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TRUTH Magazine
Winter 2018 Edition



*...forgetting what is behind and
straining toward what is ahead,*

Philippians 3:13b

Working Together to Advance the Grace of God
and Impact the World for Christ



GRACE GOSPEL
FELLOWSHIP

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TRUTH Magazine

Endeavoring to set forth God's purpose and
grace according to 2 Timothy 1:8-11

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STRIVING TOWARD GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

This article covers the fifth category from the GGF Church Health questionnaire. You can find the full resource at ggfusa.org. The goal of this questionnaire is to provide a resource for churches to continue to grow into greater health as we seek to serve our God in the world. This current article focuses on the topic of “Striving Toward Global Engagement.”

I. Engagement

1. In what ways does the leadership of your church encourage the congregation to be supporting world missions?
2. How intentional is your church about including world missions, promoting missions, and supporting missions in the everyday working of the ministry?
3. Do you make world missions personal with people’s names, faces, and stories? Or is missions simply a line in the budget with no real connection to your people?
4. How often do members of your congregation participate in short-term missions?

II. Awareness

1. How often are the struggles, joys, and challenges of the global Body of Christ focused on during your weekly gathering?
2. How do new people coming into your church find out about your world mission outreach?
3. Are missionaries celebrated or selling themselves when they visit your church?

III. Financial Support

1. Is your church actively supporting missionaries throughout the year?
2. When finances tighten do you cut missions first before any other line item?

The aim of this section is to focus on the local church’s involvement in missionary work outside its own locality and country. In order to keep a balanced ministry focus we need to include world missions as a vital part of the local ministry. To do this, it is important to enable our local communities to have a purposeful and meaningful commitment to world missions through engagement, awareness, and financial support.

Engagement and Awareness

For many, it can be easy to think of the global dimension of the Body of Christ as something “other people” are concerned about. While many of our church members may affirm the truth that the Body of Christ is a global community, the struggles and focus of daily life at home may keep this as a secondary matter. It can become an afterthought, and often the first budget item to be cut when finances are tight. However, just as a healthy family is concerned not only with their own well-being but has an appreciation and relationship with their grandparents, cousins, and uncles, it is important for the local church to focus on and connect with the global church.

From a biblical perspective, there are several occasions in which Paul’s letters make it clear that this was central to his philosophy of ministry. Though the churches he visited, planted, and ministered in were located in what modern readers would consider to be a relatively small geographical area, the realities of the first-century Roman world also meant that congregations in Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia each operated in different cultural contexts. Yet despite their physical separation, Paul seems to go out of his way to make sure that there is an awareness of not only the existence of these other churches, but also of the state of their affairs. For example Paul tells the Thessalonians that their example has become the model for believers to the south and east of them (1 Thessalonians 1:7-6). Again, at the end of Romans (16:26) Paul calls the Italian Christians to recognize the ministry of their brothers and sisters to their east who joyfully gave to support the Christians in Jerusalem. Again and again, throughout his letters, Paul is intentional about reminding the churches that they are a part of something much bigger than their own neighborhood and region.

However, it is not just an understanding of the larger context of the Body of Christ that is important for church health. As individuals and families follow the call to leave their homes in order to serve as missionaries, it is critical that they are remembered, prayed for, and celebrated by churches in their sending region. In his case, Paul asks the members of the established churches to pray for him and his coworkers as they travel, preach, and share the gospel around the world (Col 4:3, 1 Thes 5:24, 2 Thes 3:1). In doing so, Paul is suggesting that all believers have a role to play in partnering with missionaries as they serve around the globe.

These are only a few texts which provide examples for us as we seek to live faithfully with a focus on the global community of believers and those who are serving among them. They demonstrate a biblical model for understanding how God is working beyond our cities and nations. Engaging in global missions reminds us that the work of the Gospel is not only local, but also worldwide, and reminds us of the way in which the Holy Spirit unifies us with our brothers and sisters around the world. With that unity comes a responsibility to see God’s Word go forth faithfully. If you are a pastor, elder, or lay leader, are you taking intentional steps to keep this same sort of awareness in the minds and hearts of your congregation? A great place to start is following the example of many churches who set apart at least one Sunday per year as a designated Missionary Conference. This is an opportunity to not only hear directly from various missionaries, but to also reinforce the idea of the global Body of Christ to your congregation.

If this is already an established part of your church life, perhaps it would be helpful to begin to consider how you might more regularly and fully create space for global engagement within your ministry. Maybe this looks like dedicating one Sunday each month to specifically pray for world missions. In other situations, it might be helpful to encourage your youth group to spend time learning about and praying for Christians around the world. In the same way, it may be helpful to run Sunday School or Bible Study classes which focus on the biblical model of supporting and engaging with world missions. Another way to encourage this is to plan a short-term mission trip in which your congregation members can experience the diversity of the church from a personal perspective. And when missionaries visit your church, it is important to find ways for your congregation to actively welcome and celebrate the work they are doing - rather than expecting them to “sell” their ministry to the congregation. Whatever this looks like in your context, it is important for our churches to seek to continually be aware of and engaged with world missions.

Financial Support

Along with this move towards an active awareness, it is also critical for the local church to be giving financially toward world missions. In his book, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, John Dickson emphasizes that giving to global missions is not a peripheral

way of serving, but is in fact the primary means by which the whole Body can engage. Referencing Paul's use of a particular Greek phrase (koinonia eis to euangelion) in Philippians 1:3-5, Dickson suggests "Paul is saying the Philippians' 'partnership' was not just in the gospel but for the sake of the gospel, that is, for its advancement" (p.79). In other words, by giving to support Paul's efforts, the Philippian Christians were primary agents in global missions! Dickson writes "Financially supporting evangelism is not a second-string 'unspiritual' contribution to God's mission. It is true partnership in the gospel" (p.82).

Financial support is critical not only to allow mission agencies and those who work for them to continue to minister, but it also serves as a formative practice for those who give. As Jesus reminds us, a sure way to learn about one's heart is to observe where their earthly treasure lies (Matthew 6:21). While all of our churches have financial obligations of their own, it is important that each congregation is actively giving towards world missions as a way to keep an outward focus and awareness of the larger reality of the church. What percentage of your church's donations go towards global missions? How do you encourage your congregation to financially support the organiza-

tions that do this work? When you talk about giving to missions, is it done in a way that communicates and encourages partnership rather than obligation?

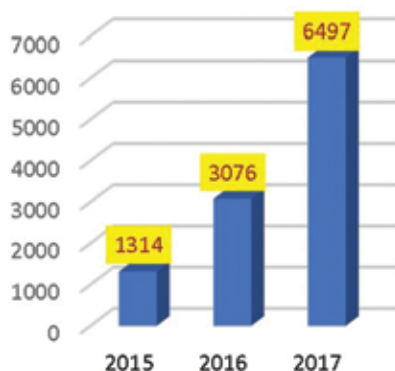
Clicks Forward

Throughout this series of articles, the Church Health Task Force has hoped to present an approach to assessment that is more process-focused than destination-based. Each church is unique in its make up and local context. As a result there are areas that some churches may be naturally equipped to engage in that other congregations find difficult. However, we believe that every church in our movement has room to grow in each of these areas. Your church may have a well-established and developed mission emphasis. This is something to be celebrated while continuing to look for ways to become even more faithful in this area. On the other hand, engagement, awareness, and giving towards world missions may be a continual struggle for your church. In that case, your congregation has a great opportunity for growth - and this is also to be celebrated! As a fellowship, we desire to see all of our churches move towards health as we seek to partner with one another in service of the grace of God. ■

How can we say thanks for all God has done?

