

GFM Nat'l Staff Conference: Cautiously Looking Forward

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This email is sent on behalf of Bobby Gross and Emily Umulis. – Lorrey Thabet

Dear GFM Staff Community,

Echoing Paul, grace and peace to you all! That is, the grace we need day-by-day to be faithful in our lives and work and peace in the face of all that gives us cause for anxiety.

And probably all of us have some anxiety and questions about our GFM staff conference scheduled for March 22-23 (with day-ahead and day-after options) at Lake Williamson Christian Center in Carlinville, IL (75 minutes east of St. Louis). We are writing to outline how we are handling the question of going forward with the conference in light of the Omicron surge.

In short, we are (hopefully) planning to hold the conference, but we are prepared to cancel as late as March 8 if wisdom dictates.

Here is more about our thinking and our plans:

1. **We are eager to gather!** We've designed the conference around an *in-person* experience, wanting to connect with one another and together with God so that we are revitalized for our shared mission in a changing landscape on campus. To echo the writer of 2 John 12: "Although we have much to communicate to you, we would rather not use Zoom and Chat; rather, we hope to come together and talk face to face so that our joy may be complete."
2. **We are concerned about the virus.** We don't want to gather if it will be too risky, whether for the staff who would come and or for those to whom they are connected or for the burdened health care system. If we do gather, we realize that some staff will appropriately choose not to come. The hope, of course, is that the Omicron surge will be widely abating bringing the risks of gathering into an acceptable range. The challenge, however, is when we will have sufficient information to discern that.
3. **We will open registration on February 14.** Three weeks from today, we will send a special email to all GFM staff with more information about the conference plans, including Covid-19 protocols for before and during the conference. We will ask everyone to make a good faith decision about attending and book refundable flights **by February 22** (a nine day window). We will ask all staff directors to have a conversation early in that week with each of their supervisees, including Campus Ministry Volunteers, about their intentions and concerns. We will invite everyone to lean toward attending but will make provision for anyone to decide not to attend at any point leading up to the conference. Knowing everyone's good faith plans by February 22 allows the conference team to plan accordingly.

Please do not book flights until you receive an email with travel parameters from Lorrey on February 14.

4. **We will signal "go" or "no go" no later than Mach 8.** We want to give everyone two weeks' notice if we cancel. If we cancel, we will not switch to a virtual conference, but we may invite all of GFM to a 75-minute Zoom gathering for vision and encouragement.
5. **Virtual Track for non-attendees.** We want to remind you that we have planned all along to offer a simplified way to experience part of the conference for those who would be unable to attend, especially

some of our part-time staff or Campus Ministry Volunteers. This track will consist of live-streamed plenary sessions and three sessions as part of a virtual small group. More details will be included in our February 14 communication.

Friends, will you join the GFM Leadership Team in praying that a good many of us will be able to gather in person and in relative safety—so that we can be strengthened by God for our work on campus and experience encouragement and joy together.

Let either of us know if you have questions.

Bobby and Emily

Bobby Gross

Vice President Graduate and Faculty Ministries

Emily Umulis

Director of Training and Leadership Development

