



Church Decline vs. Growth



Many Christian denominations and congregations are experiencing declining numbers of members and an overall aging population. This is a constant question that the Episcopal Church as well as individual parishes seek to unravel. Our vestry at Grace talks about this as well so I would like to take this opportunity to explore what factors contribute to this phenomenon and what endeavors we may be able to undertake to address this here in our community of faith.

The short answer is that there isn't a single formula for success, but there are clear patterns of activities emerging among churches that are growing. Here are some of the approaches that seem to be working.

1. Churches that prioritize relationships over programs

One of the strongest predictors of growth isn't having more activities, rather it is helping newcomers form genuine relationships quickly. Growing churches often: 1) connect visitors with a small group within weeks, 2) encourage members to invite friends personally, 3) foster intergenerational friendships, 4) create clear pathways from visitor → participant → volunteer. Research consistently finds that people are far more likely to stay because they know people than because of the quality of the sermon alone.

2. Clear mission and identity

Churches trying to appeal to everyone often struggle. Thriving congregations tend to answer questions like: Why do we exist? Who are we trying to reach? What kind of disciples are we trying to form? This doesn't necessarily mean becoming more conservative or more progressive. Rather, churches with a coherent identity often outperform those with an ambiguous one.

3. Strong preaching paired with practical application

Across theological traditions, people respond well to preaching that: 1) is rooted in scripture, 2) addresses real-life questions, 3) is intellectually credible and 4) offers hope rather than only critique.

Worship Opportunities

Sundays at 8:30 and 10:30 AM

**TO JOIN SERVICES LIVE ONLINE
VIA ZOOM, VISIT OUR WEBSITE AND
FOLLOW THE LINKS**

www.gracechurchmtclemens.org

**TO JOIN SERVICES LIVE BY
PHONE VIA ZOOM:**

8:30 Service: Call 312-626-6799
Meeting ID: 881 8016 9300
Password: 246040

10:30 Service: See YouTube link
on Website

SUNDAY BIBLE STUDY
9:30 AM in Guild Room

*Worship resources are available
on our Website 24/7/365.*



4. Investment in children and youth

Growing churches devote attention to the following: 1) nursery and preschool, 2) children and teen ministry, 3) parent support. Families often decide where to attend based largely on whether their children are welcomed, safe, and engaged.

5. Small groups becoming the primary community

Large worship services rarely create close relationships by themselves. Healthy churches often have these elements: 1) Bible studies, 2) home groups, 3) service teams, 4) prayer groups. These smaller communities help people build friendships, receive care, and stay connected.

6. Community engagement

Congregations growing through outreach often have a visible presence in their neighborhoods through 1) food pantries, 2) tutoring, 3) recovery ministries, 4) English-language classes, 5) partnerships with schools, 6) support for foster and adoptive families. When people see a church meeting tangible needs, it can lower barriers to participation.

7. Intentional hospitality

Many visitors decide within minutes whether they feel welcome. Successful churches pay attention to 1) clear signage, 2) friendly greeters, 3) easy parking, 4) accessible buildings, 5) follow-up that feels personal rather than sales oriented.

8. Leadership development

Rather than relying heavily on one charismatic pastor, growing churches tend to develop many leaders. This includes: 1) training volunteers, 2) empowering lay ministry, 3) mentoring younger leaders, 4) sharing responsibility across teams.

9. Willingness to adapt

Churches that thrive often preserve their core beliefs while adapting practices. Examples include: 1) modern communication methods, 2) livestreams and online engagement, 3) flexible service times, 4) contemporary or blended music where appropriate, 5) easier ways to register for events and connect. The common thread is removing unnecessary barriers while maintaining theological convictions.

Many successful churches follow a sequence like this:

1. Clarify mission.
2. Strengthen leadership.
3. Improve hospitality.
4. Build small-group community.
5. Invest heavily in children and youth.
6. Engage the surrounding neighborhood.
7. Invite people into meaningful spiritual formation and service to others.

In what areas do you think Grace is doing well and what things do we need to strengthen?

