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GREAT  
COMMISSION  
CHURCHES

# CHRISTIANITY IN *action*

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[www.gccweb.org](http://www.gccweb.org)

## CHANGING LIVES



### A LIFE OF CHANGE

By Tom Brown

*It was finals week of my senior year in high school, and while my classmates were thinking about biology and chemistry, I sat on a mountain top thinking about death.*

Growing up in a household torn apart by alcoholism and plagued by emotional, spiritual and physical poverty, I had some serious questions about life. I decided to skip finals and drove up to the mountains with a couple of boxes of sleeping pills, a bottle of aspirin and a bag of rat poison. I couldn't find significance in my life and was ready to throw it away.

After a stint in the hospital, I decided that I was taking things a little too seriously and I partied my way into a freshman year at Colorado State University. That fall, I met a group of people who had a peace and joy that I had never seen before. And the way they loved me was revolutionary. Through them I encountered Jesus of Nazareth. In Him a meaning and significance flooded into my life which changed everything.

The next few years as a follower of Jesus were a wild race of dorm outreaches, spring break road trips and summer programs all over the country, and mission trips around the world. I graduated from CSU, married an incredible woman and went on staff with the student ministry in Fort Collins, where I was recognized as a pastor. When I look at my family today and look back on the abundant life God has given to me, I am amazed by the gracious and wise ways of our Savior who redeems and uses the most broken of lives!

### A STORY OF GRACE

By: Darren and Kathi Stewart

*The turning point in my life came on a day when I had to do something I dreaded. I had been sober for five months and was walking through the steps of AA. I had to get my life in order. It was a wreck.*

I had one failed marriage to my name and was destroying my relationship with another woman (Kathi). I loved her and didn't want to lose her, but my addictions were destroying me and those around me.

Now, I had admitted my powerlessness in the face of alcohol. I acknowledged that only a "higher power" could help me and I called out to God to deliver me. I wrote out my story detailing my life and where I had gone wrong, and now I was ready for the dreaded Step 5 – confessing it to another human. But to whom? Who would listen to me?

Kathi had made some friends with people who attended a Bible study. One was a member of Grace Community Church. Kathi suggested that I make my public confession to the pastor of that church.

On the day I entered the church building I was extremely nervous. I didn't want to enter a church environment as no one likes to be judged. I pulled out my confession and started reading it out loud. I started feeling remorse. Shame swept over me, as I realized what a terrible person I really was. But what amazed me was the pastor's loving acceptance of me. Later on, I came to the church and put my faith in Jesus Christ.

Yes, I dreaded walking through the doors of that church many years ago, but I am so glad I did! I found the grace of God. Our lives are not marked by addictions and bad habits. We are children of God, saved by grace, changed by grace, growing by grace, and headed for an eternity of grace!



# MISSION USA

## NEW CHURCH PLANTS

### VINTAGE FAITH COMMUNITY: ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

By Mark Trujillo

*Recently St Petersburg, Florida received the dubious distinctions of the "Saddest City in America" and the "Most Stressful City in America." Why? Perhaps it has something to do with the lack of "salt and light" in the city.*

Like many urban cities, St Pete saw downtown churches move to the suburbs decades ago. The old First Baptist Church (FBC) of St. Pete sits as a picture of what the urban church in America has become. The congregation of First Baptist of St. Petersburg moved nine miles north to a new building and are still doing a good work, but the old downtown building has nothing to offer residents since it was sold in 1990. The FBC building stands 90 percent torn down but an Episcopal Church and historic preservation initiative saved the

front face of the building. That beautiful structure is laced with a steel chain and a "No Trespassing" sign marking the front steps of this once thriving congregation. This irrelevant relic represents "church" to many in St Pete: a cold empty building with no power or life.

In July, 2011 I and a team of 14 adults and 9 children from Gator Christian Life (the GCC church in Gainesville, FL) moved to urban St Petersburg to plant Vintage Faith Community.

Many of the neighbors that we have met thus far do not regularly attend a church and most are not interested. We trust that by being an active example of Christ in our neighborhood, we can see communities of leaders band together to be "the church" to one another and to the city.



