

GRACE CONNECT

Connecting People and Churches | Summer 2014





A FAMILY PICNIC!

Join the Brethren Missionary Herald Co., Inc.
At FellowShift Vision Conference

COMMUNICATIONS

Learn the latest GraceConnect initiatives at the BMH Corporation meeting:

Sunday Picnic Supper

5 p.m., July 20, Ambassador Ballroom
Omni Shoreham Hotel, Washington, D.C.

(If you cannot participate in the meal, the corporation meeting will begin at approximately 5:30 p.m.)

CONVERSATION

Engage in thoughtful conversation! Check out the deals at the BMH Books display in the Regency Gallery!

CONSERVATION

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The platforms of GraceConnect will help you connect and build relationships with others in the FGBC. Check out one of our sites to learn how Grace Brethren people and churches are encouraging, helping, and worshipping.

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Grace is not only the name of our fellowship, but our greatest selling point.

GraceConnect, founded in January 2004 as *FGBC World*, is published four times a year by the Brethren Missionary Herald Company (BMH), a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization affiliated with the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC). The publication's mission is to nurture Great Commission teamwork by connecting people and churches of the FGBC. Inclusion of an article or advertisement does not necessarily indicate endorsement by the Brethren Missionary Herald Company or the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.

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FELLOWSHIP

For those of us in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC), conference is a time to see what God is doing throughout our network, to renew friendships, and to worship together. (Oh, and we do a little business, too.)



“Conference” is a long tradition in Grace Brethren history — it predates the founding of the Grace Brethren movement in the late 1930s. In fact, you’ll find an annual national meeting on the calendars of most of the other branches of the Brethren family tree. For those of us in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC), conference is a time to see what God is doing throughout our network, to renew friendships, and to worship together. (Oh, and we do a little business, too.)

It’s one of my favorite events.

This year, there is a fresh wind blowing. A new generation of leadership is infusing conference with a contemporary look and feel. A wide range of speakers, from a variety of generations and cultural backgrounds, will address timely issues. Both men and women will take the platform to challenge, encourage, and teach us. The setting — a historic hotel in lively Washington, D.C. — provides a perfect setting for what promises to be some groundbreaking meetings from July 17 to 21.

This year, there is a fresh wind blowing. A new generation of leadership is infusing conference with a contemporary look and feel. A wide range of speakers, from a variety of generations and cultural backgrounds, will address timely issues.

The online platforms of GraceConnect will provide daily coverage of both national conference and the annual youth conference, Momentum. Watch graceconnect.us, as well as follow [facebook.com/graceconnectus](https://www.facebook.com/graceconnectus) and twitter.com/graceconnectus for regular updates.

This issue is devoted to the conference, with a look at the schedule, a glimpse at some of the churches and ministries that will

be welcomed into the Fellowship, some thoughts on what makes us unique as a fellowship, and an interview with one of the trail-blazing women of the FGBC, Janet Minnix. If you would like to attend conference, it’s not too late to make arrangements, though rooms at the conference hotel might not be available. See fellowshift.org for more details.

History tells us that change is inevitable. One doesn’t have to look too far to see how different society is compared with even a few years ago. However, of one thing (maybe two) we are certain: the Word of God will never change, nor will the commitment of the FGBC to biblical teaching and preaching.



Liz Cutler Gates, lgates@bmbbooks.com, is the editor of Grace Connect. Since 2010, she has served as executive director of the Brethren Missionary Herald Company. She and her husband, Doug, live in Warsaw, Ind.

National Conference to CELEBRATE THE FUTURE



The national conference of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC) has long been termed a “family reunion.” Opportunities to connect with people from other churches and ministries abound amidst annual corporation meetings, challenging speakers, and opportunities for outreach.

During this year’s FellowShift Vision Conference, held July 17 to 21 at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington D.C., that focus will be intentional, according to Bartley Sawatsky, executive director of the FGBC and pastor of Grace Community Church, a Grace Brethren congregation in Mississauga, Ontario.

