

OCC Family Meeting, November 9th @ 7pm

Welcome

PS & NM: "Good evening OCC – we have the whole Board up here. We appreciate you being here and online tonight. Over the last year, we have been talking about the restorative work required here at Overlake. This work is holy...and it is hard. Tonight our heart is to care for you by giving an overview of what we'll see in the report when it is released. We want to care well for each other and that requires clarity, transparency and safety. Sometimes the best way to be cared for is to have someone who loves you "tell you like it is." To be clear, is to be kind.

There will be plenty of information shared and everything you hear tonight will be available afterwards for you. The nature of what we are discussing is heavy and hard, because of the triggers some of this information includes we have a space outside the Worship Center in Lobby Room North (out and to the right) if you need space to care for yourself.

First, let's have everyone introduce themselves and then we'll open with a Passage and Prayer..."

Board Member Pics w/ Names (PP)

TR: Hi, I'm Todd Ranson, and my wife is Elaine. We have been part of Overlake since 2008. Our children Abby, Jack, Lilly, & Jalaya keep Tina very busy, and Overlake's Orphan Care program played a significant part in helping our family grow. I was honored to join the Elder Board in 2021.

AT: Hi, I am Arlene Thomas. My husband Ben and I have been at Overlake for 20 years. I currently serve on the Sunday Experience Team and have been serving as an elder since 2021. I am the current Vice Chair.

DD: Hi, I'm Duane Duim and my wife Julie and I began attending Overlake in late 2019. I joined the elder board in 2022.

NC: Hi, I'm Nate Chinn. My wife Barbara and I started attending Overlake around 2008. I've been serving as an Elder since 2021 and am currently the Board Chair.

CB: Good evening, Overlake family, my name is Carrie Bartasawicz and my husband Kevin and I have been members of Overlake since 2003 and I have been serving as an elder since 2022.

ES: Hi, I am Eileen Suico. My husband Jack and I started coming to Overlake around 2015. You'd usually find us participating at Safe Parking on Saturdays, and, with Cara's team on greetings or coffee on Sundays. Sometimes I get to join the worship team here or at MSM. Like Duane, I joined the elder board the same time last year.

HE: Hello. My name is Heidi Ellis and I have been attending Overlake since around 2007 or 8. I met my husband, Phil, right down there in the hallway. I've been on the board since 2021.

Let's all read this passage together that's provided vision and direction for us this year... Isaiah 58:9-12... join with me...

Then when you pray, GOD will answer.
You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am.'
"If you get rid of unfair practices,
quit blaming victims,
quit gossiping about other people's sins,
If you are generous with the hungry
and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,
Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness,
your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.
I will always show you where to go.
I'll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—
firm muscles, strong bones.
You'll be like a well-watered garden,
a gurgling spring that never runs dry.
You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew,
rebuild the foundations from out of your past.
You'll be known as those who can fix anything,
restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate,
make the community livable again."

Isaiah 58:9-12 (The Message)

Join with me in Prayer.

CB: The WHY. Why did we, as the current Elder board, make the decision to engage an independent third party to conduct an investigation of Overlake's history and culture?

From the moment, our co-lead pastors Pat and Neely stepped into the co-lead model they felt a deep conviction of being called to the restorative work of our Overlake story.

What they didn't know, and are still learning, is what that means. Over the past three years as co-leads, they have had several stories find their way to them. Some are stories they had already heard, and others were brand new.

A few of these include:

- A former congregant sharing her experience of being publicly disciplined and silenced in 1995 for sharing that she was considering a divorce of her abusive husband,
- Awareness that under the prior Senior leadership there had been an allegation raised of harassment and discrimination
- Discovery of a physical vault that exists within the building and contained historical documents that former leaders locked away

And, in June 2022, a former student, met with Pastor Pat to report a series of harmful experiences that took place when he was a minor during the years 2011-2013, 10-12 years ago. In particular, the former student reported a pattern of behavior he described as grooming from a former adult youth leader. The student provided a written summary of the misconduct to accompany his report. Pat shared this with Pastor Neely, as well as the board chair and human resources. Pat also reported the incident to CPS since the accounts took place while the former student was a minor and requested that the matter be addressed at the next elder's board meeting and suggested OCC should seek outside guidance from "an organization like GRACE" to determine how best to proceed.

