

# GRACE CONNECT

Connecting People and Churches | Winter 2014



## OPEN THE BACK DOOR!

Advice on  
Church Growth  
& Assimilation

page 4



There is a long tradition of family in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. When we’re spread all over North America, keeping in touch can be difficult.

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## THE TIE THAT BINDS

Liz Cutler Gates, Editor

# THE FAMILY LETTER

While it is true that some of us are related by blood, the reality is we’re all brothers and sisters through Jesus Christ. But when we’re spread all over North America, keeping in touch can be difficult.



There is a long tradition of family in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. While it is true that some of us are related by blood, the reality is we’re all brothers and sisters through Jesus Christ. But when we’re spread all over North America, keeping in touch can be difficult.

GraceConnect, a ministry of the Brethren Missionary Herald Company, is one of those touch-points that helps keep the Grace Brethren connected. Over the years, we’ve been like the “letter from home,” with news and information of people and ministries around the world. The organization was founded around a magazine, the *Brethren Missionary Herald*, which included stories of missionaries who ministered in far-off lands, thoughtful articles that addressed how to live one’s faith in a changing world, and celebrations of milestones in the lives of people, churches, and ministries.

There are plenty of reasons why every Grace Brethren person should tune in to one of the GraceConnect

There are plenty of reasons why every Grace Brethren person should tune in to one of the GraceConnect platforms – to know how to pray for one another, to be encouraged at how God is working in the FGBC, to learn new ideas, etc. The greatest reason might be that we’ve ministered shoulder-to-shoulder for more than 75 years as a network of churches that are committed to Biblical truth. We’ve developed ministries as a group that would be difficult for one congregation to do alone. We’ve pioneered international mission

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works, created world-class ministries, and seen thousands of people come to know the Lord.

Church planting has been an integral part of the Grace Brethren movement. Early on, it was often because Grace Brethren people moved to a new community. But today’s church planting efforts look very different and you’ll read about some of them in this issue of *GraceConnect*.

When you’re through reading this issue, tune into one of the other GraceConnect platforms: [graceconnect.us](http://graceconnect.us), [facebook.com/graceconnectus](https://facebook.com/graceconnectus), [@graceconnectus](https://twitter.com/graceconnectus) on Twitter, [Pinterest.com/bmhbooks/](https://pinterest.com/bmhbooks/). It’s the latest way to get that “family letter from home.”



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# OPEN THE BACK DOOR!

## Advice on Church Growth & Assimilation

by Neil Cole

**For a long time now**, the church growth world has told us to get as many people to our church services as possible and keep them there as long as possible. The thought is that if they are in church they will hear the Word, be saved and go to heaven.

We even classify people in two categories: “the church” and “the unchurched” as if they were those in Christ and those who are not. But of course, this is wrong and now we are realizing it. Lately the fastest-growing segment when it comes to attending church is the “uncommitted.” These people may actually be highly committed when it comes to Christ, just not church service attendees.

In church-growth-speak we used to hear about assimilating visitors so they become attendees, and hopefully, members of the church. The language we used was that we need to “close the back door” to the church—implying that we need to keep people from leaving. Wow, that sounds awful doesn’t it? [Cue the sinister Vincent Price laugh—*ha ha haaaa!*] While it sounds like a mouse trap offering cheese at the end—but no escape—nevertheless (much to the chagrin of the fire department) that is the language we pastor-types would use.

**Lately, however, I am of a different opinion** on the matter. Having become more familiar with the important parable of the soils (Mark 4:1-20; Matt 13:3-23; Luke 8:4-15) I have come to think we ought to open the back door as wide as possible and let the people go. Actually, I’ve come to realize that this is the Jesus way.

According to Jesus’ words, two thirds of the people are not good soil and will not bear fruit (Okay, I know the passage is not prescribing a percentage, but it is clear that more will be bad soil than good). Keeping them in the church may not be the best solution if you desire a fruitful church.

I think if people want to leave, let them leave. Don’t waste your life trying to make people want something they don’t really want. I often say: if the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus isn’t enough to motivate these people, my sermon isn’t likely to do it.

Too often, in our desire to keep people, we change church to accommodate bad soil and end up with larger fruitless congregations that want all their needs met and have no desire to serve others. Open the back door!

Jesus let the rich young ruler walk away, even though He loved him very much (Mark 10:17-22). He never tried to convince people to follow Him. In fact, He did the opposite. *He intentionally tried to thin the crowd* on more than one occasion (Luke 11:29; 14:25-26; John 6:60-71). When a large crowd was gathered, He would tell the few disciples it was time to go somewhere else (Matt 8:18; Mark 1:36-38).