“This one is relationally focused,” he said, noting that many people comment that conference is a time they “get to see people they haven’t seen for awhile.”

New this year to the schedule is a luncheon when “family” achievements are celebrated. Missionaries will be commissioned, awards will be presented, and it will be a time to enjoy the relationships found in the FGBC.

The 2014 conference targets a more youthful audience, after Sawatsky observed last year that the conference is aging. There will also be more gender and ethnic diversity among speakers and workshop leaders.

The FellowShift theme will address topics related to how the Fellowship needs to change if it is going to be

NEW COOPERATING MINISTRIES

successful in the future, according to Sawatsky. Celebration topics and speakers include:

- *FellowShift: How our fellowship must change*, Bartley Sawatsky
- *PhilosoShift: How our thinking must change*, Mark Artrip, Erica Shelton, and Jason and Christy Holt
- *FaceShift: How our demographics must change*, Sarah Knepper, Gerardo Leiton, and Stephen Joyce
- *FutureShift: How our methods must change*, Dan O’Deens and Joe Caruso
- *UnShifting: How some things must never change*, Keith Minier, R. Greene, and Heidi Bogue
- *FaithShift: How our outlook must change*, Melissa Spoelstra and Jeff Bogue

Speakers have a maximum of 18 minutes to present their ideas in the most innovative and engaging ways they can, which imitates the format of the popular TED Talks.

In addition, 18 workshops will address a variety of other topics. There will also be a session Sunday afternoon on the The Identity Initiative, led by Dr. Dave Guiles. This is designed for those who have not had the opportunity to participate in one of the five regional focus retreats that addressed the topic.

Other highlights of the conference include a concert with comedian Michael Jr., a Light Up DC! gathering on the Mall on Saturday evening,

(continued on page 6)

Five organizations will be considered as cooperating ministries during national conference. A cooperating ministry is an organization that recognizes a mutual obligation of encouragement and cooperation with Grace Brethren churches, districts, national ministries and/or other cooperating ministries. Prospective cooperating ministries include:



Design Outreach (DO) combines humanitarian engineering with Christian non-profit work by creating and implementing life-sustaining solutions for the world’s poor. Partnering with a number of non-profits and NGOs, including WorldVision and Water For Good, DO is currently concentrating on providing clean drinking water for people in developing nations. Their Hundred Pump Project will imple-

ment a LifePump, a hand-cranked water pump that reaches deeper and lasts longer than other pumps, in 100 African villages by December 2015. In order to ensure the sustainability of their projects, DO consults closely with field agents, who identify each community’s unique needs and wants. Then, when DO develops teams to implement each product, they can be sure that the community receives the best and most sustainable solution to its problem. DO founders, Abe Wright and Greg Bixler are members of Grace Brethren churches and both are professional engineers. doutreach.org



Founded in 2005, the **Grace Commission Bible Institute (GCBI)** offers a one-year intensive study of all 1,189 chapters of the Bible in a residential, dormitory setting. More than 100 students have graduated from GCBI over the last ten years. The students are “thoroughly equipped for every good

work,” according to the institute’s mission and philosophy. GCBI places students in “life-learning laboratories” as another aspect of their curriculum, where students work closely with local churches in order to sharpen ministry skill sets. Graduates have gone on to lead ministries, such as Urban Hope

(continued on page 6)

New Cooperating Ministries

(continued from page 5)

and the Bible Institute in Philadelphia, and churches, several of which are Grace Brethren. GCBI is based at Grace Church, Sebring, Fla., a Grace Brethren congregation pastored by Dr. Randy Smith. gcbi.net