GRACE Website Homepage - PP

GRACE (stands for: Godly Response to Abuse in Christian Environments) and is an organization empowering Christian communities to recognize, prevent, and respond to abuse.

The elder board approved retaining GRACE to investigate the reported harm as well as assess a history of sexual misconduct and, in some cases, criminal behavior at OCC in the hope of learning from this history and moving the church toward healing and a future where the risk of abuse is lessened. Due to Grace's backlog of cases, the investigation and assessment could not begin until January 2023.

As an elder board, we commit to Isaiah 58:

“Get rid of unfair practices...” This report helps OCC take a hard-look at the unhealthy practices and cultural dynamics that we must ensure we are rid of. Thankfully, this report offers recommendations for next-steps. The Board takes seriously the weight of these recommendations and is committed to seeing OCC address these.

“Quit blaming victims...” This report helps break a cycle of minimizing, silencing, blaming, and treating victims as an inconvenience. The opening pages answer some frequently asked questions, by sharing important details about GRACE's methodology for the construction of the report (pages 4-6).

“Quit gossiping about other people's sins...” This report is not for entertainment, gossip, or for creating scapegoats. It is for the awareness of knowing where confession and repentance is needed. It is both personal and corporate. In Nehemiah 9, we see a community who “confessed their own sins and the sins of their ancestors.” Similar to Scripture, this report shows our immense need of God's grace – both as individuals and as a church.

In the last three years, we have begun to shift culture around our BELONG values: Bravery, Equity, Learning, Ownership, Nurturing and Gifting. GRACE acknowledged our values and spoke to them, here are words directly from the GRACE report:

“These God-honoring values become critical anchors in the holy work of facing wrong-doing, engaging in repentance, and waiting for God to restore communities to His vision. It is important to note that no allegations of misconduct emerged from the investigation since Pastor Neely and Pastor Pat have been Co-Leads at Overlake. However, they and the board have the responsibility and opportunity to reckon with Overlake’s past and lead a process that embodies the values identified above.

It is painful to face the reform of a church culture that your fingerprints are on, but in this sensitive place, God will be faithful. While GRACE recognizes that the past remains unchangeable, Overlake's future lies in the hands of its Elders, staff, volunteers, and congregants. Together, they will chart the course of the church moving forward.”

GRACE Report (*page 63*)

TR: Starting tomorrow, November 10th, we will post the full report on OCC.ORG. Additionally, you will find a link to the transcript from our meeting tonight, and details about additional resources about how the church is addressing issues raised in the report.

The report is over 100 pages containing a synopsis of GRACE’s investigation into the most recent allegation, a summarized history of abuse at Overlake and how the Church has responded to these alleged and proven abuse in the past. It also contains recommendations for how to move forward and seek healing and restoration for those impacted by abuse, and how to establish a clear path forward to create a safe environment for all, especially caring for those who have suffered abuse.

We want to offer a trigger warning – the report is very detailed.

“GRACE believes this level of detail is necessary to understand the seriousness of what transpired at OCC.”

The detail eliminates ambiguity about what happened, distinguishes severity of incidents and honors the survivor’s story and experience and disempowers shame.

Overlake's history

DD:

The report covers Overlake's history through eras of leadership. Here's a brief overview...

The foundations of OCC began under Bob Moorehead, Overlake's first pastor – he started in 1969 - growing from fewer than 100 members to over 6,000 in 1998. (pg 25). Reports of sexual misconduct surfaced in 1996. It appears that at least 17 men spoke to a private investigator, then hired by the church, about groping or other forms of molestation. Some media accounts during the time period in question state that “more than 20 men” had “come forward to say they were sexually fondled by the pastor” with one report stating the “tally was closer to 40” but also conceding the “real total of victims from the past 25 years is anybody's guess. (pg 39-40)

In the aftermath of Bob Moorehead's leadership – Overlake transitioned under the leadership of Lead Pastor Rick Kingham in 1998, GRACE investigators found a summary of a 1994 investigation into an OCC-Supported Missionary about allegations of child abuse that came to light during Kingham's time in leadership. A summary of this investigation is included with the report. (pg 50-52)

