

ThirdDay Church

Cohort 2021 Contact Form

Church Name _____ Greater Chicago Church _____

Church Address _____ 705 W Jackson Blvd, Oak Park, IL 60304 _____

Church Phone _____ 708.434.5701 _____ Website_ www.greaterchicagochurch.com _

Contact Name _____ JD Leman ___ Contact Phone _____ 708.369.6531c ___

Contact Email _____ jd.leman@greaterchicagochurch.com _____

Church Membership Size _____ 250 ___ Year Church Was Founded _____ 1996 (current name as of 2009) _____

Application Questions:

Please answer the following questions. Please limit the response to each question to 250 words.

- 1) If selected as a member of the cohort, who are the two people you would assign to serve as the point people for this project? Tell us their names, role, and why you would select them?**

I would ask that Jonathan Ginter and Telva Urban be our point people for this project. They have been at the helm of our Justice Action Team for nearly 9 months and have earned the respect of their fellow teammates by leading as servants and learners. They have a heart for social justice and for the impact that GCC can have as we partner in addressing the inequity felt throughout our communities. They walk in humility, communicate with courage, and consistently show up even if it costs something extra. They provide the stability our team needs and the grit to get it done.

- 2) How do you define social justice, and what do you believe about its role in the church?**

We've been impacted by the prophetic examples in the book of Amos. The prophet speaks of *mishpat* and *tzadeqah* (roughly justice and righteousness) often applying them to the underprivileged: widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor. The people of Israel, as God's called representatives, were challenged to look after this set of people and to provide a better way for their future. They were entrusted to create a safety net for those that otherwise wouldn't survive and were tasked with living justly while displaying extraordinary levels of kindness to those that society oppresses. This is a model of past and present social justice; to stand up for the oppressed and to live radical just lives in support of all peoples.

As the prophet Amos conveyed God's heart for social justice we find ourselves as partners in that lineage and God's commands. It is now the church's responsibility to pick up the baton and to run with it. GCC aims to help people look more like Christ and in doing that, we have the same instructions as the Hebrews did over 2000 years ago. This will require the church to be vocal on issues such as race, inequality, political corruptions, unethical policies, twisted criminal justice and a welfare system designed to hold people in poverty. Though this was the model of the early church (Acts) it has largely been abandoned by our denominational stream. In order for the church to engage with social justice, it will need to be intellectually honest with its shortcomings and reverse course to more accurately align with the 'others'.

- 3) Tell us about your leadership structure and how you currently incorporate feedback from your membership or community to make decisions?**

The Justice Action Team (JAT) has two leaders that provide logistical support for the JAT and are a liaison to the church leadership. There are 4 sub groups (called buckets), each with a different leader and focus (Health, Education, Relationship and Policy). This is where the real work gets done. The bucket has final say on its agenda and schedule.

The church leadership works closely to maintain effective communication with the JAT leadership. Leadership ideas are then discussed and revisions are mutually agreed upon. Then the JAT leaders will convey to the larger JAT community the church asks. Honest and fully transparent communication is a must as this allows the full JAT to accurately evaluate the information and also prevents an individual's agenda superseding the group/church agenda.

As a team we have engaged the full church body through group digital meetings, racial themed movies and discussions, educational resources and direct instruction on Sunday mornings from the pulpit. Engaging our entire church body has been an ongoing process and is gaining serious momentum.

4) Describe a time when you responded to a community need. Why did you choose to respond that way, and tell us what you learned from that experience?

As a church we've partnered with various local organizations on an as needed basis.

- PADS. We hosted the homeless shelter network 2X a month for almost a decade. Telva (one of the JAT leaders, coordinated this team for nearly two years)
- By The Hand. We collected backpacks, school supplies, and back to school basics (haircuts, discounted shoes, etc) for 150 kids a year that were part of the BTH organization.
- A Day in Our Village: We have served on the leadership board as well as volunteering to serve as the labor for all set-up/tear down as a way to bless the people we live around.
- We partnered with Hephzibah House this holiday season, providing the Christmas morning meal for 50+ people.
- Partnered with our local residents/organizations and participated in a BLM March last summer with posts on social media
- Partnered with local teachers to host a summer art camp and subsidized it for lower income families.
- Partnered with the Oak Park Community Fridge donating nearly 2000 feminine products last month to assist those who are struggling financially.

The needs of our community will always be present, however we've learned that by simply engaging and doing what we can in the moment it opens the door to opportunities to serve and partner with others. We're committed to identifying the needs around us and finding ways that we can partner, even if it's only for \$250.

5) What do you believe the qualities are of a healthy congregation?

Healthy things grow but they also evolve. This means that your understanding has to be ever increasing. As a church, we have a mission to look more like Christ. That requires service, gratitude, giving of our resources, and being willing to lay down our desires for that of the greater good. It isn't enough to just 'give money' or to do a service project 1x year. A healthy congregation is invested in becoming an asset to their neighbors and a beacon of hope to those that are struggling. This may require a change in our thinking, the acceptance of new ideas and the expansion of who is 'in'. Furthermore, there must be quantifiable leadership that is willing to step forward and to risk being wrong. The pandemic was not kind to many churches (falling attendance, lower income, etc) yet GCC continued to press forward and the people have responded by asking to do even more. That's health, that's growth, that's GCC.

6) What are some of the areas that you believe your church can grow in?

We would like to evolve from a multicultural church to a diverse church. GCC's membership hails from many different backgrounds however its liturgy is still mostly that of the white evangelical charismatic stream. We believe that part of our growth in the next season will include the incorporation of diverse styles and genres so that can become a hub where everyone can find something that is familiar to their style of worship.

We still have work to do on expanding our availability. Currently our building is empty 5 days a week and we would love to find ways to offer our space to groups and organizations that are looking for space to operate.

7) What do you want to learn from this initiative? Be specific.

We're aware that we can't see what we aren't looking for. Our hope is that we can begin to identify the blind spots in our orthopraxy of faith. Whether that is where we serve or how we operate, we desire to have a lens upgrade that will allow us to engage on a broader level.

This would include partnering with new organizations to have a fresh set of eyes on what our community needs. How the current situations limit our effectiveness and subsequently, how to overcome the obstacles we bump into. We'd love to be a 'value add' to our society. The church has classically existed for its members and we feel that is a very narrow way to operate, especially when surrounded by extensive need. GCC wants to learn how to be a valuable part of the church's larger mission to bring love, hope, and the kingdom of Christ to society.

8) Tell us about your history of collaborating with other churches or organizations.

Prior to 2009, GCC (at that time Vineyard of Oak Park) was focused on overseas missions as well as hyper local servant evangelism. Then from '09-'17, we transitioned to a local church planting model, sponsoring local missionaries (pastors) to establish churches in the Chicagoland area. This proved to be a real challenge and we lost people and our leadership as a result of this endeavor. Starting in '18, GCC embarked on an ecumenical quest to be in partnership with the many churches in the OPRF area.

We have hosted non-denominational services for the community as a way to simply encourage different perspectives on how we worship. We have partnered with First Pres. of River Forest on their Neighbor Church Initiative and traveled weekly to nearly 100+ churches to pray for their leadership, congregation, facilities, and their needs as a community. This has been a fruitful expansion to our network and has resulted in various partnerships for teaching, kids, and outreach.