

Grain of Wheat Leadership Report

June 2023

Picking up the pieces

It's been awhile since there was a leadership report. Coming out of a global pandemic feels good, but it does mean picking up a lot of pieces. It means trying to figure out what we will do differently, what we will lose and what we would like to re-invigorate. And it is also a time to explore what new ideas may be coming our way.

As a relatively new team (6 months with all three) we are working out who does what and what is the best use of our time. Of course, in 2021 and well into 2022, the main issue was to find ways of surviving the pandemic. At first we were learning how to do worship on Zoom. Then we switched to working out how we could safely meet together in person. In this task we relied heavily on the Decision Making Circle (DMC) to be our sounding board, our researchers, and ultimately make the decisions for the body. Most of those decisions are behind us, for now, but there have been some changes that will stay with us for a long time.

On Nov. 1, we (Rachel, Tatiana and Noelle) had a day-long retreat at "Light of the Prairies" retreat centre. We wanted to come up with a framework that could guide us over the next year. The questions we asked ourselves were, "Where did we see God?" "Where did people show up?" and "What was important to GOWers?" Out of our discussions around these questions, we came up with two goals that we hope will keep us focused on what is important in our work.

A paramount consideration coming out of the isolation of the pandemic was the importance of fostering connection. And so the goals that came out of our discussion were:

1. Connecting through embodiment
and
2. Connecting through technology

Connecting Through Embodiment

We have begun **Atrium** and **Children's worship** again and that feels very life giving.

The year started off with a meeting of parents and teachers. We decided to jump right back into offering children's programming every week, knowing there would be challenges and still very much aware of the uncertainties that go along with planning during a pandemic. Carolyn and Aaron took on teaching the preschool children in Atrium while Noelle and Rachel have been taking turns with the Grade 1-6 group. In spite of being away from the space for a number of years, we were surprised and excited to see how quickly the children began to feel like it was their own.

Participating in **Communion** together was one of the big losses during the pandemic and everyone wanted to bring that back to life. To do so safely, we have made some adjustments like using individual cups. This is a form we will continue to use for the foreseeable future.

Some concern was raised about not having an alternative for those who for various reasons do not want to take wine. Communion servers had a meeting and felt they would like to have a juice option. One of the gifts of this change has been having children participate. We would like to teach the children and remind ourselves of the beauty and sacredness of what we are doing when we go up for the wine/juice and the bread.

Music is slowly building up again. Another loss of using Zoom for worship was its inappropriateness as a technology for music. It was also hard to sing at home without hearing others joining in, and in the early days of hybrid worship there were technological limits on how many musicians could play at once. Now we can have music groups again and we would like to build that up. If you have a desire and talent to share – let Tatiana know!

Youth activities in person have started again and we had Spencer as our Youth Connector for the past year.

Can we re-introduce **common meals**? We did celebrate Shrove Tuesday together and that was a great time. We also had a great time out at Ploughshares where we worshipped, ate and played together. Maybe we will look at doing 3 or 4 meals together in the year.

One way we could be together during the pandemic was to meet in the park in summer. That has become our summer “tradition.” We will again **worship in the park** one Sunday a month during June, July and August. Hopefully the weather cooperates as well as it did last year.

We would love to encourage **dance, drama, and art** in worship and in our life together. There are still some hiccups to work through because it does not translate easily for the hybrid format – but we’re working on it!

Connecting Through Technology

Something that changed because of the pandemic that has probably changed forever is learning to connect electronically. Shelby has kept us all connected through Zoom worship and continues to enhance our ability to be connected using hybrid worship. We have seen the benefits of using technology as a connecting tool and we want to learn to use it to better effect.

Ways to improve our techie connection might be to

- update and streamline our website
- refine hybrid worship or move to a livestream format (either way, we decided to buy a dedicated laptop for getting worship online)
- post a semi-annual leadership report

We try to give some time at each meeting to see where we’re at with our goals, even if it’s just a 20 minute brainstorm. We have found that taking it in little bites works well and keeps the goals current in our thoughts and in our work. If you have ideas about these goals that might enhance their enactment – let us know. We’d be happy to have your input.