Jesus invested in a few disciples and never gave his affection and trust to the larger gatherings (John 2: 23-25).

**I’ve said for years:** *what you win them with is what you win them to.* If you entice people to come with entertaining services, then you’ll need to keep them the same way. Suddenly you find yourself competing with other entertaining churches to keep people attending your service—people that only want to be entertained. Open the back door!

Too often, in our desire to keep people, we change church to accommodate bad soil and end up with larger fruitless congregations that want all their needs met and have no desire to serve others. Open the back door!

Jesus drew huge crowds. But the Gospel accounts specifically tell us that He never gave His heart to the crowd because He knew that their motives were selfish. Open the back door!

*Large crowds never changed the world. Real movements always are ignited with a few highly committed people.* Open the back door!

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*This article appeared on Neil Cole’s blog, [cole-slau.blogspot.com](http://cole-slau.blogspot.com), in May of 2013. Neil Cole is a church planter and the founder and executive director of Church Multiplication Associates & CMA Resources, which have helped start thousands of churches in all 50 states and at least 40 nations. Cole is one of the key founders of the organic church movement. He is also the author of multiple books, including Organic Church, Church Transfusion, Journeys To Significance, Church 3.0, Organic Leadership, Search & Rescue (Ordinary Hero), Cultivating a Life for God, TruthQuest, Beyond Church Planting and Raising Leaders for the Harvest. He lives in Long Beach, Calif. with his wife Dana.*

# WEIGHING THEOLOGY

## part 2

by Mark Soto  
B.A., Th.B., M.A.R., M.S.,  
M.Div., Th.M., D.Min.

These are parts of the Gospel - but the Gospel is not a set of theological propositions but rather a *person*.

Since writing the first installment of this article, several people have asked me to define how things fit into each category: *dogma*, *doctrine*, and *tradition*. (See the definitions in the sidebar.) I am gratified that so many were willing to interact with this concept - it is essential to our ability to help others understand the tremendous task of doing good theology.

Rather than answer all the questions, I'll ask further clarifying questions and suggest relevant issues for each area of theology. One pastor said that he could not think of a single area of the doctrinal statement of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC) that is not dogma. That kind of thinking illustrates the purpose of the first article. We must acknowledge that some of these categories will differ depending on personal theological commitments, but the exercise will be the same.

**The first area of consideration** is what I called *dogma*. This is asking the question: *what does a person have to believe in order to be saved?*

Begin by asking, "What does my six- or seven-year old child need to know to be saved?" They need to know about Jesus: that he was God, born of Mary who was a virgin, that he lived a perfect life, obeyed God at all times, and died on the cross for our sins. He was buried and rose again on the third day and is coming again physically to take us to live with him forever. I think a six- or seven-year-old can understand these concepts. Can they explain the Virgin Birth? *No!* But then again, I am not sure I can, other than to say it was a miracle by the Holy Spirit. Do they need to understand the

**Dogma** separates believer from unbeliever.

**Doctrine** separates us by emphasizing denominational distinctives and beliefs.

**Tradition** separates us by emphasizing culture and preference.

Trinity? *No!* They just need to know that Jesus was God! These are parts of the Gospel - but the Gospel is not a set of theological propositions but rather a *person*. We need to introduce our children to Jesus Christ, tell them the truths about Him, and let the Holy Spirit and the Trinity work on opening their eyes and giving them understanding of the truth.

**The second category** is much bigger - *doctrine*.

In fairness, this category will contain doctrines that bump almost to the level of *dogma* but don't cross the line that defines what a person needs to know and understand about the Gospel in order to be saved. In this category belong all logical constructs used to define our theology and determine our affiliations and even denominational distinctives. Here the FGBC Statement of Faith is a wonderful document to populate the category of *doctrine*, but with caution. We have often moved elements of *tradition* to the level of *doctrine*. This becomes somewhat of a problem for those who are now questioning not only what we stand for as Grace Brethren but also if we need to distinguish ourselves at all.

In the Statement of Faith, the statement on the Bible is *doctrine*. A child must believe that the Bible is true for salvation (so that is *dogma*) but not the full statement on the inspiration of the Bible (which is *doctrine*). Again, our statement on the One True God is *doctrine*, but the needed element of *dogma* is that Jesus Christ is God. The next statements on the Holy Spirit and Man are *doctrine*, as is much of the information in the section on Salvation. The information on the



Church and the Christian Life is *doctrine*, but some of the elements in the Christian life as stated belong to *tradition* when we try to put them into practice in our present cultures.