Additionally, within five years after Bob Moorhead's departure, there were three child abuse crimes committed by church employees and volunteers. A summary of these crimes, along with the criminal convictions of these individuals are highlighted in the report. (pg 53)

Mike Howerton joined Overlake in 2004 to help it transition youth into continued participation in the church in their early adulthood. This effort was very successful and Howerton's leadership grew into a Senior Pastor position in 2007. During Howerton's tenure there was notable progress made towards women being recognized and valued within top leadership and a sense of flattening of the formal organizational hierarchy that characterized the church in previous decades. (pg 55)

However, during these years of 2005-2020, the GRACE investigation outlined aspects of an unhealthy culture, and discovered allegations related to various former staff members of emotional abuse, allegations of sexual harassment on church property, and allegations of indecent liberties of an adult on church property. All of these allegations are addressed within the report. (pg 58)

HE:

GRACE identified 6 themes from during the Moorehead era – each theme, while varied, stayed in the culture, even if to a lesser extent. GRACE made recommendations on how to address them moving forward. It should be noted that some recommendations have been already addressed in the last 2 years, while others still require work.

Six Identified Cultural Findings

1. OCC did not have clear policies in responding to an allegation of sexual assault committed by a pastor or other leader.

Historically, we know that OCC acknowledged the lack of clear policies in responding to allegations of sexual assault.

As stated in the GRACE report, through interviews with past staff, current staff, and volunteer leaders at OCC, certain recurring patterns were identified. These patterns included a consistent failure to provide follow-up or feedback to relevant parties after concerns or issues were raised, and a strict control over information that could potentially challenge the reputation of charismatic leadership, often conflated with protecting the reputation of the church or its charismatic leaders

We are currently working with GRACE to develop a tailored training program to ensure we have a culture where staff, elders and volunteers can proactively identify and respond to potential abuse.

Additionally, we are working to ensure that all systems and written policies require immediate response to all allegations of sexual assault by a pastor or other leader.

NC:

2. OCC did not fully appreciate, much less honor the Biblical command to abide by the law.

During the Moorhead era, GRACE found no evidence that the church ever contacted law enforcement regarding Moorehead's acts of abuse.

After the Moorehead era, GRACE investigators found other instances in which sexual misconduct may have constituted a crime but was not reported to the authorities. There were two identified instances not previously reported to CPS but since have been reported based on the instruction of GRACE. Both instances are outlined in the report.

In addition, in October 2022, OCC chose to make its pastors mandated reporters even though the state of Washington is among the minority of states that do not require clergy to report reasonable suspicions of abuse. We've committed to the training of elders, staff and volunteers on identifying and reporting harm and in abiding by the laws in place.

AT:

3. OCC was too slow in bringing in an outside investigator or other expert(s) to assist in responding to reports of clergy abuse

In our history, as stories of misconduct were reported, there was a hesitance to believe or admit any allegations could be true. Historically, Overlake tried to handle reports of misconduct in-house. After allegations against Moorhead, a private investigator was eventually retained by Overlake, and that investigator confirmed many credible accounts of sexual misconduct by Moorehead. While there was a commitment made by Overlake to share the findings of that investigative report with the congregation, only a summary of the report was given.

In the years following, while perhaps there were some changes in how these types of allegations were handled throughout different leadership eras, the pattern of failing to seek timely, expert, independent help, did not change.

As Nate described, under the current leadership, elders and pastoral staff are now required to report *to outside authorities*, any concerns of child abuse or neglect. In addition, as a way of providing a method of reporting any harm by clergy or staff, we have also created a new email address that allows contact to the lay elders (elders who are non staff members of Overlake).

layelders@occ.org

In our case this email would go to all of us with the exceptions of Pastor Neely and Pastor Pat.

CB:

4. Cognitive dissonance likely played a role in the response to the allegations

Cognitive dissonance can be described as the challenging feelings that accompany the gap between perception and reality. Cognitive dissonance can cause people to deny certain realities in order to make that gap feel narrower. For instance, it is undeniable that Pastor Moorhead did some amazing things. At the same time, he was acting in abusive ways, causing harm to congregants. Those closest to him had a hard time believing the accounts from victims. Cognitive dissonance played a role. It was easy to say, “how could the same person who is leading people to Jesus do these things.” It created those challenging feelings to see him as a person who could do both.