Thank YOU for being a part of what God is doing to reach the 2.3 million unreached people group behind bars! There is no greater spiritual harvest field with a better return of eternal fruit for our investment of time and money of any ministry I have been a part of!

New PMA Students



We have resources online to download to plan and implement a prison ministry at your local church. **Please visit www.prisonmission.org/prisonmissionsunday so you can download and print out as needed: posters, lessons, handouts, bulletin inserts, testimonies and video clips.**

Please call Pastor Dwight Anderson for more info, 612-423-3457 We can arrange a PMA rep to speak at your church if you would like that.

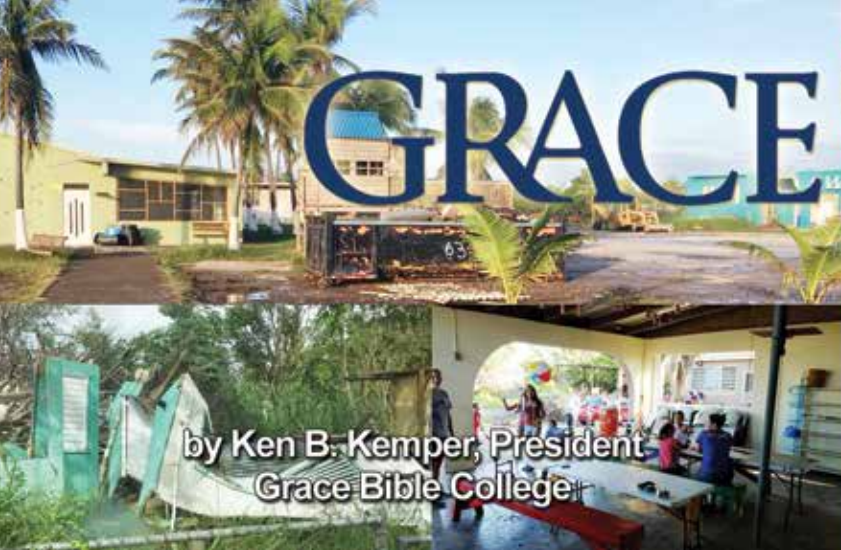
We give God the glory for what He has done this past few years. Karen sends me spreadsheets of our total students and I went back over them this week. In Feb. 2014, we had total of 19,495 students on her computer. See graph on left of growth. On Nov.30, 2017, we had 30,882! That is a total of 10,887 new students since God led me to PMA! PTL!

This past year we have been praying for God to open doors for us to tell about what He is doing in reaching inmates with the gospel of the Grace of God to plant churches behind bars across the country! We were invited to host a weekly radio show, which we named "Prison Transformation Radio." All the replays are on our website at www.prisonmission.org/media.

Prison Transformation Radio: Changing Hearts with Christ!



**Listen Every Saturday 1 pm on KKMS AM 980
Podcasts available www.am980themission.com**



by Ken B. Kemper, President
Grace Bible College



On September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria struck the island of Puerto Rico with a vengeance. Category 4 and 5 hurricane force winds (upwards of 150 miles per hour) downed trees, snapped power poles, lifted roofs from houses, and toppled buildings. Hurricane Maria was the largest storm on record in the Atlantic, and it left people without jobs, food, and homes—which were often in flooded conditions. The rain continued through its normal season, but with riverbeds blocked with debris and ditches filled with tree branches, the water destroyed homes causing widespread mildew and mold damage to cars, homes, and other possessions. People with limited resources were hit the worst because their homes and possessions were not as durable or secure. Additionally, places for them to live while rebuilding were not available.



Grace Ministries International has been involved with Camp Caribe in Puerto Rico for many years. They send multiple teams annually to assist with the maintenance of Camp Caribe which serves many groups in Puerto Rico. It was sad to hear the news of the destruction of the facilities at the camp where GMI missionaries Lawrence and Barbara Trumbower live, as well as maintenance workers Ken and Sheri Gillhespy. GMI missionaries Matt and April (Lorenz) Sykes live



nearby in the barrio. The ongoing challenge to live and minister without water or power by all the many believers moved people to take action. There were reports of the people in the barrio of Juana Diaz who were trying to recover as FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), Samaritan's Purse, and our Grace churches mobilized relief supplies. My wife, Kathy, and I read the reports and were moved by how difficult the situation was and realized the great needs of the people there. We simultaneously responded to the Holy Spirit's prompting that we needed to not just pray but rather take action and help our brothers and sisters in Christ and minister to those in need. We presented the desire to take the week of Thanksgiving and lead a group of students, if any were willing to go, and "rough it" without any promise of running water, electricity, or consistent food except what we could bring in our bags.

Ministry Team Formed To Be Ready for Anything

This plan was announced in chapel at Grace Bible College giving students the opportunity to serve the Lord alongside others over Thanksgiving week in November rather than going home to rest and enjoy their families and the abundance of our American lifestyle. Students were challenged to pray about it. If



they were feeling called to serve in this way, they could reserve a place by making a deposit of \$100 until the spots on the team were filled. Within 24 hours, we had a full team! Nathan Johnson, the Director of Facilities at GBC, was also part of this team. The generosity of family and friends, team members who paid their own way, and churches such as Rush Creek Bible Church gave added funding for relief and repair funds. GBC's Ministry Coordinator, Jim Gamble, led the formation and preparation of the team, allowing us to depart on November 17 fully equipped to serve the people of Puerto Rico. We had supplies to give to families, food for the team, finances to buy more supplies, and help from churches like Community Bible Church of Tipp City, Ohio, to assist those in need.

From the beginning, the GBC team was dedicated to serve, desiring to do so joyfully and graciously. Our team served for seven days in Puerto Rico traveling for one day each coming and going. Upon arriving in Puerto Rico, we were greeted by very hot and humid weather. Matt and April (Lorenz) Sykes met us at the airport and transported us and our luggage in two vans from San Juan on the northeast end of the island to Juana Diaz on the south central side where Camp Caribe sits on the ocean. The drive was slow, overwhelmingly hot, and due to road construction and rush hour traffic, much longer than normal. However, the team was willing to be content. Upon arriving at Camp Caribe after a nearby dinner stop, we were pleased to learn that Samaritan's Purse had donated two generators and two chainsaws to the camp the week before. This allowed us to use electricity for lights for a short while and turn on the freezer and refrigerator to store food. This was an unexpected blessing!

The Hot, Hard Work

We awoke each day to breakfast together followed by devotions led by one of the camp staff or local church leaders from Juana Diaz. We worked hard all day dividing into teams; some members worked at the camp, others in the barrio, and some with church members. The team took on the hot, ugly job of cleaning out ruined facilities—working to make them ready for use once more. This meant throwing away ruined furniture; filling large twenty-foot dumpsters; shoveling out porches; tossing mildewed equipment; and picking up lots of broken glass. It was hard work in the heat and lots of water was consumed as the team members laughed and worked. Nate Johnson led skilled workers in replacing windows and removing fallen trees with the chainsaws. We made our own breakfasts and had sandwiches for lunch each day. Team members willingly cleaned up after meals and did dishes before heading off to work or meeting with our team each evening. Their joyful spirits and singing while working or cleaning up were amazing!