**The Ordinances are** *doctrine*, but again, there are elements of application which become *tradition* when put into practice. For example, the *doctrine* of baptism of believers is clear, but if we have a specific commitment to a particular mode and allow for exceptions, we, by definition, make our mode a preference and not a *doctrine*—thus making it an issue of *tradition*. We are willing to acknowledge that it is an issue of obedience, but there are exceptions. Communion is also an issue of both *doctrine* and *tradition* and the church needs to discuss the issues of form and meaning.

The statement on Satan is *doctrine*, as is the article on the Second Coming. The particular view we hold, *pre-tribulation-pre-millennialism*, is an issue of *doctrine* not *tradition*. We form a logical construct for which we do not make exceptions for form and therefore we need to be careful not to relegate this to a secondary doctrine. Our section on the Future Life is also *doctrine*.

Issues of *tradition* that sometimes get confused with *dogma* and *doctrine* involve form for the ordinances. For example, we believe in anointing the sick, but there is no biblically prescribed oil that must be used...we surmise it is olive oil because of where it comes from but whether it is extra virgin, virgin, or non-virgin olive oil is not prescribed. If we make this



Before this present generation, we simply elevated everything to dogma and basically said, “you are not saved if you don’t believe like me.” That is simply not true. Our job is to analyze our statements and determine which are non-negotiable and which have exceptions.

of some of these systems that directly affect one’s view of *dogma* and what is necessary to be saved, but the systems themselves are issues of *doctrine*. The point is that it involves some difficult and hard work. Before this present generation, we simply elevated everything to *dogma* and basically said, “you are not saved if you don’t believe like me.” That is simply not true. Our job is to analyze our statements and determine which are non-negotiable and which have exceptions, then humbly admit that the non-negotiable statements are *doctrine* and the exceptions are *tradition* no matter how strongly we state otherwise.

**I recognize that I have opened** a larger can of worms because I have set further parameters around the discussion of weighing theology, but it is important for us to consider these things in order to defend what is worth dying for (*dogma*), and lovingly accept that there is room for believers to disagree in both the area of *doctrine* and *tradition*.

an issue for fellowship or even membership, we err by mistaking the intended meaning of the ordinance. Some other issues of *tradition* which we sometimes raise to the level of *doctrine* include days and times of services, Sunday morning services, Sunday School, evening services, attire for services, music, musical instruments, etc.

Issues of *doctrine* that are raised to the level of *dogma* include Covenant vs. Dispensationalism, Calvinism vs. Arminianism, women pastors, etc. There are elements

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# LOOKING FOR CHANGED LIVES

“From the moment we walked through the doors here, it was like walking into an old family gathering.”

**Arthur Shepherd has lived in** St. Mary’s County, Md., for all of his life, in close proximity to the community of Park Hall. Drive with him down the busy four-lane highway and he’ll show you the corner where he grew up when it was still a lazy, two-lane country road.

“It’s one of the fastest growing communities in the state,” he described the area at the southern tip of the county in south-eastern Maryland. “Many people in the county aren’t attending church.”

If his enthusiasm to begin a Bible-teaching congregation sounds like that of a coach or a teacher, it might because he spent a career working for the St. Mary’s County Recreation and Parks. He retired as Recreation Division Manager in 2011 after 33 years with the organization.

“We want to be a place where lives are changed,” noted the pastor, who planted Point of Grace Church in 2012. (It currently meets at Park Hall Elementary School.) It was accepted into the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches during national conference last year in Atlanta, Ga.

The group has taken advantage of their school location (and his parks and recreation experience) to provide programming for students, including hosting a series of free sports clinics.

“We want to meet families,” said Pastor Shepherd. He notes that the area is a mix of Department of Defense employees and rural residents who

make their living as educators, in the trades, and on the water. (Patuxent Naval Air Station is nearby.)

If the number of children who crowd the school halls before and after services is any indication, the church is meeting that goal.

“My girls get up on Sunday morning and can’t wait to go to church,” said Michael Knight, an aerospace engineer who with his wife, Angie, had been looking for a place to worship with their seven children. “From the moment we walked through the doors here, it was like walking into an old family gathering,” he added.

He noted that attending Point of Grace Church has been “a wonderful spiritual awakening” for their family. “It’s brought us closer,” he said. “It’s made us realize some of the things that were wrong in our lives.”

Christy Henderson tried the church after seeing an ad on the local cable television channel. Four weeks later, her adult children and grandchildren have followed her to the church. “They love it and intend to keep on coming,” she said.

