

Looking to See the Gospel Flourish: What is a Minister-in-Residence and Why Does It Matter?

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by David Schrock

Last week we announced in our members' meeting that Jonathan Matías, with his family (Christy, Jadon, Elijah) will be joining our OBC family as a minister-in-residence. For our church, this is a new venture in gospel ministry. And because the concept of a minister-in-residence may be unfamiliar and the specifics may be unknown to some in our church family, I want to explain how this came about and why this is such an exciting opportunity.

How did this minister-in-residence come about?

For the last six months, our church has been praying for and encouraging the saints at Grace Church Alexandria (GCA). In 2017 GCA, which met for years in an elementary school in Alexandria, experienced a precipitous loss of members. In the highly transient area of Northern Virginia, more than half their congregation was called to move out of the area. While GCA has been a healthy and active church, a beacon of gospel light that has focused on disciple-making, the loss of many longstanding leaders and other key members resulted in a crisis of viability.

As a result, Jonathan (the only staff pastor) reached out to me for prayer and counsel. Our church's relationship with Jonathan goes back many years, as Ben Purves first met him by happenstance (read: God's providence) studying the Bible in a Starbucks. In the last few years, Ben and I have met with him, as pastors often do, to encourage one another in our gospel labors. Fast forward to last October, when Jonathan reached out to me; we have been in weekly or bi-weekly conversation to pray, counsel, and seek the Lord together.

In my own history, I know the value of having fellow pastors "pastoring" me as a minister of the Word. In Indiana, I had multiple brothers caring for my soul as I resigned my pastorate. They were God's means of grace to me, and the human instruments of healing that God used to prepare me for ministry at Occoquan Bible Church. That experience has left an indelible mark on me and a desire to care for other pastors in situations like Jonathan's. As 2 Corinthians 1 teaches us, God comforts us so that we can comfort others.

This was the genesis of my relationship with Jonathan, and thankfully the elders have excelled even more in ministering to Jonathan, his family, and the GCA family. Jonathan has often observed how much the elders and the church body at OBC have cared for him. Through OBC's own series of afflictions, God has equipped you to be a means of grace to others, as Jonathan has testified many times.

As you may recall, for the last six months, we prayed often for them in our service, and sent Dave Ross, Ben Purves, and Bruce Forsee to preach in their pulpit. We held several meetings to counsel with them. And we watched how God has confirmed through tears that it was the right time for GCA to close its doors. This occurred last Sunday (May 6), where the saints of that church voted unanimously to close. In that same meeting, they decided to give a sizeable monetary gift to our church to establish a minister-in-residence.

For rest, (re)assessment, retooling, and relaunching, the elders believe Jonathan Matías is the best candidate for that position. Starting on July 1, he will fill that role in our church body, for a term of 9 months. It is with great hope for him, our church, and the church universal that we share this appointment with you. In the rest of this blog I want to explain a little more what that will look like.

What is a minister-in-residence?

Honestly, I am not sure what a minister-in-residence is in itself, but it is like many things. First, it is *like* a theologian-in-residence, a position often offered by a church to a gifted teacher, who uses his teaching gifts for the edification of the body. In this case Jonathan is more a pastoral practitioner and not an academic theologian. Therefore, it is *minister*-in-residence.

It also *like* an internship. However, because Jonathan has more than 10 years of pastoral experience, and internships are often the stepping stone from training to vocation, we believe a minister-in-residence better reflects his established usefulness in God's church.

At the same time, it is also *like* a sabbatical, a season of rest where Jonathan can sharpen his blades and refill his bags with good seed. The aim of this 9-month season is to see Jonathan sent out in the near future, where he can re-enter the Lord's harvest field with greater sharpness and strength. Still, it is not quite a sabbatical either. Surely, for the first few months it will be. Jonathan and his family will be joining our membership, with no immediate ministry responsibilities. But like any member, they will join in our church life with the gifts God has given them.

At some point in the fall or 2019, don't be surprised if you see Jonathan co-teaching a Sunday School class or filling in another teaching area. At this point, we don't have any concrete steps for him or "positions" of leadership. In this way, his role is not that of an elder. But like when Tim Cox came as an intern, enabling Ben Purves to go on Sabbatical, Jonathan will get the chance to use his teaching and leading gifts as needs present themselves.

In short run, GCA has given a gift to provide remuneration for Jonathan and his family through June 2019. This gives Jonathan time to finalize the logistics of closing GCA in June 2018. Then from July until the fall, Jonathan will have a directed sabbatical—a time of intentional rest. In the fall, he will continue to meet with the elders, help in ministry areas as assigned, and begin to pray and plan for next steps, even as he continues to serve in our church body.

Our prayer is that in 2019, we will, like the church in Antioch, be able to send him out to a place of increased fruitfulness because of the time he has spent at OBC.

What are we hoping to achieve with this position?

Overall, our vision for this minister-in-residence is threefold. First, we long to be good stewards of the gifts God gives to us. Primarily, God gives the church gifts in the currency of

people. As Ephesians 4 tells us, it is the redeemed of the Lord who are gifts to his church. In particular, God has given the church gifted teachers for the equipping of the saints. Every week, I stand in awe of the gifted teachers he has given our church.

Your bi-vocational elders are wonderfully adept at handling the word of God. Likewise, so many men and women in our church are also gifted to teach the Word. And recently, we have received into membership Bruce Forsee (a pastor for more than 30 years) with his wife Kye and now Jonathan with his wife Christy. In these gifts—and I could go on with every member in our church—God has been incredibly kind to us. And we want to be good stewards of the people and opportunities God gives to us. These gifts are not for us to simply collect, but to equip and send out as opportunities arise.

Second, we long to see Jonathan restored to pastoral effectiveness. For 10 years he has served as a faithful but lone pastor in his church. While God raised up a handful of elders along the way, his experience has not been the same as what we know at OBC. God has been unusually kind to give OBC a team of eight elders who work together to lead OBC. We believe that such plural eldership is both biblical and healthy for enduring ministry. Therefore, we (and Jonathan too) believe he would benefit much from spending the next year in our church, where he can be immersed in gospel ministry alongside and under the care of OBC's elders. In this way, we pray his season in our church will be restorative and clarifying for his future ministry.

And third, we long to see the church in Northern Virginia flourish. It grieves us to see the doors of GCA close, and we should ask ourselves: How can churches be planted and sustained in the highly-transient and often unbelieving corridors of Metro DC? With that question in mind, we will be putting our heads together to think carefully about disciple-making, leader development, church partnerships, and church planting. In the end, we believe that Jonathan's time with us will edify our congregation, and that in the long run the church in Northern Virginia might be strengthened by the outward focus our church has towards our neighbors and the nations.

In sum, the elders are incredibly hopeful for this opportunity for Jonathan to come rest and be restored in our church. In all these ways, please join us in praying for he and his family, for our church's faithfulness in ministry, and for the other members of GCA that may be visiting our church (and other churches). We are confident that seeds of truth sown in prayerful tears will result in gospel fruit and disciples joy (see Psalm 126). This is our hope and the goal of our ministry—that Christ's church would be built up through his sovereign rule and our Spirit-led service.

If you have any other questions about this exciting opportunity or how you can encourage Jonathan, Christy, and the other GCA saints, please feel free to reach out to me.

For His Glory and your joy,

Pastor David Schrock