In the evening, we were delighted to enjoy some delicious Puerto Rican food prepared by the camp cooks. They came in to bless us and added a sweet fragrance to our day. After dinner, our team gathered to “unpack” the day. We shared what we observed and learned. We also spent time reflecting on Philippians Chapter 2. These times of sharing were extremely rich and inspiring as we endeavored to keep up the great attitudes, encouraging each other and our Puerto Rican friends in their service for the Lord. We were learning in community. It was heartfelt as members began to get to know and appreciate one another.

Puerto Rican Fellowship and Service



On Sunday, we were blessed to go to Iglesia del Biblia in Juana Diaz. We met Pastor Miguel Ortiz and

his wife, Hilda, the many wonderful members of the church, and worshiped with them. The pastor's daughter, Angela, translated his sermon for us. The singing was exciting as we attempted to sing in Spanish. Pastor Miguel mentioned the joy on the faces of our team as we attempted to join in the worship, and that this was so encouraging to him and the church. Since the hurricane, the church and its members had been reaching out into their community to minister. They were doing tangible things like taking FEMA emergency boxes to needy people and renting washing machines so people could come do laundry at the church as so many were without electricity or water.

The ministry of our Puerto Rican brothers and sisters in Christ was overwhelming to us! We observed the very people hit by the hurricane seeking ways they could serve, bringing supplies and love to others who were in need. Our team members partnered with church members who spoke Spanish and ministered together on the streets of Juana Diaz. On one occasion, my wife, Kathy, and a couple of students accidentally got separated on a street while distributions were going on. They had to borrow a phone from a local resident and phoned America to ask them to call Matt Sykes in order to tell him where they were located, so they could be picked up (he had just assumed they were in another vehicle.) On the Sunday we worshiped at Iglesia del Biblia, we observed that the church was collecting Christmas shoeboxes for Samaritan's Purse to minister to those in need! A number of team members mentioned how meaningful this was to see this generosity among people who were themselves just recovering from such a tragedy.

Club Maravilla at April and Matt's Home



In the afternoon, team members would go to assist April Sykes with the after school program called Club Maravilla. In this program, children of all ages come to play and learn at her home. During one afternoon, our team members shared their story of salvation and spoke to the children about their need of Jesus Christ. The many kids who attend make this club a big endeavor. April appreciated the team's hard work of cleaning up fallen trees and water damage, as well as playing basketball and foursquare with the kids, so more conversations could be held with each child. Matt and April joyfully hosted the team all week, yet, it was busy and tiring for them as well.

On another occasion, part of our team ministered to a family in the church whose home and yard were impacted by the hurricane. The woman asked for prayer for her mother's salvation. After praying for this need, Kathy felt led to speak to this elderly woman about her faith and her own need to trust in Christ. On that afternoon, through a translator (Matt), the woman made a commitment to trust Christ! No doubt the action of love shown to her family was used by God to touch her heart. In fact, almost all of the people who were given emergency supplies or who were ministered to in the after school program at Matt and April's home in the barrio, or those others who saw grace in action had never been in the church in Juana Diaz. Nevertheless, they saw the tangible explanation of God's grace, and were shown the gospel. They observed God's people exercising grace toward them, and they saw grace in action.

A Thanksgiving Blessing

My wife worked hard just prior to the trip to prepare all the needed items for us to bless our mis-



(continued on page 20)



LIVING IN BIBLE TIMES

by Jeremy Clark, Executive Director
Grace Ministries International



The “Bible times” are not just ancient history or future prophetic events, but they are now. We can look back to the inception of this dispensation or “house rules” of grace under which we live (Romans 6:14) beginning with the ministry and proclamation of the same by the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 3:1-7, Colossians 1:24-29). We can also look forward to when God will resume His unique relationship with Israel according to His covenant with them (Romans 11:25-27). In the meantime, you and I are living out the plot of the Bible. Consider a few passages from our “Bible time” and how your brothers and sisters in Christ both here in the States and around the world are living these words out today.

“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints” 2 Cor. 8:1-4.

“But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord” 2 Cor. 8:16-17.

Some spaces are just meant for baseball. Where the concrete mixer had stood just a couple months before, there is now a hard, flat surface no more than a few feet in diameter comprised of the hardened residue which inadvertently spilled while pouring the floor of the pavilion which now houses the Grace Ministries-affiliated church in Nagarote, Nicaragua—“Arraigados” or “Rooted.” The circular concrete remnant

just looks like a place where homeplate should be. From home, situated just behind the pavilion, looking down the length of the church and ministry property located on the north side of this slowly growing town 45 minutes outside of the capital, Managua, is a line of trees far past centerfield whose tops are unable to obscure the impressive sightline of Volcano Momotombo whose thick, gray smoke is visible to much of the Pacific region of this Central American country. Yes, baseball should be played here.

Quite often a group of boys and younger men gather at the church property to play ball. Not many things start on time in Nicaragua, but on Sunday afternoons, the 3:00 p.m. pick-up games all start on time. On an early November Sunday, I moved a long-held dream over to the “completed” column when these guys invited me to play ball with them just the day before. The ground is uneven and filled with weeds. However, with a bit of skill and a measure of luck scooping a ground ball was not much of an issue. Locating my spot in the field each inning was easy as I was quickly able to identify the rut I had to straddle for three outs the top of each frame. Good plays and solid hits were abundant, but congratulations were seldom offered. These fellas were all business and that is how they enjoyed playing the game.

A few kids brought their own gloves while the rest picked through a box of well-used mitts. Many were right-handed gloves which kids fitted onto their left hands. There were no excuses given (nor any allowed) and they still made plenty of outstanding plays. We had a couple well-worn balls and took time to send a sizable posse into the dense vegetation down the third-base line to salvage these valuable commodities. As a deterrent to losing the ball out of play, the rule



Sunday afternoon pick-up game on the church property in Nagarote, Nicaragua

was that if a batter fouled off a pitch or swung and missed, he was out. The bat was an old, weather-worn, 30-ounce piece of lumber.

Whether a player was 10 years old or 20, everyone used it and swung with all their might. In the States we have footwear for every occasion and sport. In Nagarote, footwear was in some cases optional or inadequate with kids playing in mix-matched shoes, flip-flops, or even missing a shoe. After playing nine hard-fought innings, our team came out on top 9-7 scoring the winning runs in the bottom of the ninth.

The lack of resources on the ballfield is representative of the state of things both in Nagarote in general and within the small congregation that meets on this property. After a couple years of planning, investment from believers in the States, several mission teams, and lots of hard work from those who are a part of the ministry locally, the land is taking shape. A playground followed by a basketball/soccer court is situated at the front of the grounds before one would reach the pavilion where meetings and services are held. Typically, around 30 kids, youth, and adults gather on Sunday evenings (right after baseball) for worship, Bible teaching, and fellowship. GMI missionaries Emiliano and Raquel Seravalli are developing leaders among this group of believers who, while lacking in terrestrial things, are seeking the things of the Lord. People in Nagarote are curious about what is happening beyond the front gates of Arraigados as lives are changed and their neighbors are learning what it means to both have and experience God's grace. Construction, optimism, and hope paint a picture of the ministry in Nagarote.

