques. We have a coach's clinic for fathers. For example, if you wanna put your kids in our Christian school and you're a father, you have to take the father's coaching clinic cause we're not gonna teach your child apart from what you're gonna do in that child's life. So you go through that too, and learn how to e the family priest and the spiritual leader of your own child, so that we're working together.

Some of you may have received a letter from some guy, by the way. We didn't let his children in our school and he sent out letters to all kinds of people in the church, did some of you get that? That was a really strange thing. What happened was is they did not agree with the things we were teaching at Grace School, they did not agree with the theology of our church, but they wanted free education for their kids. And we had a waiting list, and we just determined that if we had to make a choice, we were gonna choose the children of the people who would be supporting what we were teaching them in the school by their own life. And their own commitment. And so that was the reason that we felt that they should not take a priority place over others who were on the waiting list.

QUESTIONER: John, I was wondering what kind of a role this church assumes - I know there's a lot of churches throughout the United States that are really interested and are really hungry for this kind of Bible teaching and this kind of a church, and I'm thinking in particular of some people back where I just moved from that are really hungry for this kind of a thing. I was wondering what kind of a role this church has in getting other churches started around the United States?

JOHN: Well, I have a burden for the church at large. And I guess my burden primarily is for the pastors. You can't do anything in a church without a pastor. And so my real burden is with the pastors. I have some priorities in terms of where I'll go. I know some of you people think I'm gone a lot maybe, but I'm not. I'm not gone much at all. During the week if I'm gonna speak here I've gotta be here, because I haven't got anything to say if I don't study all week. So I don't go very often.

But when I do go, I go - almost every time I go anywhere for the single purpose of speaking to pastors. I could be gone - I could speak three places every day of the year, just go, go and speak and do my thing and, you know, but I don't see that as the priority. So I'm committed to pastors. So I will go to speak to groups of pastors because to me, that's the heart of the thing. And God, as a result of that, has developed a tremendous rapport that we have with pastors. I don't know what our mailing list is now; Dick Mehu might know, is he here?

DICK: 10,000.

JOHN: We have 10,000 pastors that are in some way or another related to us. Getting our material, getting our tapes, coming to the Shepherd's Conference. We stated our Shepherd's Conferences, and we have now had - we're having our sixth one coming up. I think it's the sixth. And every time we have those, we have 200, 250 new men.

Now what's happening is these men are coming one time and they've kind of said we want more materials, so starting this year, we're gonna have alumni training conferences. And we're gonna let them pick an area - maybe they went evangelism, maybe they want preaching, or whatever, and they're gonna come back for a special week as guys that have been to the basic thing, and then we're gonna pump them whatever they wanna know there. So that the real priority is not to start churches, but to turn on pastors. And then the second priority, and this, by the way, goes on all the time. Our ministry to pastors is unceasing. Every day - for example, Jay Letti is my personal assistant, and he will spend a portion of every day on the telephone with pastors who call us. I mean, every single day they call. "What do I do about this problem? What do I do about that problem? How do I solve this problem?"

I got a letter from a pastor - I wish I had brought it; in fact, maybe it's - I'm gonna go up to my office and see if it's up there. I'm just trying to think of where it might be. Really worth reading to you. It's that one from Tri City's Bible Baptist Land; you remember that one I read? Okay. But that's our

priority.

Now backing off of that, first priority is to train the pastors that are there. Second priority, train other pastors to go. And we realized that a portion of our staff is gonna be here for a temporary time and they're gonna go, and that's the way we want it. In the last six months, Bill Rogers went to Oklahoma. And Boy, is he excited, and God is blessing him. Dan Macattee went to Oklahoma. John Cider went to Denver. Somebody else went. Rich Thompson went to Houston. Duane went to Westport, Washington. Dave sinioua went to somewhere in northern California in the _____ area, and just recently someone else - Ken Harris went to Placerville. See, I mean, this is going on all the time. We just wanna pump them out as fast as God allows that to happen so that's our second priority, not just starting churches. There are 350,000 churches in America. That's more churches than we need. 350,000 churches.

