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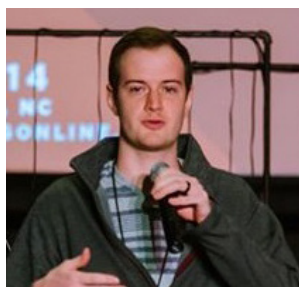
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CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

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CHANGING LIVES



FROM PASTOR'S KID TO CHURCH PLANTER

By Nick Pierson

My story is not entirely original. I grew up as a homeschooled Pastor's kid, who spent all his time in church. Outside of sports, all my friends growing up were from the church. I went to youth groups and

Bible studies, taught Sunday school, and joined the worship team. Church was not just something our family did, it was an integral part of our lives.

My parents and our church made a point of involving kids and teenagers in ministry. They were intentional about letting us serve alongside them and making sure we knew we had a vital role in the church. I began teaching Sunday school and went on my first mission trip at just 12 years old. This involvement from such a young age gave me a huge sense of ownership and responsibility for ministry. I spent my entire teenage years serving in or leading one ministry or another.

All that training and practice came to a head just before I went off to college. I was going to join my older brother at Virginia Tech, which was seven hours away from our New Jersey home. My parents then made a decision for our family: we were going to stay together and continue to do ministry together. Rather than allow us to become scattered across the East Coast, our family was going to move to Blacksburg and plant a church together.

This had a profound impact on me and my college career. In August of 2011, we planted Blacksburg Ablaze Church with the five members of my family and three other students who joined us for the first church service. God is now using us to touch the lives of nearly 100 people here in Blacksburg. This March, I was blessed to be recognized as a pastor in our church.

All of this was made possible because of two critical things my parents did for me. They were intentional about involving us in ministry from a young age, and they elected to start something brand new together rather than let our family be separated.



SWEDEN UPDATE

By Sarah Bedi

The small yeses to God in my life have resulted with me living among the nations in Stockholm, Sweden. Since encountering Jesus Christ at university, I did not have a specific calling that

I could describe. I was living in New Jersey, teaching at a public high school, and had an incredible team pioneering a work ministering to unchurched teenagers. After a few years of labor and just as the ministry was taking off, I had the opportunity to go to grad school. God said, "You can go, if you want to." I said, "Yes."

Packing up all I had, I moved to a new state for a new adventure. I can remember the quiet time I had reading Psalm 71:18. "So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come." Then God said, "If you want to do full-time ministry, you can." I said, "Yes." Riverbend Community Church in Columbia, SC gave me the opportunity to step into full-time work locally, regionally, and globally. While engaging the university students in Columbia, one of my elders said that the church had just confirmed a five year partnership in Sweden and would I bring a team. I said, "Yes."

After three years working in the north and hearing reports of the increased immigrants to northern Europe, God asked me if I would live among them. I said, "Yes." Today I live in a neighborhood where 102 languages are spoken. We are pioneering a work to see the gospel proclaimed and disciples made among many tribes, tongues, and nations.

MISSION USA

BECOMING A MULTI-SITE CHURCH

By Dean Brannen

This year marks South Ridge Church's 12th anniversary. We have truly seen God do amazing things in and through us. It all began with a small group of about 30 people and a dream to provide the people of Fairmont, WV and beyond with an opportunity to experience real life, real relationships, and real purpose through a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

We have always tried to join God where He was at work and, as a result, many people have put their trust in Jesus, obeyed the Lord in baptism, and are growing in their love for God and others.

From the beginning, our desire has been that

reaching out to Fairmont, WV would be one step in a series of steps we would eventually take to reach out to the entire state of West Virginia. We believe now is the time to take another step by becoming a multisite church, which simply means that we would be one church in more than one location. With this approach, we would no longer be limited to a couple of services in one location. We can take the church to where people live and reach out to them where they are with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

I have served at South Ridge Fairmont for several years as a Pastor and Community Groups Director. I have also been praying, planning, and preparing to lead our initiative to start a second location of South Ridge in



Harrison County. I will serve as the Location Pastor of South Ridge Bridgeport once we have launched the new location. An office building located in Bridgeport is currently being renovated with hopes to launch this location in the fall of 2017.

ANTONIO'S TESTIMONY

By Fidel Guerrero

Eight years ago, Antonio and his girlfriend came through our church doors as their last option. They were addicted to alcohol, filled with anger, and enslaved by sin in their lives. This was their last option; either God would intervene or they would part ways.

A good sister brought them to a small prayer group that was going on before the church service and introduced them to me. I received them in the prayer room and started talking to them and tried to share the gospel with them. They had dozens of questions about faith, idols, religion, the Virgin Mary, and many other topics.

With lots of patience and love, we were able to answer most of their questions without attacking or offending their beliefs. This response made Antonio lower his guard and listen more carefully to what was being shared with him. Soon after that encounter they both received Christ as their savior and, in time, they were baptized and married. Antonio and his wife were both radically transformed by the grace of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Since that time, Antonio has been serving at The Rock Woodstock with his wife and two children. On May 28, 2017, Antonio was recognized as our first local pastor. We are very encouraged to see what God



Fidel Guerrero and his wife, Maria

can do with a life that answers the call and understands that there is no greater joy in life than to live for Jesus.

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

BRIDGE BUILDERS IN THE U.S. AND OVERSEAS

By Jim Wiebelhaus

The Bridge Builders – ISM & Missions Conference has been used by God to inspire faith and equip people to build bridges to the one million international students, 50 million first-generation immigrants in the U.S., and the hundreds of unreached people groups in every nation (gcbuilder.com). Here's a summary of the Bridge Builder conferences that were held in May.