The service ended this same November Sunday of the ballgame with two unforgettable events. First, Marvin, a man we met in Nagarote over seven years



Marvin, in the green T-shirt, teaching a Saturday night Bible study

ago and who had become our principal contact in the town and ultimately one of the main reasons the ministry in Costa Rica chose Nagarote as our target to begin a new ministry in Nicaragua, came up front and prayed for me and for GMI missionary Cory Hodgson who accompanied me on this trip. To think back to our initial introductions all those years ago and then to stand in front of his church listening as he interceded to the Lord on our behalf was an event the magnitude of which could not be understated. Towards the end of this article, I will share the second event after providing a little more context.

What also cannot be understated is the magnitude of devastation throughout Puerto Rico caused by Hurricane Maria in late September. In December, a team of 14 volunteers from six different states, having formed in less than a week in response to a GMI email sent out in late October, traveled to the island to work with our missionaries, affiliated ministries, and their neighbors to do repair work and otherwise serve with the goal of bringing any measure of relief in the name of Christ. Those who volunteered for the trip paying all their own expenses were, for the most part, exceptionally skilled and more than qualified for the varied and complex projects they were handed. The few who lacked specific skills closed the deficit with diligence and a disposition to do whatever was needed.

While in Puerto Rico our team talked to many people listening to their stories about the hurricane and its aftermath. Nearly everyone could tell you exactly how many days it had been since they last had power—usually the figure was over eighty. It was not hard to believe given that nearly every street was lined with a substantial number of leaning or fallen utility poles and powerlines hanging in the street or in front yards.

Pastor Miguel Ortiz of Juana Diaz Bible Church described a typical Puerto Rican, at this point, as “numb” and resigned to the new reality on the island. Many explained how early on there was no way to even communicate with those across town let alone with the rest of the island or even with family on the mainland. People waited for weeks to hear about the fate of loved ones. It was somewhat commonplace that lines formed for blocks so that people could use a sole functioning telephone landline a generous homeowner might lend to his or her neighbors while cell service was virtually nonexistent in those early days. It is only now that many are seeing video clips online for the first time of the havoc wreaked in other parts of Puerto Rico the day of the hurricane. As our team walked door to door in a neighborhood on the south side of the island, still without power, handing out “bags of hope” or bags of essentials and necessities (donated by Rush Creek Bible Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan), many of the people we met just cried as they told someone new their story and thanked us both for the gift and coming to help their people. While in the security line leaving the airport, the conversation was the same. The man in front of us was leaving the island for good having lost everything. The same was true of the family behind us. As we explained why we were there, the man in front teared up thanking us for helping his people. It is great to do good, but better to do it in the name of Christ, who gave Himself for us (Titus 2:14), which we were able to share over and over again.

Camp Caribe—a long-time ministry of and affiliated with GMI—is regaining its footing. There is still much to repair and several challenges, but with the hard work of their staff, volunteers, and mission teams they see a way forward and they are optimistic. GMI



GMI missionaries Emiliano Seravalli and Cory Hodgson overlooking Lake Managua with Volcano Momotombo in the background to the left

missionary April Sykes, who runs Club Maravilla—an after-school ministry to neighborhood kids—is seeing significant growth in her ministry while she and her husband, Matt—who coordinates and hosts around 25 mission teams a year at Camp Caribe—are reaching out into the neighborhood making contacts they have never had before all with the purpose of sharing the gospel. The Christian radio station located on the camp property is now broadcasting 13 hours a day due to the perseverance and toil of GMI missionaries Lawrence and Barbara Trumbower. Juana Diaz Bible Church regained power and water relatively quickly after Maria and has served as a hub for community outreach. Though many in the congregation were significantly impacted by the hurricane and several ministries were interrupted, the church is still vibrant and hopes to plant a church in nearby Ponce in the near future. Contrasting the construction in Nagarote with the destruction in Puerto Rico, our missionaries and ministry friends are both optimistic and hopeful knowing that they can glory in their tribulation which will result in a hope that does not disappoint (Romans 5:2-4).

We are living in Bible times. Our Puerto Rico mission team visited Juana Diaz Bible church the second Sunday in December. Before Pastor Miguel began his sermon he allowed me to make a couple of presentations. The first produced audible gasps of joy and thankfulness as this church was given a check for \$10,600—the amount collected specifically for them from sister congregations across the United States affiliated with the Grace Gospel Fellowship. The second presentation brought tears. At the end of the service back in November in Nagarote when Marvin had prayed for Cory and me, this small congregation gave me an envelope with the money they had been collecting during the previous few weeks for the Juana Diaz Bible Church. A month later, their gift, given beyond their ability but freely and generously, had been delivered. It was a homerun in the bottom of the ninth.

As moving as that moment was, the story continues. The next Sunday Juana Diaz Bible Church said goodbye to one of its young members, Jean Carlos. Jean had been raising funds to spend much of 2018 working with the church in Nagarote. Now he goes to Nicaragua on his own accord because of his earnest care for them and their ministry.

Since we are living in Bible times, what will your chapter say? ■



A definite **YES!**

The Bible says “there are varieties of service but the same Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:5 ESV) which came to mind when I read a pamphlet, **THE FIFTH GOSPEL**. It was written by A. A. Sandoz, printed by GRACE GOSPEL PUBLISHERS, P.O. Box 21001, Denver, CO 80221. Permission was granted to use it in this current ED SAYS column of TRUTH. Wording is slightly different without changing the logic or thrust of the pamphlet. Thanks.

THE FIFTH GOSPEL...NEVER HEARD OF IT...

The great majority of true Christians are familiar with the four gospels of the so-called New Testament but have NEVER heard of nor even studied THE FIFTH GOSPEL. Paul uses the phrase *my gospel* three times when referring to the special ministry given to him by the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

1 “...according to *my gospel*, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus” (Romans 2:16).