Now what that means is that there's one church for every 200 people in the United States. And out of that 200 people, maybe 40 of them go to church. So there's a church for every 40 people. You don't need any more churches. We already have a dilution of the talent in terns of preaching because we have so many preachers. But we have started some churches in areas where there was no church. Jim Harris went to Boise and started the Treasure Valley Bible Church, and we have men all the time who are starting churches and they're not from our church, but they're starting churches with the principles they've learned here.

I got a letter today from a guy who said, "I just came to this area" - he's in North Carolina; - he said, "I was out at your Shepherd's Conference, I met with you when you were in South Carolina. And I've come here to start a church and the Lord is blessing, and here are my questions, help me with this", and he gave me this big long list questions. And that's a major part of what Jay Letti does in his ministry, is work with these men so that they can be effective for the Lord. So that is a high, high priority for us.

And we know that if we're gonna change this country and make it come around to the glory of the Lord, judgment has to begin in the house of

God. The church has got to get its act together, and the key to that is to change the hearts of pastors. That's a high priority for us. Okay

QUESTIONER: Could you read that letter?

JOHN: Oh yeah, let me read the letter. "Dear John, when at your church and on another occasion, I spoke to you that if you were ever in our area, it would be a great privilege and blessing to have you at Tri City Bible Baptist Church. I noticed you have registered to be at the Rummy Bible Conference Center on June 23 and 24" - that's in New Hampshire next summer. I'm gonna speak to pastors up

there. By the way, I think they're gonna bring a whole bus load of those French pastors down for that conference too, so we can continue the ministry with them.

He said, "You'll be coming within 35 miles of our church, and if there's any way to arrange your schedule to be in our church somewhere around those dates would be a joy to us". Then this, "Brother again, you had a great impact on our church. The first time picked up your book titled 'The Church, the Body of Christ'" - do you remember that book? It's now reprinted under the title "Body Dynamics". Anyway, he said her read it. He said, "I wept and sobbed through each page as I saw the most beautiful manifestation of God's glory on earth unfold before my eyes. That was some four years ago, and much has happened since. We have been through much trial in our church, and the purging of the Lord as I broke down every sacred calf we had erected by our theological prejudice and as he dealt, in some cases, severely, with what he called sin. We had a congregation, a dictorial form of government, a legalism that had whitened our sceplacres, and self righteousness that had fostered a spirit of latency and deadness.

My health was broken, but much worse my heart. We had numbers, but not a functioning body of church. But oh glory to His name, how things have changed. We were averaging 450 to 475 and had a top attendance of 820. When God was through with his purge, we were below 100. The offering dropped from $3,000.00 a week to $900.00 and we were sinking fast. I prayed as to whether God was through with me here, but his answer kept coming back that he wasn't through, he'd only begun. I'm not sure what our attendance is now" - I like that. He stopped counting. "Probably somewhere in the neighborhood of 200 or 300. The offerings are now beginning to exceed the need. Our people are beginning to minister tangibly and openly and willingly to one another; homes are being changed with the power of heaven. A revival spirit has been in the church for about eight weeks now; our men gather every Sunday at 7:00 a.m. for two and a half hours of prayer. And what a prayer meeting it is. Men I have never seen moved before are weeping and crying at the Throne of Grace. The entire government of the church ahs changed, and we are now under Elder rule, and the list goes on and on.

"It was only a year ago that I thought the church was gone, and I would lost ministry, and it was obvious I was right. But our intervening God was setting the stage for this church to carry out His singular purpose in the universe, to glorify His wonderful name.

"I first thought, Brother John, that you had gotten me into a lot of trouble by the things you were teaching". I've had men say to me my ministry was fine 'til I got to you and you ruined my ministry. Because you make them think Biblically, see, and it tears down everything they've ever built, if they've been building it on the human level. He says, "But then I realized you were teaching the Word of God, and when I began to teach the Word of God it simply surfaced a problem that was already there. And I say that s that I can make my next point. If you know of some preachers who are heartbroken as they watch a sovereign God dismantle their ministry so he can institute his, brother,

tell him it's worth it. It's really worth it.

"I sat in my car with my 18-year-old boy last year as we drove down Spalding Turnpike, and I watched that boy-man cry and with tears streaming down his face, he begged me to leave this church. And nothing will move a father's heart like that. But I said, 'Paul, God has not told me to do that, and if he has not, he will honor the word that I preach, you just watch'. I don't know if I even believed it then, but a little while go Paul came to me and said, 'Dad, you were right. God has honored the word you preach'.