Intro Series 2022/2023

We had a wonderful year getting to know Val, Baden, Chloe and Spencer over the winter. And they got to know each other. By the end it felt like we had another Seed Group. What was really nice about it was that we met in various homes and had “guest” presenters each week. This gave the new people a chance to get to know some more Wheaties. Of course for Baden all this was kind of old hat as they grew up in GOW, but they came along for the ride.

The topics were fashioned around our Identity Statement and 13 Commitments but the discussions were wide ranging. Here’s what it looked like:

Week 1: History

- We met at Langels’ and plumbed their memories

Week 2: GOW Identity Statement

- We met at Campbells’ and Craig went over the theology with us

Week 3: Growing in our faith

- We met at Murphys’ and Stephen gave us input on spiritual practices

Week 4: Our connection with the world

- We met at Naduraks’ and Marv outlined what we do in the community and the world

Week 5: How we live together

- We met at Kornelson/Janzens’ and Jason talked about our structures

Week 6: Hearing from them

- We met at Rachel Braun’s to share our thoughts about what comes next

Saying goodbye

Although we have been privileged to greet some new people this year, we have also had to say goodbye to some of our friends this past year.

Although Annie Janzen passed away more than a year ago, it was during the pandemic and we want to note it here. Annie was an inspiration to many and her connections were far reaching. She lived a life of enough and worked at finding ways to live in harmony on this earth with all God’s creation. We keep her in our memory and find ourselves often referring to something Annie used to do or say.

One of our founding members passed away on New Year’s Eve of 2022. Jake Pauls had had a bad fall in his home in August and never fully recovered. He was a carpenter who had worked on many, many GOW houses. But he was known for his deep faith, commitment to the good news and his love for Jesus. We will miss his voice pointing us always to seeing God in our all our work.

Later in the winter we said goodbye to William. William was one of those people who pitched in everywhere – whether it was making pancakes for Shrove Tuesday, fixing crates for Atrium or bringing popcorn to Seed group. His passing leaves a significant gap in our circle.

We have also said farewell to some people who have moved away or moved on. David, Sarah and Annelie let us know that they were going to start worshipping at Hope Mennonite Church as the Mennonite connection felt like a good fit for them right now. Maryanne moved with her husband Vincent to The Netherlands to start a new chapter of their lives there. She can still be seen on Zoom every now and again. Saori, Kai and Juna left for Japan in February and Randy is hoping to join them in July. That's a big change for them but Saori felt it was important to be with her aging parents at this time. For all these wonderful friends, we thank God for the time we had together and pray God's blessing of peace and joy in their lives.

WestEnd Commons

Things have been getting harder for people in and around the West End, which led to a string of break-ins at the WestEnd Commons starting in the winter. Due to the insecurity of the building, many of the tenants have decided to operate elsewhere for the time being; 1JustCity has been holding outdoor "drop-in" times, but most of their usual activities are taking place at Crossways In Common. The WEC board has been hard at work making the building more secure and strategizing what else is needed for the wellbeing of residents and tenants. Grain of Wheat has been a strong partner in this work in the past; we are looking for ways to increase our connection to the people who live and work in the building.

Looking Ahead

Many organizations have started to develop and use land acknowledgements as a part of the journey of reconciliation with First Nations peoples. This is something that we are discussing and working toward. We hope to bring this conversation to the wider body in the near future.

Another upcoming item is the topic of baptism. When our identity statement and 13 commitments document was originally accepted, there was an appendix added stating that we would discuss baptism and its role in our community life further at a later date. We will be starting this conversation with the Decision Making Circle to clarify the importance of baptism in our community life.

We hope this report has helped shed some light on what we've been up to in the past while. If any of it has sparked questions or ideas, let us know!

- Noelle, Rachel, and Tatiana