Vintage Faith Community Church

Please pray for this young GCC work to be effective in demonstrating "church" to those around us, that God would make us a light to show that church is not just a building but is a community full of life, committed to Jesus, the Bible, and one another.

### A CHURCH INITIATIVE: JUST SOW IT

By Jaclyn Loschiavo

*(based on an interview with Mark Darling)*

*The apostle Paul, writing to the Romans, states, "for I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God!" The gospel is powerful. It is a seed of truth to be sown in the hearts of others that when sown has the opportunity to grow and flourish in a person's heart.*

Jesus' last command in Mark 16:15 to His disciples was, "go into all the world and preach the gospel to everyone." What amazing opportunities we have today. There are approximately 700 million believers in the world. If each one shared the gospel with 10 people, everyone in the world would hear the gospel! Research shows us that the majority of Christians never share the gospel with anyone. Other sincere Christians feel a false burden that it is somehow their responsibility to save

people. Still many other Christians practice good works, but never actually share the gospel with others. Pastor Mark Darling, from The Rock church in Minnesota, encourages believers in the church to prioritize sharing the gospel. "Just Sow It," is the phrase that stuck with Mark. When sowing a seed in your backyard, the Lord does the work to make the plant grow, right? In that same way, it is our job to simply sow the gospel seed. God will take care of the rest in His timing. Just as Nike encourages its athletes to "Just Do it," Mark is exhorting his church to get back to the basics and "Just Sow It." Sow the gospel!

After teaching on this Mark and his co-pastors decided to send out an anonymous survey to believers in the different house church locations within The Rock, to see what was happening. Based on the responses from the 140 adults who took the survey, the following results were calculated for 2011. The gospel was shared 2,383 times. 1,417 tracts were handed out



Mark Darling

in efforts to spread the gospel. 256 people shared another biblically based book with someone, and 34 [known] lives were surrendered to Jesus Christ!

Mark encourages his congregation to find creative ways to sow the gospel: write a personal letter, share a video of your testimony on YouTube, write a Facebook message/ testimony, call a loved one, or go do street evangelism. There are many possibilities for ways in which to share the gospel, but keep it simple. Just Sow It and let God grow it!

For more information about the ideas behind "Just Sow It," please contact Mark Darling at [mark@rockthechurch.com](mailto:mark@rockthechurch.com)



# INTERNATIONAL



## TEAMWORK IN ACTION

by Mike Bergen

Through many opportunities, the Lord has shown me, along with my wife Rita, how crucial teamwork can be in creating an effective ministry. We have had the privilege of being part of a team of hundreds of Christians over several decades, which has resulted in nine churches in the Philippines, who are united together as the "Great Commission Churches of the Philippines." Currently these churches are learning to work together as a team so they can send missionaries to the unreached parts of Asia.

Teamwork led Rita and me to get married after we went on a church plant team to Champaign, Illinois, in 1979. Her invaluable insights, wisdom, and encouragement have made her my most important partner in raising our four children, training disciples in our church, and coaching in the Philippines.

We moved to the Philippines in 1990 because of the teamwork between Great Commission churches and another Christian organization, Cru. That year hundreds of people in Great Commission churches gave, so we could stay there for one year. After that year, a young Filipino continued our Bible study and started a church from it. We continue to keep in touch, and God is doing so much through that example of teamwork.

About eight years ago Herschel Martindale joined me and boosted the Philippine leadership training. Now a group of eleven pastors leads the "Great Commission Churches of the Philippines," including about 175 adults and 350 children and students. They are learning how to work together and become a strong and effective team.

In every arena, we've witnessed transformed lives and the multiplication



of disciples because of God's intricate orchestration of awesome teamwork. However, He's not done yet. He is expanding the team of Americans and also increasing the team in the Philippines. Together they are working to send many missionaries to those in Asia who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## GOD'S WORK IN ITALY

By Frank Apisa

After serving at Il Rifugio Church in Turin, Italy for ten years, my wife and I moved to Milano to plant a new church among young people at the university there. God has given us a long-term vision for Italy. We desire to plant churches through seeing college students become saved. Then we will train and equip them to lead churches in hopes of expanding in every major city in Italy.

