



The Birth of a
New Church
PAGE TWO



Great
Commission
Monterrey
PAGE THREE

Mission to
Armenia
PAGE THREE



Meet the Pastor:
Andy Gray
PAGE FOUR



CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

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CHANGING LIVES



A STEP TOWARDS RACIAL RECONCILIATION

By Andy Gray and Mary Reed

We all are aware of the racial strife that exists in America today. As Christians we are called to live in harmony within the church and demonstrate oneness to an observing world. Several of us from the Urban Refuge went on a "Sankofa Trip" where we visited important historical sites of the Civil Rights Movement in the South. The purpose is to "look back, so we can move forward."

When we arrived at Sankofa, we were encouraged to share our expectations, backgrounds, and experiences. The leaders stripped away the usual tools (like job titles and cell phones) we use to separate ourselves from one another. They defined key things needed to build a community, like not being afraid or retreating when conversations become vulnerable, honest, and even chaotic. The selection of experiences was robust. We were exposed to cultural and historical museums, speeches, and art. The music, food, sites, and on board movies were all orchestrated to provoke thoughtful discussion and drive us to cross emotional bridges as we journey toward harmony.

Learning our history during Sankofa gave us greater understanding of the history that has shaped our culture and us while reminding us that we have more to discover about each other. It emboldened us to not just share space, but to share our lives as we work in synchronicity together. It was encouraging to see people of different ethnicities take the time to invest in understanding. Please pray for God to bring healing to our land through the power of unity among His people.



FROM FAITHWALKERS TO ELDERSHIP

By Nick Carruthers

In 2003, Great Commission Churches hosted the first ever Faithwalkers. As a result of that conference John Hopler's son, David Hopler, came back and started a small group, through which I came to Christ.

A few years later, in 2005, I got in a van with a bunch of friends and began the long trek from Columbus Ohio to Tan-Tar-A for my second, and the third ever Faithwalkers conference. I'm not sure I could have anticipated the ways the Lord would use that conference—and one message in particular—to change the course and direction of my life. You see, in December of 2005, I had just turned 21 and had been following the Lord for about two years but I had no idea what I was going to do with my life. The theme of the conference was "The Core". During one of the main sessions Brent Knox shared on the idea of Christian leadership and specifically on the calling of an elder.

In that message Brent shared from 1 Timothy 3:1, "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task." Brent finished his message by having all of the men in the room stand up, and he said "If any of you have enough guts to stand before the Lord and ask Him, 'Do you want me to become a pastor?'—then raise your hand."

By God's grace I raised my hand and by God's grace, ten years later, I was ordained as a pastor at Linworth Road Church.

MISSION USA

THE BIRTH OF A NEW CHURCH

By Darrin Miedema

In September of 2016, Walnut Creek Church launched its fifth location in the Greater Des Moines metro area in the town of Altoona, just northeast of Des Moines. This location was started by about 35 adults primarily from Walnut Creek Downtown. In May 2016, the launch team began meeting weekly to share meals, pray, and study God's Word. Over the course of the summer, the team organized many outreach and evangelism efforts in the city of Altoona leading up to the Sunday morning service launch on September 11, 2016.

At Walnut Creek, our mission is to make authentic disciples of Jesus Christ who love and worship God in all they do and to spread the message of the gospel. As we start new locations, that mission drives our prayers and activities. God has been unbelievably faithful

to our church as our team has come together in faith to go to a new part of the city.

God began paving the way for us to go to Altoona long before we launched in September. Altoona is a small community geographically so we knew finding a location to have a service was going to be challenging. In February 2016, we found a church building for sale. Built in 1870 by the Methodist church, it's one of the oldest standing buildings in the city. Other churches had considered buying this building in the past, but were unable to navigate the challenges posed by the modern city code. By God's grace, we were able to get the necessary code variances to use the building as a church once again and purchased it in August.