"I believe if I had run when it looked like I would get starting the church all over again, I would not only have missed the blessing of the present moment, but I would have lost an 18-year-old son. Brother John, tell those preachers it's worth it. It took five years, but God has turned us around. Forgive my rambling, and I know you're busier than I'll ever understand, but brother, I want you to know there's a native New Hampshire preacher who is influenced by your ministry. Oh I don't give the credit to you, I know it goes to God, but brother, I want you to know I love you. We have a long ways to go, but the goals of God are coming in clear. We've thrown off by his grace the shackles of traditionalism and peer pressure, and we've realized where there's north a genuine attitude changed by the filling of the spirit, there will never be activity to glorify God. Triumphing in Christ, Ron Welch".

That's a great letter, isn't it? You see, now that's part of what happens. Originally when we started our Shepherd's Conferences, guys would come out here looking for another bag of tricks. You know, to make the church grown and - I mean, guys are really into gimmicks. You know, I man, you would be amazed. And they didn't find a bag of tricks. They found some biblical stuff. And the men's hearts were right. Took that and went back, and a lot of times their church couldn't handle it. I mean, they went back and started teaching the Word of God, started checking out the leadership to see if they fit the biblical qualifications, saying this is what the Bible says, church discipline started happening and people were just blown out the back door - they couldn't handle it. I know many men have said to me, my people are just upset because we don't sing 18 verses of "Just as I am" and have the tear-jerker illustrations, and they wanna know have I abandoned evangelism, and what's this verse-by-verse stuff, and what happens is, everything begins to collapse. And God has to tear it all down and start all over again. and give years, and I talked to Ron one day and he was so sick; his stomach was so totally destroyed by ulcerations that he was having all kinds of problems and surgeries, and he didn't know whether he was gonna make it. And that letter was a joy to my heart.

So that's just one out of many, many, many, many, many. So we're looking to see God change the church and I'll tell you another thing; beyond that we're looking to God do see him change the world too. And we wanna see people go all over this world with the things of Christ.

Now I am very trust in my heart about that, and its' very difficult for me. I am getting regularly appeals to go to New Zealand and Australia, and just recently I got a letter from all these missionaries down in

_____ to come and to help them to understand what the Bible teaches about the church so they can really build a native church the way it ought to be. That's important, you know. Cause if they just get it started the right way in the beginning, they don't have to try to reform the thing down the track.

And then recently there are groups of people in South Africa that are just crying out, and our tapes have been there and they've been distributed all across South Africa, and now they say "come down and help us", and so some people are coming up here to talk to us clear from South Africa. I got a letter the other day that the missionaries want to meat in Mindenow and the Philippines and to come there and do the same thing, and we sent Jim George to Singapore for a whole year to try to train the Asian church, so the Lord has really stretched the ministry through tapes and, you know, it's just been marvelous. And we are reaching just beyond.

And there's a principle that I've always believed in my heart, and that is if I take care of the depth of the ministry God will take care of the breadth of it. So I don't feel like I've gotta see how big it can be, I just believe I need to see how right it can be. And if it's right, then God will take care of the spreading. I mean, if he finds that it's what he wants, then it's his to spread it. Okay?

QUESTIONER: I'm glad you read that letter, by the way, that was something. I've heard in the news a number of times lately that the state of California has come against Herbert Armstrong's church for not revealing their records, and more recently come against Robert Scheuler's church for similar reasons, and I wonder how you as a Board of Elders, how you might respond to that type of thing and how it might conceivably affect this church some day.

JOHN: Yeah, as I taught a few Sundays ago, in _____ relation to the government, we conform to the government. We submit ourselves to the powers that be as ordained of God. We don't fight the government. If the government says "You need to fill out a certain form", we fill a form out. Now there are some people who won't do that, they're just so cantankerous. Like the guy who got his school shut down in Missouri, and then he got packed off to jail - the reason he got all that happening to him is because he defied the government on stuff that was just basically minimal stuff. If he had just worked it out with them, they would have resolved it. But there are some people whose nature is to pick a fight.

