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Grace and peace friends,

I, like many of you, have been anxious and stressed at the uncertainty of the future. Not only for our church, but for our country, families, and livelihoods. I am hoping to reduce some of that anxiety and stress by talking about what the future of our church will look like. Before I was appointed to Gethsemane UMC in 2018, the leadership of the church knew something needed to change in order for our congregation to reach new people, build discipleship, and help bring the message of love found in Jesus Christ to people who do not know Jesus. Hoping to not have to reinvent the wheel, they turned to the Minnesota Annual Conference for help in bringing this vision of outreach and discipleship into reality. Our District Superintendent Susan Nienaber talked to them about a partnership with a flourishing, multi-campus congregation in Sioux Falls, South Dakota called Embrace. Thus, the wheels of change began to turn!

When I arrived two years ago, we began diving into what this vision of an Embrace partnership would really look like and how we could accomplish the task of reaching unchurched people in Lino Lakes. This earnest, Spirit-led discernment brought us to two conclusions on how we can accomplish our vision: One (1), our physical space needs to be changed in order to welcome new people who have never been to church before. And two (2), we as the church need to release me half-time to serve as a church planter in Lino Lakes. By renovating our space and giving me the flexibility to build contacts in our community, we are laying the ground work for a new worship service centered on contemporary music, relevant teaching, and an inviting atmosphere. And since we are planting a new service with a new name, identity, and style; we are able to build it from the ground up to offer an authentic worship experience, children's programming, and make it safe for a post-pandemic world.

So what does this new vision mean for Gethsemane UMC? It means that our physical space will change to be more inviting for people who have never experienced church. It means we will eventually have two services, an earlier traditional service with hymns and a contemporary worship service. It means reorienting the focus of our ministry on the visitor and guest, so they are can have the opportunity to meet Jesus in the walls of our church the same way that many of us have met Jesus. It also means we need prayer; prayer for health, safety, and connection as we begin navigating bringing this vision of outreach and discipleship into reality. I know you have questions, fears, and anxiety about this; and I encourage you to call me! Let's talk about it and have a conversation! Seriously, call me. That way we can move forward in this exciting new chapter of Gethsemane UMC's ministry filled with hope, faith, and joy!

Shalom,
Pastor David Hodd