Sarah Williams and her husband, Jason, both Army veterans who served in Iraq, also found a spiritual home for themselves. “Every time [Pastor Arthur] has a sermon, it feels like he’s talking directly to me,” she noted. “I know he’s not,” she added. “You know that the Holy Spirit is speaking through him. The things he says give me courage to continue and help me know I’m doing the right thing.”

Shepherd and his leadership team are missionally minded, with six neighborhoods near Park Hall School in their sights. One of them is St. Mary’s College, a public liberal arts college located four miles to the south. Shepherd has met with the leadership of the Christian student groups on campus, inviting them to attend Point of Grace and become involved.

Grace Chapel of Southern Maryland, located 25 miles north, is their sponsoring church. “They didn’t stand in the way of the gospel,” stressed Shepherd. They provided financial support and offered the use of the church facilities for events such as baptisms, while offering encouragement and prayer.

They also provided members who went with Shepherd to plant the church.

“We have three services,” noted Dr. Carl Snyder, pastor of Grace Chapel. “Arthur preached the middle service, so people could hear him,” he recalled. Then Snyder encouraged members to join the new effort. “If you feel led to go, go,” he remembered telling the congregation. “I want you out of here.”

The result has been a vigorous start to a new ministry. “God sent a strong leadership team to begin this mission,” said Shepherd.

## Captions

1. A portable sign welcomes church visitors to Park Hall School on a Sunday morning.
2. There are Sunday school classes for young people of all ages.
3. Pastor Shepherd (back to camera) talks with some of the congregation following the worship service.
4. An Adult Bible Fellowship gathers prior to the morning worship service.
5. Pastor Arthur Shepherd wants to reach his community for Christ through Point of Grace Church.





## SEEDNet BRANCHES OUT

“God put on my heart to keep planting churches,” explains Wells. “Specifically in spiritually, emotionally, economically, and developmentally oppressed areas (SEED).”



**SEEDNet, the project of VisionOhio** that has become known for its unique role in planting churches in apartment complexes and low-income communities, has become an independent organization. Still partnering with local churches and VisionOhio, the new corporate standing of SEEDNet includes a board of directors who meet four times a year and regional leaders who meet periodically to ask “50,000 foot questions” that focus on the movement and nurture those in the leadership positions.

SEEDNet began under the umbrella of VisionOhio, a Grace Brethren regional church-planting network that helps catalyze local churches to plant other churches. In 2006, VisionOhio member Nathan Wells (then serving as the youth pastor at Ashland Grace Brethren Church) gathered a few others to start intentionally building relationships with the adults living at a low income community nearby. Eastgate Bible Church, the first apartment-complex congregation, grew out of that initiative.

**SEEDNet currently has congregations in ten different apartment complexes from Cleveland to Columbus. They have already been approached by apartment owners and asked to plant churches in more than 300 multi-family dwellings throughout Ohio, a challenge they have tackled head-on.**

plant churches in more than 300 multi-family dwellings throughout Ohio, a challenge they have tackled head-on.

“The apartment complexes are filled with oppressed people who are in desperate need. And Christ is meeting them there,” continues Wells. “The soil is ripe and the need is great to bring the gospel and plant churches among them that will nurture their souls, and give them a spiritual community in which to thrive and grow. Their walk with Christ is tender and precious. They need the gospel and they need a church.”

SEEDNet is funded through gifts from individuals and churches. To learn more about this ministry, see the SEEDNet blog at [seednetblog.wordpress.com](http://seednetblog.wordpress.com). (You also can subscribe to have regular updates sent to your email inbox.)

“God put on my heart to keep planting churches,” explains Wells. “Specifically in spiritually, emotionally, economically, and developmentally oppressed areas (SEED). The people living there aren’t just surviving hard times, their lives are oppressed. They are oppressed by their own blatant sin, by fear, godlessness, brokenness, sadness, anger, poverty, and addiction,” said Wells.

SEEDNet currently has congregations in ten different apartment complexes from Cleveland to Columbus. They have already been approached by apartment owners and asked to

## LIVES CHANGED AT KALAHARI

Kalahari Winter Retreat has become known as a place where lives are changed. This year was no different.

**Held January 3-5, 2014, at the Kalahari Water Park Resort in Sandusky, Ohio, the weekend featured speaker Clayton King.**

### Fast Facts

- **1,797 students and 442 volunteers attended**
- **26 churches represented**
- **212 (and counting) students committed their lives to Christ**
- **124 students rededicated their lives to Christ.**

### Fun Facts

- **2,304 swim noodles were given away**
- **612 pizzas were consumed**
- **2,700 pop tarts were distributed**

*Photo credit: Bill Tiano, adult leader at Grace Church, Wooster, Ohio (Bob Fetterhoff, pastor)*



# Happy New Year

As we head into 2014, we found this article, first published in the Brethren Missionary Herald magazine in 1945, to be applicable for today.

