



VIABILITY RESOURCE GRANT

BACKGROUND

Out of tragedy sometimes come gifts. On September 28, 2022, Hurricane Ian wreaked havoc on SW Florida causing loss of lives and horrific destruction of property, particularly on the barrier islands in the Gulf. Such was fate of Chapel by the Sea Presbyterian Church, the very first church to be founded on Fort Myers Beach. Many members had no homes to return to, and despite being welcomed by other churches, the members had no physical home, no furniture, no pastor, and dwindling membership and giving. An Administrative Commission was formed in March of 2023 to work with the Session, but, most regrettably, after a year of work and ultimately taking original jurisdiction, the AC concluded the congregation was neither viable nor sustainable.

From this tragic situation came gifts to several nearby churches and the Presbytery in the form of assets from Chapel by the Sea. In creating this fund, the assets are the remainder of insurance payments made to Chapel and one of several gifts intended to “honor and preserve God’s legacy of service by Chapel by the Sea.”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Peace River Presbytery has established a fund from this gift to enable churches to dream dreams to advance their overall mission. Think visionary, aspirational, transformative, even transformational, perhaps life changing.

Therefore, this is not an emergency fund nor is it a box of band aids. Based on the payout from the physical destruction of CBTS, the intent of this grant is to build, not simply to sustain; to help fund the high cost of essential services which heavily impact a church budget. These may include but are not limited to wind loss coverage, clergy salaries and benefits, staff support, or capital needs. But more than that, it is meant to be a starter grant to do that something a church wants to do, dreams and prays about doing, but currently cannot move forward without some assistance.

In October 2025 the Presbytery voted to add the funds that had been designated as the Blessing Grant to the Viability Grant. This \$3 million gift has been invested and will generate annual funding at 4% (approximately \$120,000 for 2026). The grant is renewable in decreasing amounts

for a second and perhaps third year upon submission of a year-end report evidencing satisfactory outcomes as a result of the award.

After the grant application and committee interview period is concluded, the Grant Committee will base its decisions on whether or not the award will enable the church to enhance, extend, and transform its viability as a congregation.

A BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, CONFESSIONAL RATIONALE

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.” (Acts 2: 42-45 ESV)

2000 years later, there are still those who have need, including churches who help those who have need. Through the marriage of funding from CBTS and hands-on connections with you, the members, Peace River Presbytery will be able to accomplish the goal of helping to establish vitality and viability for any church with the vision and desire to move forward in God’s plan.