Grace Refuge Outreach

Worldwide (G.R.O.W.) seeks to rescue children and youths living in Southeast Asia from the threat of human trafficking. They accomplish this goal by taking the children out of their environment and placing them

in small, safe houses. As the children grow, two Christian guardians guide the children in education and faith. The ministry started when Grace Brethren pastor Ivanildo Trindade (now at Grace Church, Lititz, Pa.) met Faa Choemue, who had begun a small children's home in Chiang Mai, and caught her enthusiasm and love for the children of Thailand. Now, in cooperation with Grace Church, Wooster, Ohio (Bob Fetterhoff, pastor), Faa and two other staff members raise nine children, who are all from abusive backgrounds. Faa and her team teach the children about Jesus Christ and the hope they can have through Him. grow-worldwide.com



MetroGrace has been incorporated since 2003 to gather, train, send, and coach church-planting teams throughout urban Philadelphia. In partnership with the Crossroads Grace Brethren Church and the Northern

Atlantic Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, the ministry's goal is to develop gospel-centered, community-based churches in low-income areas. Already, three congregations have been established in the neighborhoods of Frankford, Holmesburg, and Wissinoming. In addition, MetroGrace hosts short-term missions trips and summer and semester internships for those interested in working with the ministry. Grace Brethren pastor, Dr. Jim Brown, is the executive director. Kurt Miller is the director of strategic partnerships. metrograce.org



VisionAlaska Inc. brings Christ to Alaska through church planting and church growth workshops, Christian conciliation (or mediation), and legal counseling for Alaskan churches. Since its inception in 2013, Vision-

Alaska Inc. has hosted Dr. Tony Webb from VisionUSA, orchestrated a week-long chaplaincy school for military chaplains, and is now planning a youth canoe trip for area churches. Roger Holl, VisionAlaska's president, holds a doctorate of jurisprudence and certification of mediation from the University of Washington. His background as an attorney enables him to give relevant legal counsel to Alaskan churches on matters ranging from elder disputes to congregational rifts. visionalaska.org

National Conference to Celebrate the Future

(continued from page 5)

and meals (along with corporation meetings) of FGBC national organizations.

During the annual business session on July 21, three churches will be considered for membership. They include:

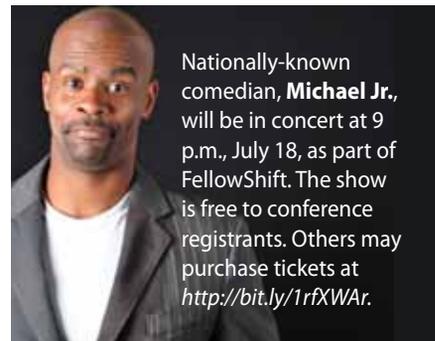
- *Grupo Amor Cristiano*, Dublin, Ohio, Phil Guereña, pastor
- *Living The Word Church*, Ashland, Ohio, Nathan Wells, pastor
- *Woodside Church*, Ashland, Ohio, Nathan Wells, pastor

Five organizations will also be considered as cooperating ministries. A cooperating ministry is an organization that works with Grace Brethren churches but does not have a national representation on its board. (National ministries must have board representation from three regions: east, central, and west.) Prospective cooperating ministries include:

- *Design Outreach* (DO)
- *Grace Commission Bible Institute*
- *Grace Refuge Outreach Worldwide* (G.R.O.W.)
- *MetroGrace*
- *VisionAlaska Inc.*

See the sidebars for more information about these churches or organizations.

For complete information about *FellowShift*, see the conference website: fellowshift.org.



Nationally-known comedian, **Michael Jr.**, will be in concert at 9 p.m., July 18, as part of *FellowShift*. The show is free to conference registrants. Others may purchase tickets at <http://bit.ly/1rfXWAr>.

THE PROCESS OF CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

Three new congregations will be considered for membership in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC) this summer. Each group is dedicated to the five functions of a church — worship, fellowship, teaching, preaching, and serving — and is committed to the FGBC, a highly cooperative, missional, Bible teaching group of churches in the USA, Canada, and the Caribbean.