This is not an uncommon phenomenon when it comes to people in leadership in ministry. Congregants generally see the work being done and can then believe the person is, in many ways, infallible. When victims come forward, it can be hard to reconcile their stories with the known behavior of these leaders. We recognize the importance of elevating victims’ voices.

To combat cognitive dissonance, the current leadership has put in place several accountability practices for leadership. Elders and co-lead pastors regularly meet to hear how the pastors are doing and create space for a time of confession and accountability questions.

The elders and leaders are committed to continue additional training. We will continually look at the practices of accountability and confession and see leadership as whole people.

ES:

5. The OCC leaders and community did not understand or did not fully take into account the physical, emotional, and spiritual impact of trauma, as well as the unique dynamics of trauma when the victim is a male.

All the known victims in the early years of OCC were male. This went on for several years. GRACE provided a helpful analysis on what kept this going for many years.

According to the report, most of these come from flawed understanding of abuse especially when the victim is male.

Grace lays out myths around harm done to males, all are helpful in establishing an understanding why something as serious as these can continue for many years. The awareness can help disrupt the cycle of abuse and use of power in this way, giving folks the empowerment to rise above myths that keep them isolated.

6. OCC leaders applied Scripture too narrowly by failing to take into account all the Bible has to say about trauma and caring for the “least of these.”

As the elders brought up, GRACE's expertise is investigating trauma from abuse. And, included in this is sexual abuse. In their practice, the victims are primarily placed at the very center—their protection, care and prevention from further harm are priority. In their report, they establish that acts of abuse, including sexually related ones, are often done by those in positions of power to abuse, control or manipulate.

In GRACE's assessment, OCC's cases way back from 1970s are not exceptions. Instead, they are very consistent with that culture of power, and unfortunately, even in the way they address the incidents. One illustrative example is the repeated and flawed use of the passage in Matthew 18 in more than one reported incident.

In GRACE's experience, Matthew 18 is often used to silence victims and should be used cautiously when responding to reports of abuse especially in the case of a child. GRACE points out the importance of using the framework of the "least of these" in the use of biblical references when responding to reports related to abuse.

Grace recommends the urgent need that OCC should theologically engage topics of abuse, sexual assault, and other forms of trauma. We are committed to following their recommendations.

There is a lot of work ahead. GRACE has provided a substantial list of recommendations that will be put into plan. The plan and the timeline will be posted online with the GRACE report.

CB: Our Co-Lead Pastors, Pat & Neely, have been on the staff here for over 12 years each. We wanted to give them an opportunity to share about their experiences and roles at OCC throughout the time leading up to their taking leadership of the church.

Words from Pat & Neely

PS: I've been on staff for over 13.5 years and this work is more than just organizational, it's personal. It's been humbling to realize I participated in a culture that led to people feeling unsafe and being hurt, and some still have pain they carry today.

Some of the tensions I feel in this is...

1. I don't want to avoid, minimize, cover up, or defend.
2. I also don't want to blame-shift or scapegoat.
3. I also don't want to over-take responsibility for things I'm not responsible for, which at times I'm tempted to do.

I'll begin by sharing a specific example of what this looked like. In June of last year, when a former student came forward and shared numerous painful experiences from his time in OCC's youth group. After he finished sharing everything, there was a memory that came to my own mind which I shared with

him and sought his forgiveness. He was incredibly gracious to forgive. I ended up sharing this same memory with GRACE, and the elders, and it's in the report, so I want to share it with you...

It was a memory from a flight home from a ministry conference with a mix of staff and interns. And I was sitting next to this former student, an intern at the time (still a minor) and he fell asleep. I thought it would "be funny to prank him" by pulling out a pen and drawing a penis on his leg.

Clearly, this is something I wouldn't do today. It speaks to the culture at a time that made space for crude & crass humor. Let me read from Ephesians 5...

"Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving."
Ephesians 5:1-4 NLT

Obviously, I wasn't following "God's example." I remember thinking to myself, *"Well, this is just part of being relevant to teenagers now days and doing youth ministry. It's part of building relationships for the greater cause of helping students on their journey of following Jesus."*

I was foolishly reframing what was un-Christlike as necessary for helping others become like-Christ. How backwards! It was wrong. No excuse. And I knew it was wrong back then. I was not without conviction. I can even recall my own wife, Leah, calling me out multiple times - saying, "You really shouldn't be joking like that!"

What has taken me time, is continued learning of power dynamics and what unhealthy cultures have in them and how that leads to people being hurt and harmed.

I owe an apology to former youth, staff and others who have suffered the harmful effects of being in a culture that was simultaneously perverse & crass, while at the

same time weaponizing the shame of purity culture. Looking back, I can see how I was also shaped by a similar culture.

This work has also revealed how concerned I've been about image, brand & reputation and the temptation to then hide, pretend or project something other than what's true – which is deceptive. I want to be fully real, authentic, and integrous.

And that will always require the brave work of truth-telling, confession, and repentance.

It's uncomfortable and humbling.

And it's been freeing and healing.

NM: The GRACE report is not an attempt to scapegoat any one person or one part of our story – it is about shared responsibility- that includes being shared by me. Part of why I joined the Student Ministry team in 2011 was because of toxic culture I observed as a volunteer...specifically for the young women in the ministry. I went to Pastor Mike – I told him what I had seen and heard – basically why he needed someone like me on the team. I think I did some things right and I also know I missed the mark – and I have some regrets about my years in Student Ministry.

There were a few things so obviously unhealthy to me.... toxic masculinity, a dangerous purity culture that was harmful to students in the ministry, forms of homophobia...AND then there were other areas that seemed normal based on my years in student ministry within the evangelical church even outside of Overlake.... Including the use of sexual humor especially when talking about sex and dating. Slowly over the years, even some of those areas began to feel wrong to me...in particular, as I got older and as my kids grew and became a part of the ministry.

As I read the GRACE report...it's pretty clear that this unhealthy culture didn't just exist in Student Ministry...but in Overlake's history and in the broader culture of the entire church. It has been disheartening to look back... especially as I consider

how I had hoped to bring change, knowing now that I had also participated in some of the problematic parts of it too.

As I read the report, I was sad...I am still sad. It's hard to read about how a place I love and believe should be a safe space for everyone... was instead causing such harm and pain to so many people...people I love. There is conviction for me as I understand my complicity and my role in the harm.

In a culture that made light of sexual dignity through coarse joking and humor...I contribute to it. You'll see my name in the report regarding this. I am sorry for the joking that caused harm to people and as GRACE stated in the report, this joking allowed for potential bad actors to participate. While I believe humor can be a gift – I truly understand that this kind of humor has wounded people, and it normalized a kind of joking that shouldn't be a part of a believer's life.

In a culture that caused harm to so many young men, as you'll see in the report – I am sorry for not seeing clearly how toxic masculinity was hurting the young men as well as women within Student Ministry.

In a culture that I had identified as harmful – I am sorry for the unhealthy ways I showed up so that I could fit in...like at times choosing silence INSTEAD of naming the harmful behavior and moving towards health and safety quicker. I told students all the time...if you see something, say something. And as I read the report, I realized I didn't always follow my own teaching.

Over the past few months, I have found myself extremely grateful for our BELONG values. While I am mindful that we have not arrived yet, knowing the culture we want to create has allowed me to do some honest reflecting. What we are doing here is hard and it's been hard for me. I have wrestled with what it means to be both human and to be a pastor...capable of helping and harming others...sometimes even at the same time. And this work has required bravery, to listen to how we, as a church (and how I), have hurt people. I've learned a lot in the last 12 years I have been on staff and I am still learning so much. There is more for us to learn together as a church family on how we can keep creating a safer place for everyone.

The report is just the start of our work...it's the truth telling part of our work. We're going to tell the truth. We're going to confess and repent from our history...and then we're going to commit to the road of reconciliation. It's already begun, Pat and I have been in communication with some of the former students who were a part of the report – as they self-disclosed to us. And there are some who don't trust us or the work yet – we hold hope for reconciliation with them too. It won't be quick work...but it will be holy work.