In the last year, God has helped us to develop many circles of influence around Milano and the surrounding suburbs. When we met a young man at the university, he was an agnostic. Over a two-year period, we built a friendship with him and shared the gospel. He began reading the Bible. When he faced a difficult decision we had the opportunity to pray together. In his own words, "Before when I prayed, it didn't seem significant, because I had

no relationship with God." The Lord continues to draw him near and in my opinion is now very close to becoming saved. Through him we have gotten to know his parents, his sister and her boyfriend.

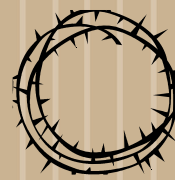
Another encouragement came from a lady who worked down the hall from where we met for English Clubs. She ended up changing jobs, but we still stayed in touch. We continued to minister to her specifically during a difficult time when she and her husband were separated. We arranged for her daughter to live with an American Christian family for a month, to improve her English. Because of her stay, she left atheism, and now believes that God exists. We continue to share with her about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. During her time in the U.S., her parents got back together and we are currently doing a Bible study with her



Frank and Pam Apisa

whole family.

God has also led us to several students on campus who study the Bible with us. We are excited to see all that God will continue to do in Milano!



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NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION TODAY

# INSIDE GCC

## PASTORS CONFERENCE 2012

JUNE 18-20: ST. LOUIS,  
MISSOURI



This year's theme is "Courage." Now is the time for courage, to banish fear and apprehension, to live boldly, to live courageously and to let this world see in our courageous lives that God is indeed alive, that Jesus Christ is indeed the Lord of all. Let them see our courage to live by the guidelines, the roles, the parameters, and precepts of the Bible. Join us this year at the 2012 Great Commission Churches Pastors Conference as we follow the command: Only be strong and very courageous!

For more information log on to: [www.gccweb.org/conferences/2012-pastors-conference](http://www.gccweb.org/conferences/2012-pastors-conference), or call the GCC office at 740-964-1002.

## MEET A GCC PASTOR



### THIS EDITION: JONATHAN WILLIAMS

Jonathan has been a teaching pastor for over thirty years with Great Commission churches, serving in Kansas, Missouri, Virginia, and now in his home town of San Antonio, Texas. Jonathan's primary gifts have been in teaching and writing. He attended Calvary Bible College, and the University of Missouri in Kansas City where he majored in history. He also graduated with a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies from Trinity Seminary.

He is the founder and President of *Word of God, Speak!* which focuses on advancing life change, building a biblical worldview, and connecting people to God's story. He is the creator of *Stories of the Master*, a weekly radio broadcast heard in seven U.S. cities that retells the story of Christ and the stories He told. Jonathan is also the regular teacher for the Heaven and Home Hour broadcast, a daily teaching program heard throughout the U.S.

Jonathan was married to his first wife Dee for 27 years, who passed away in 2003 and is now with the Lord. They have three children and three grandchildren. God has blessed Jonathan with another wonderful wife, Kathleen, who is his best friend and a great encouragement to his ministry.

One of Jonathan's favorite verses is: *"Therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ in whom we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand and we exult in hope of the glory of God."* Romans 5:1-2

Advice from Jonathan: Never doubt! Because of the work of Christ, God is one-hundred percent for you and is completely committed to work out everything for good in your life for His glory.

## CHANGED LIVES

JOHN HOPLER - DIRECTOR, GREAT COMMISSION CHURCHES



In the newsletter this month, I was impressed by the hearts of individuals in Great Commission churches to reach people for Jesus Christ. The gospel is indeed *"the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."* (Romans 1:16.) Praise God for the miracle of the new birth when someone hears and believes the message of Christ!

There are three qualities that we hope and pray will be embraced by every person in the Great Commission church movement. First, a heart to obey the Scriptures. Second, a mindset to be a servant. Third, a desire to share the gospel with friends, family, and neighbors.

Obedying His word, serving others, and witnessing for Christ. If these three are practiced by church members, what a glory that church will be!

So join up! Be part of your church's commitment to follow the Lord Jesus. Read His word to obey it. Serve others. And share your faith...that more people in your city may come to believe in and love the Lord Jesus Christ.



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