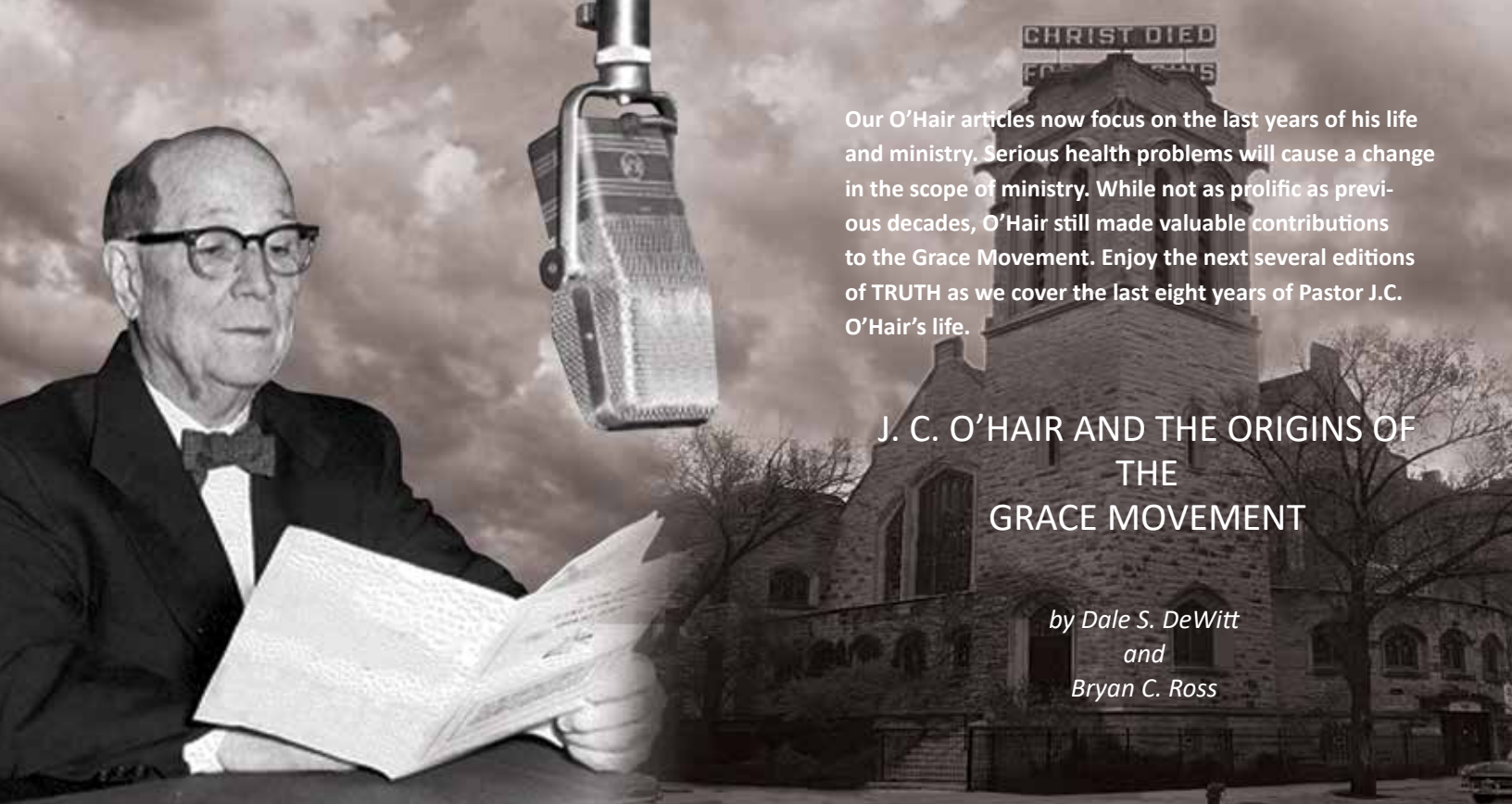
2 “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to *my gospel* (2 Timothy 2:8).

3 “Now to him who is able to establish you according to *my gospel*...” (Romans 16:25). Paul then defines what he means by the term *my gospel*: “...even the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested by the prophetic scriptures, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith” (Romans 16:25-26). *My gospel* is not limited to salvation by grace through faith, apart from human merit, but incorporates the doctrine, the exalted heavenly position, the spiritual walk, and the eternal destiny of every member of the present-day church which is the “Body of Christ” (Ephesians 1:22-23).

THE BODY OF CHRIST...NEVER HEARD OF IT...

The word church is a popular term all over the world but few have ever heard of the distinctive title, the Body of Christ given to the group of believers in God’s present-day age of grace. The Body of Christ was God’s

(continued on page 13)



Our O'Hair articles now focus on the last years of his life and ministry. Serious health problems will cause a change in the scope of ministry. While not as prolific as previous decades, O'Hair still made valuable contributions to the Grace Movement. Enjoy the next several editions of TRUTH as we cover the last eight years of Pastor J.C. O'Hair's life.

J. C. O'HAIR AND THE ORIGINS OF THE GRACE MOVEMENT

by Dale S. DeWitt
and
Bryan C. Ross

Further Discussions of Baptism and Related Issues

New Baptism Pamphlets. During the 1950s, O'Hair endured a pair of new attacks over Bullingerism and baptism. The attacks came from author and teacher Martin DeHaan of the Radio Bible Class, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and John R. Rice, pastor of a Baptist church in Wheaton, Illinois, and editor of a paper called *The Sword of the Lord*. DeHaan and Rice were not partners in this offensive as were Fuller and Haggai in the 1940s. The pamphlets of this group are different from earlier baptism pamphlets in their *more retrospective*, "look-back" or "look-around" character. O'Hair had a sustained interest in the major denominations and their evangelical spokesmen-theologians. He spoke well of most of them as preachers for whose ministries he was grateful, but was troubled over their conflicting explanations of water baptism. The six pamphlets of this group reflect his chagrin over their arguments in defense of their respective views of the issue, but with some new slants. For example, the six pamphlets together contain extensive reviews of immersionist, infant, and household baptizing beliefs and practices. All six pamphlets discuss the conflicting biblical interpretations and logic of varied baptismal views per denomination.

Another special aspect of these pamphlets is the number of fundamentalist leaders mentioned by

name. Among them were teachers and pastors from whom O'Hair had learned and gained, and a few leaders he had seldom mentioned like D. L. Moody. Evangelical millenarian and prophetic study movements like the previous century's Niagara Conferences are reviewed. He also deals with the puzzling question, raised now and then before, of why some fundamentalist teachers had backed away from earlier agreements with him, and why recovery of lost truth since Darby had become a "stalemate." Some of his prominent evangelist-teacher friends had once embraced his view of the Twelve's kingdom preaching to Israel in Acts. They had laid foundations for his view that Jesus' preaching commission to the Twelve was aimed primarily at the renewal of Israel's kingdom opportunity after the ascension. Some had even spoken to large public gatherings on the recovery of such lost dispensational truths.

Recovering Lost Truth. Another booklet of the 1950s, important for a sense of O'Hair's thinking near the end of his life, is *The Recovery of Lost Bible Truth: Who is Responsible for the Stalemate?* In a sense the booklet stands at the head of this related group of pamphlets which follow its main theme. It comes from 1951 and is the most straightforward of the group in asking why the progress of the last century and a half in "recovery of lost truth" has stalled. "Lost truth"

Although Darby's dispensational theology was taught in most Bible institutes in Scofield's form, O'Hair perceived the Bible institute faculties as hesitant to recognize Paul's mystery teaching.

refers mainly to the revelation of the church, the presence and contingent (on national repentance) future of Israel's kingdom in the gospels and Acts, and the related use and meaning of miracles and water baptism. Placing these pamphlets in sequence does not mean other pamphlets of the 1950s did not intervene between them, only that the group follows this likely order;¹³ the probable sequence is:

1951—*The Recovery of Lost Bible Truth: Who is Responsible for the Stalemate?*

1952—*Four Religious Movements that are Moving*

1952—*Quite a Variety of Religious Undertakers*

1954—*The Dispensationalism of Dr. E. W. Bullinger, Dr. C. I. Scofield, and Dr. John R. Rice*

1956—*The "Paulites" and the "Thessalonian Baptists"*

1956—*The Church of Christ and Ten Confused Fundamentalists*

In its look-back passages, *The Recovery of Lost Bible Truth* mentions several important people and events: J. N. Darby, a frequently noted forerunner in O'Hair's later pamphlets; Donald Gray Barnhouse of Philadelphia; and the significant Niagara Conferences also known as "The Believers' Meeting for Bible Study." O'Hair notes the Bible institute movement which had grown from Moody Bible Institute's origin about the turn of the century to more than sixty schools. The pamphlet has an unusual glimpse of O'Hair's earliest months after conversion when he witnessed heated, disturbing arguments over baptism's necessity and meaning between Church of Christ leaders and Baptists. He thought these confrontations were the more outrageous because both groups were immersionists. He witnessed these public conflicts during his travels in southern states and came away from them with a negative impression and troubled spirit about water baptism.