The Fellowship Council, the coordinating board for the FGBC, recently defined what constitutes a church for purposes of recognizing new member congregations. This allows the Fellowship to encourage new church plants while ensuring the future success of a developing congregation.

This process is only for churches who are located in the USA, Canada, or the Caribbean that wish to join the FGBC or are started by churches, ministries, or church starters who are already connected to the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.

There are three stages to the process:

- 1.** A new church start is comprised of a church starter (a person), a target location (a place), prayer partners, and a plan for a new church.
- 2.** A new church is five families who have committed together to fulfill the five functions of a church. New churches are encouraged to complete a New Church Form two to three years before applying for formal membership in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.
- 3.** A church that has demonstrated a commitment to the five functions of a church for at least two years may formally apply for membership in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches using the New Member Application. (The appropriate forms are found at fgbc.org and need to be completed by June 1 to be considered at national conference that July.)

While there may be only three congregations joining the FGBC this summer, numerous other new church starts and new churches will be celebrated at VisionShift in Washington, D.C.

THREE CONGREGATIONS CONSIDERED

Three congregations will be considered for membership in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches during the business meeting at national conference in July.

Grupo Amor Cristiano, a church based in Dublin, Ohio, serves the immediate Spanish-speaking community in both Dublin and Columbus, Ohio. Lead by Pastor Phil Guerena, Grupo Amor Cristiano provides English as a Second Language (ESL) classes through the church and hosts celebrations on traditional Hispanic festival days, such as Children's Day and Posada. Pastor Guerena and his team write extensively for Hispanic publications and websites that reach a wide array of Spanish-speaking churches in both the U.S. and abroad. The church focuses on reaching out to those churches and their pastors with encouragement and discipleship.

Woodside Church meets inside of Woodside Trailer Park in Mansfield, Ohio. It originated out of SeedNet and VisionOhio almost two years ago, when Nathan Wells began praying and evangelizing park residents. With the help of two residents, Wells founded the church, which meets in Woodside's office trailer. Each week, they worship through prayer, preaching, teaching, and fellowship and meet again for individualized Bible studies. Woodside focuses on teaching authentic biblical leadership and offers an elder training process for its members.

Living the Word Church, a church based in Jennings Apartments in Mansfield, Ohio, also began through SeedNet and VisionOhio. Nathan Wells and Andy Shank worked two years ago to bring the Gospel to Jennings Apartments. They met Thomas and Evelyn Jordan, who became the founding church planters. "We just named the church Living the Word this year," said Wells, "because it captures the servant heart of the people." Living the Word brings together several families from the apartment complex, and they have also welcomed several new believers into their midst.



QUIET

by Viki Rife

She wasn't the kind of girl one would single out to train for leadership. Quiet and shy, she was content to teach a Bible story to an imaginary Sunday School class, using her mother's flannel-graph figures. She didn't look like a leader who would direct a national organization into a new era. But as Janet Minnix retires August 1 after 17 years as president of Women of Grace USA, the national women's ministry of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, she leaves behind a thriving organization that is changing the lives of women across the nation and around the world.

So what transformed a quiet, timid woman into someone of great influence and public ministry? Janet says it started gradually. Her father, Tom Hammers, was a pastor and church planter, and she learned early on to help transform their house each week into a "church," with their living room as the sanctuary and the bedrooms as classrooms. Her mother, the former Mary Ashman, came from a family that was known as pastors and leaders in Brethren churches.

While a student at Grace College, Janet was involved in various music teams, which gave her experience in front of an audience. After graduation, she moved to Roanoke, Va., to teach. It was there she met her husband, Odell, an air traffic controller. She credits him for being a great supporter and encourager of her ministry. They have two sons,

LEADERSHIP

and their three grandchildren live just up the street from them, “close enough to make a run for ice cream together.”