I talked to Georgie Binns about this. Georgie Binns - I asked him, I said "What is the Russian Christian church's attitude toward the government?" He said, "We submit to the government in everything, except in the control of our faith. So that if we were ever persecuted, it's very clear that we are guilty, and that they've stepped into the arena of the revelation of Got." And I agree with that. So I don't believe in violating the government. I don't believe - now I think the reason that Scheuer is getting taxed is because he is in violation of the basis, non-sectarian tax-free status that a church has. He has a money making operation. Aerobics classes, and they charge for them, weight watchers, and they charge for it, concerts with the Fifth Dimension, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, you

name it, from $14, $12 a seat to $140 a seat. In fact, when they built that cathedral, there was an article in the Times and he made the statement "It's going to have 3,000 money-generating seats". And so in many ways, it is a business. And if it is a business, then it ought to be taxed like a business. There's no question in my mind about that.

I think, I just think that's the way it has to be. Now the problem that happened with the Word Wide Church of God, Herbert W. Armstrong, was that there were some people claiming that there was some wrong being done there with their funds. And the government asked for the funds or for the record of the funds; they wouldn't show them. You can call that a constitutional right if you what to; to me it sounds like you got something to cover up. If the government wanted to look at our books, we'd hand them all to him. Say, "Look at them. And if you can find something that we've done wrong, we'd be happy to make it right." When it comes to existing within the framework of our society, as a tax-exempt organization, as soon as we accept tax-exempt status, we have come under the privy of the government, and that's fine. And the Lord has provided that, and we are to be subject to authorize. And so we have no fear of the government's intervention, because we feel that we are functioning as a church, we are not a money making organization, and that's one reason why I just have never been able to see the church as a way to make money. That's why our bookstore does what it does, that's why our tape ministry does what it does, that's why we don't badger people for money, we don't put on stuff. We recently were approached by somebody who wanted to have a big concert here and they wanted to charge so much money per seat, and we said no, we won't have you do that. You can't' use this place to do that, this is not a money making place. This isn't a place where you sell seats to make money.

So I think as long as you stay - believe me, if you stay within the biblical parameters, we have found that if you can define your faith very clearly to the government and they see it genuinely within the bounds of your faith, you won't have a problem okay?

QUESTIONER: How many people are on paid staff at Grace, and what are their capacities as far as serving?

JOHN: How many people are on paid staff? Do know Lynn? 158, 160. Yeah, we have about 34 pastors, and probably about 20 or 30 _____, just to tell you - see, we have a lot of secretaries, we have a lot of school teachers, we have tape ministry people, radio ministry people - how many people are on the custodial staff? How many? 30? 30? No. *(Laughter)*Do you all know John Zimmer? He cleans the worship center, and he does a great job. We're thankful for you John.

But they aren't all full-time, but you realize, Lynn, somebody was telling me the other day that just in one building alone, the number of changes that have to be made in the furniture per week would stagger you. As I remember it, something like 50 a week. Just for one room. I mean, it's staggering. The people that have to move things around, and we do all of our own maintenance, all of our own

repair, all of our own building, all of our own construction - I mean, if we have to repair air conditioning, we do it; if we have to put in a new - if the whole administration center that was moved to _____, we built the whole thing. All our guys do everything. They repair all the stuff, they build the things, they frame the rooms, they plaster the rooms; when we build our new radio studio where we can make our new radio ministry, we built every bit of that thing from scratch. Our guys did.

So there's those people, there are people in the administration center that work with our computers, which we have to have to control all of the mailing lists we have with tapes and radio. It just goes up. But God has given us great people. And we have a wonderful fellowship. Once a month we have a chapel service. You can find out when that chapel is, and you can come any time you want. It's Tuesday at 8:00, and I think it's the first Tuesday of every month - *(Laughter)*- the first Tuesday. People give me lists and say tomorrow you will go here and the next day you will go here and that's all I know. But in the chapel at 8:00 on the first Tuesday of every month, we have staff chapel and you can come meet the whole bunch of them - you're welcome, we'd love to have you if you could ever come. And we just have a marvelous time. Great, great spirit. Great morale, wonderful Christ-loving people. We have no dissention on our staff. We have just a beautiful, sweet spirit, and God has just enriched and blessed us in that way. And I mean there are a lot of places where that can be a real problem. But I think we have a marvelous, marvelous team of people. And all the time we see young men coming into the ministries and growing and maturing and even with our secretaries, young gals and some of the ladies that are helping in the women's ministry; we just have a tremendous, tremendous staff.