*But, let us not despair.  
It is the declared purpose of God to let man come to a full end of himself, and realize that apart from God, he is vanity.  
“Without Me, ye can do nothing!” When man gets to that place, help will come from above.*

*Many, many millions have been wishing each other a “Merry Christmas” as these editorials were being written. As for the editor, it is hard to see how this Christmas season can be merry “except in the heart of an innocent child.”*


From every nook and corner of this habitable globe comes a story of human (or, inhuman) hate, human cruelty, human misery, and human suffering, until the heart sickens and we cry out, “How long, O Lord, how long?” How much longer can a just and merciful God look down upon these earth scenes, and withhold from action His mighty arm? Human failure on all sides we see. Every device that man has ever created, every panacea that man has ever concocted, every scheme for human betterment, have proven themselves utterly worthless to stay the avalanche of extreme wickedness that threatens to engulf the whole world and destroy the last vestiges of civilization. There is no hope left in the world so far as man’s efforts are concerned. It seems the more man moves, the deeper he sinks into the mire. It is surely time to cry with the Psalmist as of old: “It is time for Thee, O Lord, to work!”

But, let us not despair. It is the declared purpose of God to let man come to a full end of himself, and realize that apart from God, he is vanity. “Without Me, ye can do nothing!” When man gets to that place, help will come from above.



No, this Christmas season cannot be merry to any heart that has within it any of the compassion of Christ. Only a heart calloused by utter selfishness can even make a pretence of merri-

ment. But, thanks be unto the God who hath given unto us of His Spirit, we can be happy—happy that we know Him “whom to know is life eternal”—happy in the service of God and our fellow men—happy to know that the reign of all that is anti-Christ is but for one brief day—happy to know that God has not yet abdicated the Throne that ruleth over all—happy in the thought that by every possible sign that God can give us the kingdom of heaven draws nigh—happy in the glorious expectation that ere the year 1945 shall become history our Lord shall remove His own from this wicked world and we shall press to our bosoms those we have “loved and lost awhile”—happy in the knowledge that immediately thereafter the ungodly nations will be speedily judged—happy in the thought that then our Lord will come back to earth with all the saints attending—happy to know that then, as He sits upon the throne of His father David, He will overthrow all oppressors and speak peace to the nations—happy to know that then shall all men “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and nations shall learn war no more—happy to know that in the Sun-rise of that approaching day, shall all “sorrow and sighing flee away!”

Assuredly we wish every reader of THE BRETHREN MISSIONARY HERALD a HAPPY NEW YEAR!



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## CHURCH PLANTING

# ANTICIPATING A NEW ENGLAND HARVEST



"I've been in New England for 17 years, and I truly believe

more than ever that the fields of New England are white unto harvest... and so we are looking to reap that harvest by planting churches on Boston's north shore and throughout New England as God would allow us."

*Jack Brown*

**"I once heard someone refer** to New England as the 'graveyard of pastors,'" said Jack Brown, founder and current pastor of North Shore Bible Church (NSBC), a Grace Brethren congregation in Cape Ann, Mass. (That's him in the photo at left.) "We started with a mind to plant churches in New England on Cape Ann and the north shore of Boston."

The church is rooted in an April 2000 meeting, when a group of about 25 people met to discuss the potential of starting a new church that was committed to the sufficiency of the Bible. As they met weekly for worship and prayer, God prospered that small group. It was not long before they outgrew their meeting place. Then, the Lord opened up the doors of the Cape Ann Food Pantry, which became their meeting place for a number of months before moving to their current location in Essex in February of 2002.

Now they are going even further.

"We just initiated GROW New England – a church planting ministry," explains

Brown. "Over the next year and a half, I will be backing down role as pastor, and spending more time recruiting potential church planters. Dana Moore will begin to transition into a new role as senior pastor of NSBC.

"New England is such a needy area," Brown continues. "You'll only find one or two evangelical gospel preaching churches. Many are very liberal." He says that in 2009, New England was noted as the most pagan area of the United States of America.

"I've been in New England for 17 years, and I truly believe more than ever that the fields of New England are white unto harvest...and so we are looking to reap that harvest by planting churches on Boston's north shore and throughout New England as God would allow us."

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