The pamphlet outlines several hindrances to the recovery of lost biblical truth. (1) The rise of Pentecos-

talism distracted evangelicals from the Darby-Scofield, or more fully Darby—Haldeman—Anderson—Scott—Scofield)¹⁴ recovery of lost, neglected, or obscured truths. For example, after 1920 O'Hair appealed repeatedly to A. E. Bishop's pamphlet, *Tongues, Signs and Visions, Not God's Order for Today* (1920). He viewed Bishop's pamphlet as an important development of one aspect of the recovery beyond Darby—a notable advance because Scofield endorsed the pamphlet's argument in its Introduction. Another explanation of the "stalemate" (2) is what O'Hair saw as the careless or even self-interested compromises of some prominent fundamentalist leaders who once professed ideas identical or similar to his. O'Hair wanted to know why they no longer said in their public sermons and teaching what they sometimes said in their writings or private discussions. He also notes (3) the American Bible institutes of the first half of the twentieth century, and their faculties who mostly embraced an Acts 2 origin of the church. He thought this widely but not unanimously held view could not help the recovery of the Pauline mystery teaching or the correct understanding of Acts' early chapters. Although Darby's dispensational theology was taught in most Bible institutes in Scofield's form, O'Hair perceived the Bible institute faculties as hesitant to recognize Paul's mystery teaching. He thought they should rather have followed the implications of Darby's views of the crucial passages in Acts' early chapters. A fourth reason for the "stalemate" (4) lay within the corps of itinerant American evangelists active from about 1900 to the time of the pamphlet (1950s). Many said they agreed with Scofield and O'Hair on the end of signs, but were "too busy saving souls to get into any discussion of the

¹³See the brief notes on dating the 1950s pamphlets in the Appendix.

¹⁴See MacLeod, "Walter Scott, a Link in Dispensationalism between Darby and Scofield?" pp. 155-178, for this analysis. MacLeod thinks the differences between Darby and Scofield cannot be explained by a direct line of influence. If one asks who made the likely shifts, Walter Scott, in MacLeod's view, is the most likely possibility, especially since Scofield names Scott, not Darby, as an important mentor; but other teachers in this noted sequence contributed to the stream as well. See *The Scofield Reference Bible*, Introduction, p. iv for Scofield's comment on Scott. Mention of learning from an in-print mentor is paralleled in O'Hair's mention of Haldeman.

difference between Peter's Pentecostal message . . . and Paul's unmixed 'grace' message . . ."¹⁵

Two Pamphlets of 1952. The pamphlets, both focused mainly on baptism, are *Four Religious Movements that are Moving* and *Quite a Variety of Religious Undertakers*. In both pamphlets he jests over opponents' arguments, as in the allusion to "Religious Undertakers" and his quip about the "Independent Religious Undertakers' Union" (immersionists). O'Hair engages the *Four Religious Groups* on their claims about regenerative water baptism, for example, from John 3:5's "water and Spirit." He thought John 7:38-

¹⁵J. C. O'Hair, *The Recovery of Lost Bible Truth: Who is Responsible for the Stalemate?* (Chicago: J. C. O'Hair, 1951), p. 28.

40 showed that at least some of John's water images read by Catholic, Lutheran, and some Church of Christ teachers as water regeneration actually referred to works of the Spirit in believers. O'Hair also thought many biblical water images could be shown to be non-water in intent, while other texts viewed ceremonial washings as standing "only until the time of reformation" (Heb 9:10). These notes on texts in John's Gospel reflect increased attention to this Gospel in the 1950s. Also present here is a rare appreciative mention of the Quakers who shared his view of baptism (they do not baptize), and an affectionate, joking allusion to "dear Mel Trotter" from whom O'Hair quotes a quip that "baptizing human beings with water is like putting cologne on a skunk-in-action." These are cases of the O'Hair humor aimed at his detractors, and fondly recalled from family and other gatherings by memoirists. ■



(More Than Four Gospels - continued from page 10)

sacred secret hid in Himself, (not hid in the Scriptures) during all past ages (Colossians 1:26) until it was revealed to the Apostle Paul by none other than the *risen* Christ. The true church of today is not a man-made organization but is a divine spiritual organism, the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

The **Father** chose us "in Christ" before the ages began (2 Timothy 1:9). The Son redeemed us not by His life nor by His example, but through His substitutionary death on the cross and His resurrection (Colossians 1:14). The **Holy Spirit** sealed and baptized us, not into water, but into the **Body of Christ**, the all important membership (Ephesians 1:14). The sevenfold unity of the **Body of Christ** is defined in Ephesians 4:4 through 6.

HIS SECRET COMING...NEVER HEARD OF IT...

The second coming of Christ is a very popular theme throughout Christendom, but relatively few have ever heard of the Lord's **SECRET COMING** in the **AIR**, not to earth, and only for members of the **Body of Christ**.

This is exclusively Paul's teaching and is the next great event in God's present-day age of grace (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The pretribulational **SECRET COMING** in the **AIR** is imminent, whereas His prophesied second coming, when every eye shall see Him, occurs at the end of the great tribulation. "For God has not destined **us** (the **Body of Christ**) to wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

THE FIFTH GOSPEL (Paul's *my gospel*) is the biblical answer to the current dilemma of religious illiteracy, denominational confusion, numerous cults, and the social gospel: "Be followers of me, even as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Under God's present-day program, Christians *should* follow the *risen* Christ, not with Moses and the prophets, not with John the Baptist, not with the twelve Apostles, but with the Apostle Paul and his team, the channel for the revelation of God's present-day program. "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you" (Philippians 4:9). ■

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Puerto Rico, here we come! Several years ago Bill and I had the privilege of spending two weeks with Joe and Joanne Cerra. They had asked us many times to come and spend time with them and their students in the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) school—so we agreed to go. Who wouldn't want to escape the cold and snow of Michigan? Our first week was spent with the students in the school. We had their undivided attention each day for two hours and we had such fun! Bill and I prepared many different types of activities for the students—to teach them and to entertain them. About every half hour when we sensed they were getting a little restless, we changed subjects. We began each morning with a story about Amy Carmichael, a famous missionary who served in India most of her life and saved many girls and boys from sex trafficking. Then we switched to verse memorization, the history of Congo, the geography, a little French, songs in Swahili, and greetings in Swahili. The girls loved wrapping themselves up in the cloths that the Africans use every day. We enjoyed our time very much.

The following week we did some sightseeing, ate the good Puerto Rican food, and enjoyed good fellowship with Joanne and Joe. Joanne was the one who selected the places where we ate. Despite the fact that Joanne was suffering a severe infection in her foot, she made us feel welcome while we were there. Both Joanne and Joe showed us their dedication in reaching boys and girls for Christ. This was through their ACE school which Joanne organized and administered. Joe pastored the church and acted as chaplain in the school. Joanne had a gift of hospitality as she welcomed us into her home as well as so many others. We loved every part of our visit. She will long be remembered for her kindness and hospitality. ■



Joe and Joanne on a cruise several years ago with their son, Peter, and his wife, Amy

Many, many years ago Don and I became friends with Joe and Joanne Cerra. It was around the time when God was calling them to serve in Puerto Rico. Our friendship has continued through the years and continues to this day. We called each other weekly, and we visited them in Puerto Rico several times over the years. They loved my Christmas cookies, so I sent them a box each Christmas.