QUESTIONER: Hi John, my name is Sheryl, and I was wondering if we had any ministry to orphanages; either public or run by the church for orphans?

JOHN: We don't have an orphanage as such. Basically, that whole area has come down to a foster child situation as far as I know. In other words, orphans are usually put into homes as foster children. We have many families, several families in our church who take foster children. And we do do our best in placing, helping assist various agencies to place foster children in Christian homes.

QUESTIONER: Well what I was thinking was we have our jail ministry reach, and if there was any outreach to the orphanages in our area.

JOHN: Yes, there is in a sense. There's a place called Holly Grove, which is one of the major places where they keep kids that have no foster home and they're orphaned, and it looks to me like a good portion of the staff there are from Grace Church. And we work very closely I was down there recently to speak to them all, and we have done quite a bit in that area, in the area of ministering in Holly Grove and many as I said of their staff are from our church.

I can't answer fully beyond that. We do a lot with those that are disabled. Like at the _____ home where those kids are, we minister quite regularly to them on a weekly basis.

QUESTIONER: Well if I was interested in volunteering hours to go visit or be with orphans and just love and be with them, who would I contact at the church to do that?

JOHN: Yeah, I think Marie and Shannon probably would be the ones. Tom, your wife Pat does some kind of things like that too now and then. But I think Larine, Larine is involved in a lot of that, and in a lot of assisting and placement of adoptions and various things like that, and she would be able to direct you to those people.

QUESTIONER: John, one question can I ask two questions?

JOHN: Okay, why don't you ask one first, and then we'll get to those people and then you can come back and ask your second one.

QUESTIONER: Okay so it's kind of long, so hang on. How do you keep such a large church to work as a living organism and not substitute the _____ and quickening of the Spirit by programs instituted in order to have control over what the people are doing?

JOHN: That's a good question; very important question. How do you keep a church an organism without turning it into an organization. And I'll tell you the simple answer to that. You have to have strong central leadership. In other words, it's' gotta be clear to the whole church where you're going, and what you believe, and what you're committed to, and what your priorities are. So that everybody understands where they're going. You know what I'm saying? If for example, I play a lot of football, and this is the unknown factor that you don't see on television - you have to go into a huddle or be with a team to find it out - but a lot of times the difference between a mediocre football team and a great football team is the leader in the huddle. That's why they talk about a quarterback being a great leader. It even is true on defense. A man who can pull everybody together for the common direction.

Now in the case of a church, it's more than one person. But we're all committed to the same priorities. Ad I am able to articulate those priorities from the pulpit. And that becomes the common denominator. You know what I'm saying? Most all of the ministries that flow out in our church flow out of something that as taught in the pulpit. The pulpit activates the hearts of people, they get concerned about certain issues ad out of those concerns float ministries.

Now I believe where you don't have a strong pulpit, and you don't have an affirming, biblical authority coming from the pulpit with definitive type of teaching, people run at loose ends. And it can happen in a church of 50 people, that there's no real unity. Oh they may say hi how are you Alice, I know you real well, and stuff; but there's no real spiritual unity, there's no team, there's no moving ahead

together. Without a real central focus and central thrust, and I think that's a very, very important thing.

Second, there has to be a team of leaders who are committed to the working out of that biblical priority, that biblical truth. And they begin to work in implementation. And that means that every minister you have in your church has to be under the leadership of these men. That's why every single ministry in this church, if followed along its line, would find its way back to the Elders.

Now the next element is this, in order to keep cohesion and spiritual development in a church this size, you have to keep breaking it down and breaking it down and breaking it down into smaller groups. You cannot just have people come, sit, listen on Sunday and go. They've got to get into accountability. People never develop spiritually without accountability. They just don't. I mean, there are very few menasctics who can go off in a corner, get in a cave and get spiritual. We need accountability. We have to have somebody that holds us responsible for things. So that's why we developed the fellowship groups, and ever since I came here we've had home Bible studies - now they're called flocks, and we continue to urge people into those flocks. When a person gets saved, the first thing we do is put them in an FOF class not only to teach them basic doctrine, not only that, but to teach them that they're going to have to learn to communicate with other Christians, to stay close to other Christians to seek strength from other Christians, to input other Christians so they begin to see that as a way of life. And then get them into a flock, that's important.

