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First Baptist Church

Dear Pastor:

We greet you in Christ's name and thank you for your support for Grace in Action in the past.

We are writing to you today to make some specific requests concerning the ongoing and future ministry of Grace in Action (GIA)—a ministry to which your congregation is a partner. First we would like to provide some background to our requests and then lay out specifically what we would like to ask you to do.

Background

In the 10 years since GIA came into being both its work with homeless people and the response of the churches in Davis to the challenge of homelessness have changed in many fruitful ways.

Grace in Action has learned a great deal about the complexity of chronic and acute homelessness, has helped organize a committed group of volunteers to respond to homelessness with acts of mercy, and has come to understand the importance of spiritual companionship—a deeply relational response to the homelessness in the city. At the same time, the churches of Davis have engaged in direct ministry to homeless people by encouraging members to participate in the work of Grace in Action and, more recently, by hosting homeless guests as part of the Interfaith Rotating Winter Shelter (IRWS).

Engagement in the IRWS has "humanized" homelessness for many people and many congregational members are now asking, "what more can we do?" At the same time, both individuals and broader church communities are aware that they lack the organizational capacity and/or the knowledge and wisdom to launch into programming in these areas.

These processes have resulted in an opportunity for GIA and the churches to collaborate in new ways that could result in GIA coming alongside the churches as a **resource, connector, facilitator and catalyst**. This will enable churches to draw on the rich experience of GIA and to more fully embrace Grace in Action while receiving support to empower church members to become more involved in responding to the needs of homeless people in Davis. Grace in Action thus stands prepared to work with and respond to the churches of Davis to enable them to deepen their work with the meek and the poor in our community with wisdom and grace. Grace in Action proposes the following support roles in coming alongside the church:

Resource - GIA staff and volunteers stand ready to listen to the needs of various congregations and respond by training and mentoring members as they respond to the needs of homeless people in the community. Such training can run the gamut from topics like preparing for the long run—avoiding burnout in homeless ministry, to "creating congregational care teams" for the poor and meek in our communities (homeless individuals), to spiritual direction for volunteers who serve the homeless.

Connector - GIA can continue to help churches connect homeless individuals with whom they are walking to vital services in the community. GIA can continue to maintain an updated resource data base and counsel churches on what each service does and does not offer.

Facilitator - GIA can help facilitate learning and sharing among congregations and be a clearinghouse of lessons learned and best practices for the churches of Davis. It can facilitate a network of practitioners from individual congregations who come together on a regular basis to share, pray, learn and give/receive support in this important work.

Catalyst - Finally, GIA can help individual congregations or emerging consortia of churches to consider leading edge issues, engage in intentional learning and try new approaches to dealing with individuals struggling with homelessness in Davis.

Our Request to You

We believe that Grace in Action is no longer called to be a ministry “over there” but needs to become a “claimed mission among us.” This important evolution will require the churches to claim and embrace God’s mission to the poor and the meek in our community as their own. It is only in this way that GIA can be a sustainable resource for the churches of Davis and become, truly, a ministry *of* the churches of Davis. Given all of this we would like to ask you to claim Grace in Action as mission by committing to the following:

1. **Provide leadership to GIA:** This request will require your church to appoint and support an individual to serve on GIA’s board of directors. Said individual will represent your congregation—s/he will be anointed and sent by your congregation—and provide strategic guidance to the Grace in Action staff.
2. **Encourage and name people to serve with GIA:** This request will require your church to collaborate with other partner congregations to fill key staff positions and provide either resources to hire staff, or “in-kind” support for specific tasks.
3. **Planning and giving:** Via board engagement, we are asking your church to develop annual plans and budgets to accomplish the plans. This implies that your church will agree to help fully fund the budget (so established) or commit resources to finding grants or other funding sources, or hold fundraisers to cover budgetary needs.

We are also asking for one congregation to **host GIA’s administrative and support functions:** We are asking one member church (or perhaps several on a rotating basis) to provide GIA with office space, a phone connection, photocopying, mailing and internet access.

With state and country budget cuts we face unprecedented challenges in walking with homeless and poor individuals in this time. The board of GIA realizes that it cannot carry on the work without the kinds of support outlined above. We would ask you to prayerfully consider these requests. We will be contacting you in the coming weeks to discuss them with you and hear your questions and concerns. After that we will be holding a workshop for all congregations that have expressed an interest in moving in the directions laid out in this letter to build consensus concerning the best way forward. We will be praying with you.

Thank you for your time in reviewing this request and for your prayerful consideration.

In Christ,

Carl Vandagriff, GIA Board President