While we renovate our building in the coming months, we are meeting in Altoona Elementary School. The School district has been a very gracious host to us, and in our first couple months of services we've seen tremendous interest in the community. We had over 100 people at our launch service and have grown every week since then. Our prayer is that God would raise up more laborers so that we can get people connected to the body and walking with Jesus.

SUMMER DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM

By Jonathan Kimball

Fifteen years ago, I had the opportunity to participate in an intensive summer ministry project. That summer was a crucial season in my development as a leader and growth as a disciple of Jesus. During that summer, I began to understand and use some of the gifts that God had given me. It was a time of intense, growing devotion to the Lord.

However, for the last few summers in Ohio, we've been missing an experience like this for students. So in May 2016 we launched the Summer Discipleship Program (SDP) at Ohio State University.

SDP is a program designed to help students grow as followers of Jesus Christ. Naturally, one cannot follow Jesus without also taking on some level of

leadership. As Jesus led people so must we who follow His example. This past summer, our goal was to help students know Jesus as followers but also begin to realize their potential as leaders for His kingdom.

Fifteen students lived, learned, and served together this past summer for our pilot version of SDP. Each night we would meet together for dinner as well as teaching, discussion, or ministry. Students learned to watch their doctrine by taking the Scriptures as they mean to be taken. We intensely studied the various genres found in the Old and New Testaments. Students learned valuable leadership skills, spent time diving into deep heart issues, took an intensive course on evangelism and



apologetics, and heard from men and women who have been serving the Lord for decades on a wide range of topics related to the character of a Christ follower. Many of the most profound experiences though came as students shared the gospel on Ohio State's campus and as they took risks for God—practicing what they had learned.

It would be hard to overstate the joy of this past summer in seeing such love and passion for Christ from this group of students. It was a life changing summer. We're already planning and anticipating for God to do great things in the summer of 2017!

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

GREAT COMMISSION MONTERREY

By Sergio Handal

It's an exciting time for us at Iglesia Gran Comisión Monterrey. We are working to reach out to this busy, thriving city in Mexico and preparing for more church plants soon. Our church in Monterrey began in 2006 and has been reaching out with the Gospel for the last 10 years.

It has been joyful to look back and remember how the church began and how it has now grown to three services. Our members have increased from 40 to 300+. We will finish this year with 21 small groups throughout the city. We strive to be a 'church for those who don't have a church' and refreshing, unique, and Christ-centered in reaching out to a population that has so many strong cultural religious traditions in place.

With a greater number of leaders now prepared and ready to start new churches, we are committed to continued church planting in Monterrey and other important cities throughout Mexico. Church planting is at the heart of "Project 10.5" with the hopes to plant four new churches here in our country over the next five years. With these God-sized goals of more Mexican church plants, and 28 new churches overall throughout Latin America, we are working hard to prepare to send many more workers to the harvest. We are also working hard to secure a new, permanent location for our church services after renting from local hotels over the years. We have had the honor of sending out members to assist in planting other churches and continue to refer members who wish to join and support other growing church plants already in place.



We are excited for our plans to start a new location in the suburb of Cumbres, Monterrey. Cumbres alone has over one million inhabitants with little to no local access to an evangelical church. With this in mind, Gran Comisión already has seven small groups in the area and could begin the new church plant with 100 committed members in place immediately! Our prayer is also that the church could become self-sufficient within the first few months with such a strong foundation in place.

MISSION TO ARMENIA

By Marina Bannik

At the end of May, believers from five different countries gathered in Kiev for a conference about disciple-making. We were challenged to take new steps of faith in being a part of reaching the world for Christ. At the conference, I had opportunity to talk with Tigran and hear about his vision for reaching his homeland of Armenia.

God put it on my heart to take a new step of faith and organize a short-term team to go and help Tigran. Most people thought my idea was unrealistic because most Ukrainians are too poor to take part in such a trip. However, four of us trusted God to provide and in early August we arrived in Masis, Tigran's home city.