Shortly after marrying Odell, Janet was invited to a meeting of what was then called Women’s Missionary Council (WMC), the predecessor to Women of Grace USA. Over the years Janet served WMC in various ways, eventually serving as national program chairman for 12 years. When she was asked to let her name be placed in nomination for president, she refused, content to serve in the background. The request came again, and she continued to say “no” for a year and a half. Then one Sunday her pastor preached on Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and His conclusion, “Not my will, but yours be done.” She knew then that she had to say “yes.”

“God has used several difficult situations in my life to move me to greater dependence on Him, but accepting the presidency was a turning point,” Janet shares. “I knew I was called by God to this office, but was faced with my helplessness and inadequacy for the job. I know I’m not capable of being His instrument apart from His wisdom and power.”

A Calling from God

She took the position expecting to fulfill her three-year term and then hand the responsibilities over to someone else. “We tried to find someone to run as president-elect, but couldn’t find anyone who had the vision and was willing. One day it occurred to me that it was no longer about finding a name to fill a slot on a ballot. It had to be viewed as a ministry calling from God. Then I had total peace that we couldn’t find someone else for leadership. God had called me to this ministry, and He would provide the right person at the right time. I would know it, and the person would know it.”

Janet ended up leading Women of Grace for 17 years. Her guiding principle is that it’s God’s ministry, not hers. She explains, “He called me to it, but it’s not mine—it’s His. I need to keep open hands, rather than feeling possessive and trying to manipulate it my way. That’s backed up by a lot of prayer.”

“We have changed the perception of ourselves from being the stay-at-home moms who did their work from their kitchen table,” Janet observes. “We have gone from being a women’s mission organization only to being a women’s organization that, while retaining the core value of missions, has a broader

vision of how we can minister to women. We know that an interest in missions will grow as women are firmly grounded in the Word of God.”

Janet often led changes that were not guaranteed to work and that sometimes were unpopular. For example, the presidents of regional districts used to meet before National Conference. As the conference format began to be more focused on pastors than on lay people, the women leaders were less motivated to come. The idea developed of hosting an annual leadership training Summit. Although the concept of each district having a president has been fading, the popularity of the Women’s Leadership Summits has continued to grow.

Flourishing Ministries

Other aspects of the ministry are also flourishing. For Janet, a tipping point was the response to the first *Women’s Spectrum* magazine. “I felt this was something that would have an impact beyond the confines of the Women of Grace groups—a tool we would be able to use to influence women in all the churches in the Fellowship,” she shares.

The magazine has grown and now offers opportunities for women to use their writing and editorial skills. The twice-a-year printed newsletter has become a monthly e-newsletter that provides inspirational articles as well as information on what is happening in Women of Grace.

Janet was instrumental forging a partnership between Women of Grace and Grace Theological Seminary in offering a series of weekend classes in various regions toward a certificate in

What transformed a quiet, timid woman into someone of great influence and public ministry?

When asked what she considers her greatest accomplishment, she laughs. “It’s really God’s accomplishment.”

Women’s Leadership Studies. The demand has grown so that there is now a need to develop more instructors for the classes. Spanish language ministries are developing for women in Hispanic churches and there is an interest in offering training in French or Creole for the women in the Haitian churches in Florida.

“I am strengthened by the fact that we have a team. Yes, a team needs a leader, but everyone has equal say, and no one person has control,” Janet says. “Every decision has to be made by the team, and even the team leaders don’t bear the whole burden. This has been a comfort to me. I’ve appreciated the godly mindset of the women on the team and that prayer is the primary core value that’s worked out.”

Board members are grateful that she initiated a “stop-and-pray” rule. Any time someone on the board feels uncomfortable or overwhelmed by the direction a discussion is going, she can call for a stop-and-pray. It has contributed greatly to the unity of the board and a conviction that decisions are being made with the clear leading of God’s Spirit.

“What I have learned from Janet is graciousness.” Cindy Bushen, Women of Grace treasurer, shares. “She carries a quiet, godly grace about her yet, when put to the task, is bold about her convictions. She has shown me that there is no aging in Christ. She is young at heart and cares about the young. There is no room for hanging on to ‘the way things were’ when Christ is directing us to move on.”