Joanne always kept us up to date on the progress of their church and school. When they first began their church they held services in their home. It began with only a few people until it grew to be what it is today. I admired their hard work and their generous spirit. They were willing to help others with the little that they had. In fact they put the needs of others before their own.

I still continue a happy relationship with Joanne's family. They invite me to their family gatherings and special parties. I thank God that they are a part of my life.

— Joan Medema



by Matt Amundsen
Executive Director

Dependence Upon the Lord

Dependence. Upon the Lord. Upon each other. Perspectives. Individually unique and yet collectively, when put together, create great cohesiveness in a masterful work of art.

Within western culture, even at times within the context of the local church, we are encouraged to look out for ourselves first and almost exclusively. This self-reliance promotes an inward focus that leaves little room for partnership with other congregations, whether it be a community church down the road or a fellow GGF church ministering in the next county. Our 2020 Vision of planting churches, cultivating healthy churches, and developing new leaders rests squarely on this concept of partnership and interdependence. For us to flourish, we must pursue Jesus Christ and promote healthy “fellowship.”

In early October a team of GGF pastors and leaders met in Southern California for the Exponential Church Planting Conference in Irvine, CA. We had men from Arizona, California, Colorado, Michigan, Oregon, and Washington in attendance. Pastor Joel and Darcy Molina graciously hosted our team. In addition to attending the conference, we were given the opportunity to preach and teach at three of our GGF churches:

Anaheim, Riverside, and South Gate. After a great morning of worship and fellowship, Grace Bible Church of Anaheim hosted a BBQ Picnic for the area churches. What a tremendous time of food and fellowship, along with a challenge from God’s Word brought by Gerardo Ruiz, a young man who grew up in the South Gate church and is currently serving on staff at Rush Creek Bible Church in Byron Center, Michigan. Additionally, Gerardo is working with the GGF to develop a ministry plan for planting a multiethnic church in the Grand Rapids area. “Jerry” challenged us to reach into the lives of people in our community, just as many people reached into his life with the love of Christ. Life gets hectic and we often lose sight of how God uses the gifts and willingness of others to speak truth into our lives. God used individuals to reach Jerry as He will use Jerry to reach others and the Lord has and will continue to do the same for you and me. It was such an encouragement to see these congregations come together for the sake of the gospel of God’s grace which has long been our goal—to see healthy partnerships among the churches. These partnerships serve as a catalyst for future growth as we look to plant churches nationwide.



Upon each other.

*LEFT PAGE—back: the GGF team having morning devotions and prayer; middle: Josh Herman – NW Church Plant Leader; front: Multiethnic Session (Gerardo Ruiz and Matt Amundsen)
RIGHT PAGE—left: scenery by the Pacific Ocean; back: Exponential Conference; front: Gerardo Ruiz speaking at the regional BBQ at Grace Bible Church of Anaheim*

CHURCH PLANTING UPDATE

Recently, we received great news from the Northwest Region. In a unanimous decision, all seven churches voted to support a church plant in the Portland, OR/Vancouver, WA area. In this decision process, the regional leadership team, consisting of pastors and staff, asked Josh Herman to prayerfully consider leading the church plant team. Josh accepted this opportunity and has since attended the Exponential conference and has developed a ministry plan for this new work. Josh has attended Grace Bible College, Northwest University, and Moody Theological Seminary and has been heavily involved in a number of GGF churches. Previously, he served as Youth Pastor at Grace Bible Church in Grants Pass, OR, alongside Pastor Gary Cloud. Recently, he furthered his ministry experience at Berean Bible Church of Shoreline, WA, under the mentoring of the pastoral staff--Jim Shemaria, Gary Hansen, and Kevin Lane. We

are excited to partner with the Northwest Region and ask you to join us in prayer for Josh as he will be moving to the Portland/Vancouver area in early 2018. When I look back at our time in Southern California I am drawn to our time of fellowship, devotion, and prayer. While we had a multitude of laughs and sharing life, there were also significant times of reflection as a group of men. In fact, one night we enjoyed a great meal together, read scripture, and shared deeply, both about our struggles and heartaches as well as the examples of true joy and contentment and how the Lord is present in all of them. While it can be difficult and sometimes painful to share with others, it can serve as a catalyst for closeness and dependence—first, with and upon the Lord; and second, with others. It is my prayer that our time together in Southern California will serve as an example to you of what fellowship can look like. ■



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Region 1: Northwest



The churches of Region 1 are working together to partner with the GGF's vision 2020: "...churches partnering to plant 10 churches reflective of their community." We are excited that Josh Herman has taken the call to start a church plant in the Portland, OR/Vancouver, WA, area. One of the benefits of this area is there are other Grace believers already there, including Harry and Kaylah Alicea, former GMI missionaries to Puerto Rico. Josh reports that they may begin a church plant ministry in late January/early February 2018. Please pray for this effort to reach out to a new community. ■

cookies and an ornament to exchange. ■

Region 3: West



Bethel Union Church in Akron, CO: Attendance is down a little. The Word of God continues to surprise me as I prepare for each Sunday. God is good all the time and all the time.... We finally put up a church sign at least partially this year. We are looking forward to what God has in store for us this coming year.

Cope Community Church in Cope, CO: Winter time is upon us! Bible studies, Thanksgiving celebrations, Christmas plays and services, a marriage retreat, and a host of other things. Busy, busy, busy! But in all this busyness we are remembering to keep our priorities straight. We are following hard after God and inviting those around us to do the same. Looking forward to the New Year and our annual open house on New Year's Day. Come by if you can, we start at noon on January 1! All our best to you ... Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Grace Bible Church of Lakewood, CO: Our congregation has been struggling with dear folks battling serious illnesses and the passing of loved ones. We are a praying church and believe that our petitions get answered! So, despite the sadness—we rejoice that one

fine day, all of this pain will be taken away! Blessed be the name of Jesus and when or if any of you are out our way, stop in and visit!

Harvest Fellowship in Brighton, CO: This fall season has been a real adventure. We have lost six leading couples due to job changes causing them to move out of state. It can be hard on us if we don't keep our eyes on God. It has helped us to understand who we are really serving. Maybe Paul's words, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" apply here. But, it's also interesting to see others decide to step up and take their place. I am convinced that we are discipling/equipping people for the greater Body of Christ and not just for Harvest. We have hired one of our college-age men as an intern to serve at Harvest. Next year, we are looking at a few more interns. We are trying to bridge the gap of high schoolers being assimilated into the church rather than leaving the church which we and so many other churches experience. We are praying about and starting a college/career group and starting a NexGen service to capture more of the 16-29 year olds who seem to disappear from our churches.

Liberty Heights Chapel in Lawton, OK: The Christmas Program will be December 17 at 11:00 a.m. We do plan to have morning services on December 24 and December 31. ■

Region 2: Southwest



Grace Bible Church of Anaheim, CA, had their annual cultural dinner on November 4. Tables held food prepared from Indonesia, Germany, Brazil, the Philippines, Vietnam, and an American table featuring hot dogs. It was well attended by the neighborhood. Then on December 2 the ladies had their annual Christmas luncheon. Each one brought a dozen

Region 4: Upper Midwest



What a great time we are enjoying at **Grace Bible Church** of

West Allis, WI, in God's rich blessing of preparing for a short-term missions trip to Nicaragua. God has given us 10 people who will be led by Pastor Randy travelling January 8 – 19, 2018 to minister to the new church plant (Arraigados) in Nagarote. Milo and Raquel Servalli are the couple that God has led to begin that church plant and our team is going to build a building for classrooms which will later be turned into a dormitory for retreats and other functions. The team will also be very involved in the weekly church meetings and an outreach at a public school. God has provided all of the \$20,000 for this trip including the cost of the materials to be used in the project. We thank our God who stirred the hearts of those who are going and many of those who gave generously to this important ministry.