Bridge Builders East – Clarksville, MD: Oakridge Community Church in Maryland graciously hosted the first Bridge Builders Conference-East. We had three leaders from Chinese churches in Maryland and New York join our conference. They found our conference on the web, hoping to mobilize their churches to focus on all the nations

and not just the Chinese who immigrate to America. They have asked us to consider doing a conference for their churches. Perhaps God is wanting new bridges built between Great Commission and Chinese churches in order to reach the millions of immigrants and refugees along the eastern seaboard of the U.S. as well as overseas.

Bridge Builders West – Omaha, NE: 124 people from ten churches, including pastors, missionaries, young professionals, and international and college students, not only shared great fellowship but learned how to reach international students, immigrants, Muslims, refugees and how to assimilate them into churches. The WeChat app allowed one missionary team in Asia to listen to the conference. One member from their team,



who recently returned from serving in Asia for two years, gave an update on their work. She reported that six Chinese students have come to Christ over the last two years and meet regularly with the fellowship. She was able to encourage others to take advantage of full-ride scholarships to study abroad in order to take the gospel to the millions who have never met a Christian, read a Bible, or participated in a church fellowship.

TOTAL HEALTH UPDATE

By Jay Flinn

About two years ago, Total Health began exploring the possibility of a clinic in Soyapango, a densely populated area on the edge of San Salvador.

San Salvador is plagued by severe gang activity, which threatens the lives of many that cross over established gang territorial lines. As a result, educational and medical programs are limited by where one can safely travel. Soyapango is a gang-neutral zone meaning the people living there have some safety from the gang violence. However, this safety comes at the expense of health care. Communities like this are where Total Health works to provide quality health care.

It amazes me that when the Lord's timing is right, all the pieces of the plan fall into place. We were thrilled to be able to open the fourth Total Health clinic in Soyapango last fall. This clinic was made possible when

Bethel Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Ohio stepped up to make it a reality. By committing to fund half of the cost, Bethel has brought this clinic from vision to reality. In addition to supporting us financially, they have participated in two mission trips that resulted in three new homes through the Total Home program in Honduras.

We are also blessed to be partnering with a vibrant GCLA church in El Salvador that provides the facility for the clinic. Pastor Victor Turcios has a true passion for helping those in need in his community. The Soyapango clinic is adjacent to other facilities that help those in need. Total Health will provide the primary medical care in partnership with programs that help with nutrition, education, and spiritual care. Partnering with each other, these programs empower those we serve to improve their lives and their futures.

The clinic is open half-time, serviced by Dr. Valencia, a local doctor. We are striving to



Jay Flinn, Dr. Valencia, Pastor Victor Turcios, Dr. Jay Martin in Soyapango

secure the funding to allow for full-time operation. If you or your church would like to partner with Bethel, GCLA, and Total Health in building this community, we would love to hear from you. We believe that the lives of thousands of people in desperate need are being changed for the better.

For more information about Total Health, please visit our website: www.totalhealth.org

INSIDE GCC



As followers of Jesus Christ, we live as aliens and strangers in a foreign land. As the old spiritual song says, "This world is not my home, I'm just passing through."

How do we as Christians live between these two worlds? This will be our focus at Faithwalkers 2017.

From December 28-30 in Ridgecrest, North Carolina and from December 29th - January 1st in Des Moines, Iowa, Christians from all over the country will be gathering to learn how to be faithwalkers in this secular age.

So, circle the calendar. Come to Faithwalkers 2017—and bring a friend!

For more information, log on to www.gccweb.org/conferences-missions/faithwalkers/

MEET A GCC PASTOR

THIS EDITION:

Rory Whitney

"This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" – 2 Corinthians 5:17

I grew up in northwest Iowa with four brothers and lived a life immersed in agriculture. The summer after my first year at the University of Iowa, everything changed in my life. My closest friend, the person I shared a birthday with, died.

About that same time in my life, my oldest brother decided to commit his life to Christ and join a group of people that were going to discover if the promises of God, written in His Word, were reliable.

Eleven years later, after traveling down many roads that led me nowhere, a prideful, selfish, twenty-nine year-old husband and father yielded his life to a God who had loved him in spite of his many failings.



Rory and Kathryn Whitney

Eleven years after receiving Christ, I was given an invitation to join up with another family (Gary and Patty Osborn) to plant a new church, and I began the adventure of a lifetime in Omaha, Nebraska.

Twenty-one years later, God has so richly blessed our lives and we are forever grateful for the Great Commission heroes of faith who have afforded my family and me this opportunity.

My wife, Kathryn, and I have been married for forty years. We have been blessed with seven children and fifteen grandchildren.

ADVANCING THE WORD

JOHN HOPLER - DIRECTOR, GREAT COMMISSION CHURCHES



"Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?'" John 11:40

When the Lord said these words to Martha, she was grieving because her brother had died four days earlier. Standing at the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus knew He was about to do a miracle. Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, was about to raise Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus continues to do miracles today. This newsletter tells of a couple of men whose lives were radically changed by the grace of God and who then became

pastors. Other stories tell of individuals who made choices to step out and believe God by starting a new ministry or a new church. Like Jesus, as they believed in Him, they have seen the glory of God.

How about you? What is God calling you to do? What step of faith is He asking you to take? Who can you reach out to with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Whatever step it is that God is calling you to, be assured that He is faithful to His promise. If you believe, you will indeed see the glory of God.



NAE | National Association of
Evangelicals