And I think the thing that kind of rounds it out is this. A church will turn into a bunch of programs if that's what it develops. We are not interested in that. We're interested in developing people. Our goal is not to develop a program, our goal is to develop people. And that happens when people minister to people through spiritual gifts. And so we wanna build up the saints and let them minister.

And all we wanna do program-wise is create environments where people are forced together, so that they can be accountable to one another, so they can stimulate one another, "in love and good works" as Hebrews 10 says, and so they can build one another up in the faith. So it's a very, very crucial- it has to start with a single focus, and a strong word from the Lord that says this is what we believe and this is where we're gonna go and this is what we're committed to, and then what everybody in leadership seeing that being implemented, and everybody out in the fringes and in all the areas of ministry meeting together under the control of those leaders.

Now it doesn't have to be control like dictatorship. There has to be latitude and freedom for the spirit to work. But that's basically it.

QUESTIONER: I was curious, is it imperative for one to be a member of this congregation before someone can teach here at Grace?

JOHN: Yes, in order to teach here at Grace, we want folks to be a member. And the simple reason for that is that the membership process is a screening process. It's the way we get to know you and find out who you are and know that you know the Lord. And it also says to us two things, membership does: 1, I submit to the leadership of this church, 2, I wanna be involved in the ministry here. And when you join the church, you're saying "I wanna come under your control and leadership, and 2, I want you to train me and prepare me to be useful here".

It isn't that we're trying to prevent anybody, it's just that we're trying to be careful with God's flock. And we don't wanna give our people to you unless we know you're one of us. And the way we know that is through the process of membership. Sometimes it takes a long time. Because by the time you join Grace Church you've probably given your testimony to somebody different five or six times. And it's very important that we do that.

Church membership is, you can come here all you want for the rest of your life 'til the day you die without joining the church officially. But I think it's good to join the church, because I think you're saying "this is where I wanna belong, this where I wanna put my heart, this is where I wanna submit and thus is where I wanna sever Christ. And I think there's too many people, there are too many people who just flit and float, and they never really identify. And so we don't' know whether you belong to us or not. I mean, we don't know what our responsibility is to you. We don't know how far to reach out and to care for you, and we don' know how to use you, because you haven't said I belong to you, identify with you.

You know, when a Christian in the early church moved from one city to another, he always took letters from the church commending him to the next church because there was no such thing as a Christian who wasn't a member of a local assembly. No such thing. But we have a lot of those sort of floating Christians. So we do have the standard that if you're gonna teach, you need to be a part of us.

QUESTIONER: John, in the area of government involvement in the church, not in the area of money in taxes but in the area of life and faith, I'm wondering what has been the role or what experience have you had in terms of the government involvement. Looking in counseling records, do they have that right, has that ever happened anywhere, have we been involved in the church in other things other than taxes in money is really the question.

JOHN: To my knowledge Ed, in the United States of America, the government has never gotten involved specifically in our lifetime, in the spiritual life of the church, with the exception of one potential situation, and that was when they decided, the City of Los Angeles, to pass a zoning ordinance which prohibited religious assembly in residential areas. And they closed down two Bible studies. Because neighborhood people said they were having a Bible study in that house, and that's against the ordinance of not having religious assembly in a residential area. And they closed down

two Bible studies.

At that time, Sam Erickson went down to the City Hall and said, "You can't do that", showed them the First Amendment, and they rescinded it. So they didn't know what they were doing. And the first question Sam asked them was, "What if we wanted to get together to watch pornographic movies and play poker", and they said that's okay by the ordinance, and they could see how stupid that was, and that it was in violation of the First Amendment because the First Amendment the right to assemble, and the freedom of speech, and the freedom of religion.

So it's a question of working with these people. You see, you have to realize they're running blind when it comes to faith. So they don't know whether they're invading us or not. When that happened last time up in Sacramento, the guy told Sam Erickson "...and every time we pass an ordinance down here, we'll check with you to make sure we're not violating some spiritual deal".