During this past quarter of church ministry, we have had our first purity group meetings with the Conquer Series videos. It was attended by ten men whom Pastor

Les led for the five-week period of time. All ten men attended every session and God used the videos and the study booklets to help raise our awareness of the ways we are challenged in our culture to stay pure before the Lord.

We had a wonderful pastors and leaders meeting in Tomah, Wisconsin, on October 5, 2017. This was a great time to pray together, share what God is doing, and encourage one another! Please come to our next one which will be March 1, 2018. If you cannot make the drive, we can skype you in like we did Pastor Brent Befus from **Bethesda Church** in Prior Lake, MN.

We give thanks for the work God is doing at Bethesda Church on both our campus in Prior Lake and our **North Branch**, MN, campus. We had our largest VBS and our AWANA doubled this fall. Praise the Lord! North Branch recently hosted a "Defending your Faith" seminar which was well attended. We are working to do more outreach connected with the Super Bowl which

is here this year! Pray we can make the most of this opportunity! ■

Region 5: Lower Midwest



St Louis Bible Fellowship has resumed a 15-minute program, "The Message of Grace," on KSIV 91.5 FM Christian radio. Many people will tune in on their way home from church.

Grace Church of Indianapolis, IN, hosted an Angel Tree Gift Party. The church provided gifts based on the request of the incarcerated parents for 13 children. The party included food, games, singing Christmas songs, a devotional, and giving the gifts to the children. Church members delivered gifts to the children who could not attend the party. It was a great time to celebrate the joy of giving. If interested, you can find out more at the Prison Fellowship website (www.prisonfellowship.org). ■

(Grace in Action... - continued from page 6)

sionaries and Puerto Rican friends with a nice dinner on Thanksgiving. This included a twenty-pound turkey which was frozen solid in a suitcase! On Thanksgiving Day after breakfast, some of our team members helped by peeling potatoes. Then our teams set out to work again for the morning. Two young ladies from the team stayed back with Kathy and worked all morning to prepare a fabulous dinner to honor the Puerto Rican missionaries, as well as the leaders of the church and the camp. We served these 13 Puerto Rican leaders and ministers. Our 16 team

members also sat down at the table where we ate and enjoyed the time together. We shared the Word, prayed, and sang together. The missionaries and leaders were so encouraged by our fellowship, as well as the great dinner of turkey, stuffing, pies, green bean casserole, and all the trimmings. They felt as if they were honored and almost "pre-hurricane" as these things brought them joy and great appreciation for our visit and ministry.

In reality, the blessing was greater for those of us who served. We went to bed exhausted and sore each night, but truly blessed

to be agents of God's grace. Our interaction with the people of Puerto Rico was such a rich source of blessing to all of us. In fact, one evening we went to a night of worship, and even after all our hard work, we worshiped together with the joyful members of Iglesia del Biblia for two hours! The service and action of grace does bless others, but it also grows our faith and exercises our muscles for great servanthood in the future. Let's continue to pray for our missionaries, other teams, and our Puerto Rican brothers and sisters in Christ who remain in the fray of ministry and show grace to others. ■

Region 9: Michigan



Pastor Jared Kusz reports: “We at **Georgetown Grace Church** [Hudsonville, MI] are looking forward to a New Year of discovering God’s faithfulness. This past year has been full of sorrow, defined in many ways by the homegoing of many precious members of the Body and of our church family. But we have also found joy as God has brought us many new members, provided for a new roof and parking lot, and drawn us closer to Him by His grace and love. We are looking forward to another year of enjoying His faithfulness and praying for the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Maranatha!”

Berean Church of Norton Shores, MI, recently called Pastor Steve Carlson as their new Associate Pastor of Family Ministries. Steve has had experience in several Youth and Family ministry capacities in West Michigan churches and most recently worked with Youth for Christ in the Mona Shores school district. He and his wife, Amanda, and their four children are excited to be part of the ministry and future of Berean. Some may recall that Steve’s father, Jim Carlson, was the Lead Pastor at Berean Church in the ’70s and ’80s and led the church through their move from downtown Muskegon to the current location in Norton Shores. Our “new” Pastor Carlson brings a passion for the family/youth of our area and we look forward to serving with him to further our influence in the West Michigan area.

The women’s ministry held their Ladies and Girls Christmas Gala with nearly 70 in attendance for a wonderful evening of fun and fellowship. The phrase “**S.I.S.T.E.R.S. in Christ**” was selected as the new Women’s Ministry name. It stands for **S**upport, **I**nspire, **S**erve, **T**each, **E**ncourage, **R**espect and **S**hare. Their theme verses are 1 Peter 4:8-11.

At our Fall Missions Conference, we enjoyed hearing from Bible Doctrines to Live By, Circle Ranch, Muskegon Rescue Mission and World Mission. We also enjoyed having GMI missionaries Givemore and Sylvia Nyakambiri as our guests in November to share their vision for Mozambique.

For the last two years **Rush Creek Bible Church** in Byron Center, MI, has been working to discover what the Lord would have for us in the near future. That process has morphed and shifted a number of times as the Lord has opened some doors and closed others. As a result of the Lord’s grace and leading and the incredibly hard work of many within our congregation, we took a vote on December 10 to move forward with a substantial renewal and renovation project of our building. The vote was overwhelmingly in favor of moving forward, and we praise the Lord that our church is united in this next step of vision and ministry!

It’s exciting to see where the Lord will guide us as we follow His leading in this project! We are also overwhelmed and humbled that in the past year volunteers of all ages gave over 21,000 hours in various ministries. Praise God for the heart

of people who desire to *be* the church, not just go to church!

Greetings from Doug Kessler, pastor of **Grace Community Church** in Belmont, MI. I write this as the new pastor, who along with my wife, Marcia, and daughter, Kaitlin, joined this sweet church family this past July in their ministry on the northeast side of Grand Rapids. We are well placed to impact the lives of people both in the community around the church and those in our individual spheres of influence: our neighborhoods, coworkers, fellow students, and those we rub elbows with in the everyday things of life. Our desire is to shine forth the glory of Christ and the good news of the Gospel in a world desperately in need of hearing about God’s grace. The Kesslers joined a church with a rich heritage of ministry and we look forward to seeing how the Lord leads the Body at Grace Community Church into the next chapter of ministry for Him.

Frontline Bible Church in Byron Center is glad to have Pastor John Lowder back from his three-month sabbatical. While it was certainly different not having him there, it gave the church family an opportunity to “be the Church” in a unique way. One of the joys was to have six of our own lay members preach during the sabbatical – and they did a fantastic job! Also, so many people stepped up to fill the gaps-- it truly was a growing experience for our pastor and the Frontline family. Our next steps are to take the things we’ve learned and apply them toward the goal of planting churches someday. Exciting days are ahead! ■

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