NC: While Neely & Pat have been on staff at Overlake for a significant portion of its history, no other allegations were made about their conduct, apart from what they have disclosed here tonight. While these incidents fell short of the values we aspire to, survivors have described a confidence in Pat & Neely's character to carry this work forward. We are grateful that many survivors also expressed gratitude for their response to the allegations. We as elders, along with GRACE, believe their confession, apology and subsequent proactive actions to rectify the culture, demonstrate their commitment to repentance and restoration. Moving forward, we are also committed to maintaining open channels for anyone who needs to reach out, related to any concerns.

When we established the shared leadership model, it included putting a framework in place to intentionally share the responsibility of leadership and accountability between both Pastors. These include:

- Individual therapy for each Pat and Neely, quarterly joint sessions with them together
- Individual accountability meetings with Elders
- Alternating Preaching Assignments
- Alternating Staff Team Leadership
- Participation in trainings (along with staff and elders)

TR: Some might ask, why are we talking about our past...

Through the investigation into the most recent report of abuse, it became apparent that Overlake had never fully addressed a persistent pattern of abuse. We believe the only path forward is the path laid out for us in the Bible, which is

to acknowledge and confess our collective sin, both for the blatant harm and lapses in morality as well as the prideful decision to protect power over seeking justice. Confession heals. Truth sets us free.

In the report, you'll find that some people are named and some names are redacted - why?

In this report, GRACE has named those who have been convicted of criminal activity, as well as those who are public figures and are already identified in media or other publicly available materials. GRACE also named the lead pastor or pastors during OCC's history as benchmarks that may aid the reader in understanding OCC's history. Given this criterion, GRACE did not name the youth group leader who was the subject of the investigation. GRACE did not name others identified in documents or witness statements as having engaged in sexual misconduct because it was not within the scope to investigate other allegations but to utilize these documents and statements in the hope of understanding the culture at OCC which has contributed to sexual misconduct.

By design, all survey responses and interviews remain confidential and within GRACE's control. Identifying information is shared with leadership only through self-disclosure of investigation participants.

AT: We realize there has been a lot of information given tonight. This is hard. Really hard.

We know that this information can stir up a lot of emotions, and perhaps reminders of personal experiences for some of you in the room or listening online. A word to survivors of abuse and church abuse, we want to stand with you. If there are ways in which we can be a part of your healing, we want to be available to you. On the Overlake website, we will also have a list of community resources available.

While we recognize and grieve these parts of our history. We also hold hope. Our hope is that:

- Where there has been secrecy and silencing of victims...we are working towards transparency

- Where there has been blaming of victims...we are working towards listening and making space for stories of those harmed.
- Where there has been self-protection and abuse of power... we are working towards accountability to power
- Where there has been harm...we are working towards reconciliation and safety

As we close for tonight, there are a few other important things to note.

- 1) **"RESTORE" series graphic (PP)**. The Next Two Sundays will be very helpful on this journey together. Pastors Pat & Neely will dive deeper into what it means to be people who join God's invitation to the work of Restoration and we will have extended times of worship following services.
- 2) Next Tuesday at 7pm in this room will be a **LAMENT SERVICE (PP)**, a time in which we can gather together, making space for both grief, reflection and work towards healing from these parts of our history.
- 3) We'd love to connect and care for you. The elders will be the last ones here tonight – we'll be available here at the front of the stage. If we can help in answering questions you might have and/or to pray with you.

Or you can email us:

elders@occ.org or layelders@occ.org

Let's stand together and pray this Isaiah 58 passage again...

Then when you pray, GOD will answer.
 You'll call out for help and I'll say, 'Here I am.'
 "If you get rid of unfair practices,
 quit blaming victims,
 quit gossiping about other people's sins,
 If you are generous with the hungry
 and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,
 Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness,
 your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.

I will always show you where to go.

I'll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—
firm muscles, strong bones.

You'll be like a well-watered garden,
a gurgling spring that never runs dry.

You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew,
rebuild the foundations from out of your past.

You'll be known as those who can fix anything,
restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate,
make the community livable again.”

Isaiah 58:9-12 (The Message)

Amen