QUESTIONER: I noted that Grace is considered a nondenominational church, and I was wondering if most of the people who come here are from other denominations and if so, what are the two or there most common denominations represented?

JOHN: That would be interesting to find out. How many Baptists, put your hand up. Baptists. Bless the Baptists. I was raised a Baptist. How many Presbyterians? That's good. How many Lutheran? How many Catholics? Interesting, isn't it. Baptists and Catholics win. *(Laughter)*Episcopalian? One, two? Several, half a dozen maybe. How many, say, come out of a reformed church background? Okay, another six or eight or ten. Methodist? There are some Methodists left in the world. That's great. Good, quite a heavy.

Thank you for waiting, this is the last one.

QUESTIONER: John, my name is Joanna. My question is about an Elder or a pastor in this church, and if they have an adult child living outside of the home, rebellious, would that disqualify him for the service?

JOHN: Rebellious is a hard word to respond to. Timothy in Titus says that he is to have children in subjection, and then Timothy says and Titus says he is to have believing children. We believe that a man, to serve as an Elder at Grace Church, must demonstrate that his children are believing children. Now, there may be a period of time in the life of a child when he is walking in disobedience to the Lord. But if confronted, would say that he believes, he's just in that point in time living in sin. That given all other factors in the life of that man would not disqualify him. And this is something, believe me, we really wrestle with this. The standard is so high here at Grace Church - I'm not kidding. And it gets higher every year. Because as we learn more and as we grow more, and as we mature more in Christ, the standard keeps going up and up and up.

When I think back 14 years ago what we thought was an Elder compared to what we think is one now, there's just no comparison. Because we've perceived such greater richness in the standard. So that these men, and we leave it to their conscience and to their own heart, that if they feel they are in no way disqualified by the momentary drift of one of their children, but if on the other hand they have blatantly unbelieving Christ-rejecting children, that's a disqualifier. On the basis of the fact that they don't have believing children.

Now the question always comes up, "What if he's got seven children and six believe?" And that's a very difficult thing to answer. And I would say that there would be some cases where if he had seven children and six were committed to Jesus Christ and one was not, and all the other elements of his Eldership were in line with the Scripture, we wouldn't disqualify the man. Because he has met the standard in its ideal aspect, and we cannot hold him responsible for the fact that - well as one man said, God hasn't elected one of his children. It's a very difficult problem; very, very difficult. But we want you to know it's something we really grapple with. The standard is very, very high. And so you know that if a man serves as an Elder in Grace Church, he is a man whose had to expose his life, his wife, his kids, his home, everything, to the test.

That's a good place to stop, and we'll pick it up next week. Do we have next week also? Because our time is really gone, we wanna let them go. We'll get you next time, thanks.

Well I hope this has been helpful, has it? It's been helpful to me, and maybe, Lynn, you could take a note down about putting some notes from the Elders monthly. And I know the men want to do that; it's probably an oversight since our paper doesn't go out anymore, that we haven't put that in there. There's a real battle in the Bulletin each Sunday. We're trying to keep the thing reasonable, for several reasons.

One, we don't like the idea of people coming to worship the Lord and getting the Grace Times, you know. Secondly, it's a cost factor to just keep - every time we print another page, it's just that much more paper and I don't know, 10,000 of those deals every week, it just adds up. And so we've tried to condense it, so it's a fight for space and things.

But I think it would be very much wroth it if we just monthly had a little insert on notes from the Elders. And I know that they wanna do that, it was probably just an oversight on their part. Okay?

Let's have prayer and we'll let you go. We thank you Father for the good fellowship tonight, and I could take a seat out in the audience and have asked the same questions these folks asked. It isn't my church, it isn't even our church, it's your church. And a lot of times, I wonder why You've done things the way You've done them, and think maybe that there would have been a great thing accomplished if only we could have done this or done that, and a lot of times I wonder why we can't

get the property for the school, or why we can't get ahead in our funds in the radio so we can expand into the cities where the Word of God is not being taught, and I guess I ask the same questions of You that they've asked of me.

Father, I'm just confident and thankful in the fact that this is Your church. It belongs to Jesus Christ. And I'm so thankful to be a small part of it. we pray for all of those that are here, that we'll all be faithful to whatever part you've given us. that it all might be for your glory in Christ's name, Amen.

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