Each morning during our trip, we spent a lot of time in prayer and reading John 17

together. We were amazed at how God would speak to us in the morning and then we would have opportunities to put what we read into practice during the day. Specifically, we saw how our unity and joy as a team was a great testimony to the Armenians with whom we had the opportunity to share.

Most of the people that we met are people to whom Tigran and his wife sell milk door-to-door. They do this to provide for their family, but it is also a natural way for them to build friendships. They have begun discovery Bible studies with a number of their customers. We were able to meet with several of their existing groups. We met both new disciples and some unbelievers that are still seeking. It was so exciting to share with these groups the testimonies of how God has worked in our lives.



Ukrainian mission team with Tigran

For all of our team, it was a new experience to cross cultures and share the gospel. This trip changed our lives and we encourage everyone to take this kind of step of faith.

INSIDE GCC

VICTORIOUS

2017 GREAT COMMISSION CHURCHES
PASTORS & LEADERS CONFERENCE

2017 PASTORS CONFERENCE

As Christians, we are not losers—we are champions through our victorious Savior Jesus Christ.

He won the victory at the Cross, and triumphed over the grave three days later. He now sits at the right hand of God, overseeing His mission of making disciples of all the nations. And in that mission He always leads us in His triumph (2 Cor. 2:14).

Come join us in Des Moines on June 15-16, 2017 as pastors and leaders in Great Commission Churches will focus on the theme, Victorious. (And if you are working will college students and college age individuals, consider staying an extra day for the Campus Workers Roundtable on June 17.)

MEET A GCC PASTOR

THIS EDITION:

Andy Gray

Psalm 139:5 (NIV84) *You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.*

I graduated from college in 1990 and landed an engineering job in Chicago. I thought I had life by the horns and was good to go. But an unsettledness increasingly welled up in my soul leaving me feeling alone and aimless. A friend invited me to a church in Novi, Michigan where Jeff Moore shared a message about Samson's choices. Choosing "life with God" was set before me and by grace I placed my hope in Jesus Christ to lead me.

My first question was "Do you know of any churches in Chicago?" Yes! I started attending a GCC church in the Chicago burbs but was subsequently assigned to a project in Minnesota. "Do you know of any churches in Minneapolis?" Yes! I started attending Evergreen, a GCC church, and eventually moved to the Twin Cities and



became a pastor in 1997. I am forever grateful that God "hemmed me in" the GCC family during those formative years of my faith journey.

In 2003 we planted The Urban Refuge with the intent to build a multi-ethnic community of God's people. We have relentless passion to see the body of Christ united in harmony through breaking down the typical racial and economic barriers that have divided the church for so long. My greatest joy is being married to Laura and being Dad to Isaiah, Simon, and Lizzie.

Thanks,
Andy

RAISING UP FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

JOHN HOPLER - DIRECTOR, GREAT COMMISSION CHURCHES



"Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions." Luke 2:46

This is the first picture we have of Jesus Christ "doing something." He was in the midst of the teachers, sitting, listening and asking questions. Jesus, the Son of God, was a listener.

We live in a polarized society. There is strife between social classes, political parties and races. What is the way to bring about harmony?

I suggest that we follow the example of Jesus Christ—He sat in the midst of people and listened. He took the effort to see the world from other people's perspective. Jesus was an "incarnational" listener.

In this newsletter are examples of people whose lives were changed by listening. Whether it was listening to God's word at a conference or listening to people from a different ethnic background, we grow as disciples of Christ when we sit and listen.

Our association was named after the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..." A disciple is simply a learner, a student, a listener. Therefore, we could fairly say that our mission to is to "Go and make listeners of all the nations."

I urge you to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ to listen empathetically to people from every race, nationality and background. And may God grant us grace to make listeners of all the nations, that the gospel of Jesus Christ might multiply throughout the world.



NAE | National Association of
Evangelicals

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