Blessings,
Pastor Steve

Hearts for Homes Progressive Raffle



Join Hearts for Homes in a progressive Queen of Hearts raffle, running **now through July 1, 2027 every Thursday at 7 PM** at Tipsy's, 7280 12 Mile Road in Warren. Buy a ticket for \$5 and choose a number from 1 to 52; write that number on your ticket stub. One numbered envelope containing a playing card is drawn from the barrel; if no one is a winner, all of that week's tickets are thrown out and the jackpot rolls over to the next week, when a new batch of tickets is sold. If the envelope that's drawn contains the queen of hearts, we have a winner! They'll receive half of the money collected from ticket sales. Then a new set of cards is prepared and we start another round of ticket sales. We accept Venmo and PayPal. Please call with any questions: (586) 850-6668.

What Are the Dog Days of Summer?

The dog days of summer run from June 5 to August 11. During this time, the sun is in the same region of the sky as Sirius, the Dog Star—the brightest star visible from any part of Earth. The increased heat of the dog days doesn't come from Sirius as the ancient Romans believed, but from the tilt of the Earth causing the sun's rays to hit at a more direct angle and for a longer period of time, which means longer, hotter days. Because it takes so long for the oceans and the land surface to warm up, peak temperatures arrive in late July or early August, not on the summer solstice itself—in other words, right during the dog days.

— Adapted from *The Farmer's Almanac*

Staying Safe in Hot Weather



Watch for these signs of hyperthermia:



Dizziness



Muscle cramps



Swelling in your ankles and feet



Nausea and weakness



Rapid pulse



Tips to prevent hot-weather illness:



Drink liquids



Limit caffeine and alcohol



Wear light-colored, loose fitting clothes



If it's too hot, try exercising indoors

Learn more about staying safe in hot weather at www.nia.nih.gov/hot-weather-safety.

August Birthdays

Sara Schlanbusch-Mattuck	8/17
Dash Heath	8/22
Patricia Mastrojanni Burn	8/22
Dave Farrell	8/23
Barbara Keranen	8/23



Join us in the Guild Room for Bible study, every **Sunday at 9:30 AM.**



"F" Dollars for Fueling Kids' Futures

If your wallet has any dollar bills with **F** on them, please pass them along to help us fill backpacks with weekend food for hungry Mt. Clemens students.

Monthly Bible Study

Did you know that Grace also hosts monthly Bible study sessions in addition to our regular Sunday meet-ups? Join us in the Guild Room on **Friday, August 14 at 6:30 PM.**



COMMUNITY SUPPERS

Wednesdays at 4 PM

Sundays (Nov.-Mar.) at 4 PM

GRACE FOOD PANTRY

Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, 10 AM to 12 PM
Curbside distribution

Book Club at Grace

The book club will meet at Grace on **Thursday, September 10 at 6 PM** to discuss *The Shadow Box* by Luanne Rice. Reviews of this book describe it as a thriller mystery with multiple and seamless twists and turns. If you have any questions, please call Ann Strevel. Looking forward to seeing you!



Recommended Food Pantry Donations

Canned soups, canned fruits and vegetables, macaroni and cheese, peanut butter, jelly, canned tuna/chicken, SpaghettiOs, Hamburger Helper, instant mashed potatoes, spaghetti sauce, pasta, cereal, canned applesauce

A Prayer of Praise

Praise to You, God, for long warm days,
for buzzing bees and chirping crickets,
for shade trees and gentle breezes.

Praise to You for the earth's rotation,
for our cycle around the sun,
for "sun, moon, and stars in their courses above."

Praise to You for the order of the universe,
the variety of the seasons,
and the gift of another summer. Amen.

Grace Episcopal Church Staff

Pastor Steven Steinberger-Domienik

Cell: 203-641-2068

Email: pastor@gracechurchmtclemens.org

Music Director: Josh Dulin

Clergy Emerita: The Rev. Deacon Betty Brogan

2026 Vestry

Mike Oakley	Lucy Smith	Mike Zubas
Ernie Simon	Sharon Potter	Don Siefkes
Margaret Morgan		Selia Tuten