A Gentle Teacher

“Janet has a discerning way of using the strengths of each woman so that the board functions efficiently with creativity and loads of energy,” adds Sharon MacMillan, the board’s director of spiritual life. “We are motivated to be diligent and yet dependent on the Lord. The spiritual lessons that have been gently taught by example have been treasures that I take with me to other places of ministry.

“I will never forget attending a chapel service at Grace College with Janet after one of our meetings more than ten years ago. The speaker led us to a personal time of vision casting. Since that time I have observed that God has exceeded any dreams that Janet may have had. He has done great works in a woman who has given her heart and soul to God’s ministry, and many women will never be the same.”

In addition to her leadership of Women of Grace, Janet has also served in the women’s ministry in her church, Ghent Grace Brethren. She also serves as Missions Commission chairman and worship team pianist. She has also led girls’ discipleship groups through SMM (Sisters Mentoring with a Mission) and has been on ministry teams to Urban Hope, Germany, and the Central African Republic. She also serves on the Board of Trustees of Grace College and Seminary.

Two passages have been sources of great comfort and encouragement to Janet as she has led:

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10

“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, **equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him**, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Hebrews 13:20-2 (emphasis Janet’s)

When asked what she considers her greatest accomplishment, she laughs. “It’s really God’s accomplishment—that He can take a shy introvert without leadership training or skill leading an organization and use [her] as He wants to. He took someone who felt incompetent and inadequate and taught her to put that in the Lord’s hands and let Him guide. The role of leadership [not only] put me in a position to depend on the Lord but also developed a self-confidence I never had, because the Lord gave it to me.”

Editor’s Note: Viki Rife is the director-elect for Women of Grace USA, where she has served as the Communications Coordinator and Director of Girls’ Ministries. This summer, she will succeed Janet Minnix when Janet retires from leadership.



Janet and Odell Minnix (photo by Joe Sgroi)

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I have come to believe grace is not only the name of our fellowship, but our greatest selling point.

Since assuming the role of executive director of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC) in July 2013, I have spent time considering the essence of our movement. That fall, we began discussions around our identity at our Focus Retreats. This Identity Initiative, led by Dave Guiles, is instrumental in reviving the important and ongoing discussion of who we are as Grace Brethren.

Our first round of talks involved participants writing a “Timothy Letter” — a letter that one would leave behind to a child in the faith and that would embody what a person considered most important to their faith. The exercise produced encouraging but not surprising results. Top responses were grouped into seven or so categories, such as “preeminence of Christ” and “passion for the gospel.” The results reinforced our strong evangelical values, but, as some noticed, really didn’t differentiate us from any other evangelical group. (Read many of the letters at graceconnect.us/timothy-letters-1/.)

I did not grow up Grace Brethren but have been part of the FGBC for 17 years. I was part of numerous denominations previously both as a layman and pastor. This gives me some ability to compare objectively. My exposure to the FGBC came through my connection with the Chesapeake and Northeast Ohio districts of Grace Brethren churches. Since starting Grace Community Church in 1998 in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, most of my deeper connections have been through various boards on which I have served. Although I never went to Grace College or Seminary, I have read a fair amount of our history and have talked at length with many of our leaders in order to understand our tribe better.

I write this as someone trying to identify our DNA as I see it in 2014. Identity is not completely static. We may come to realize that certain aspects of our past have faded in significance. Other values may have emerged. I am reporting on what I have learned, seen, and continue to witness as the integral aspects of our identity. I welcome the discussion that will ensue.

Mission-Driven

There is really no denying that the FGBC has mission in its DNA. Our churches have always been committed to the great commission, both in North America and around the world. Christ’s last command is our greatest concern. In 1900, that passion came to a head when 53 mission-driven men and

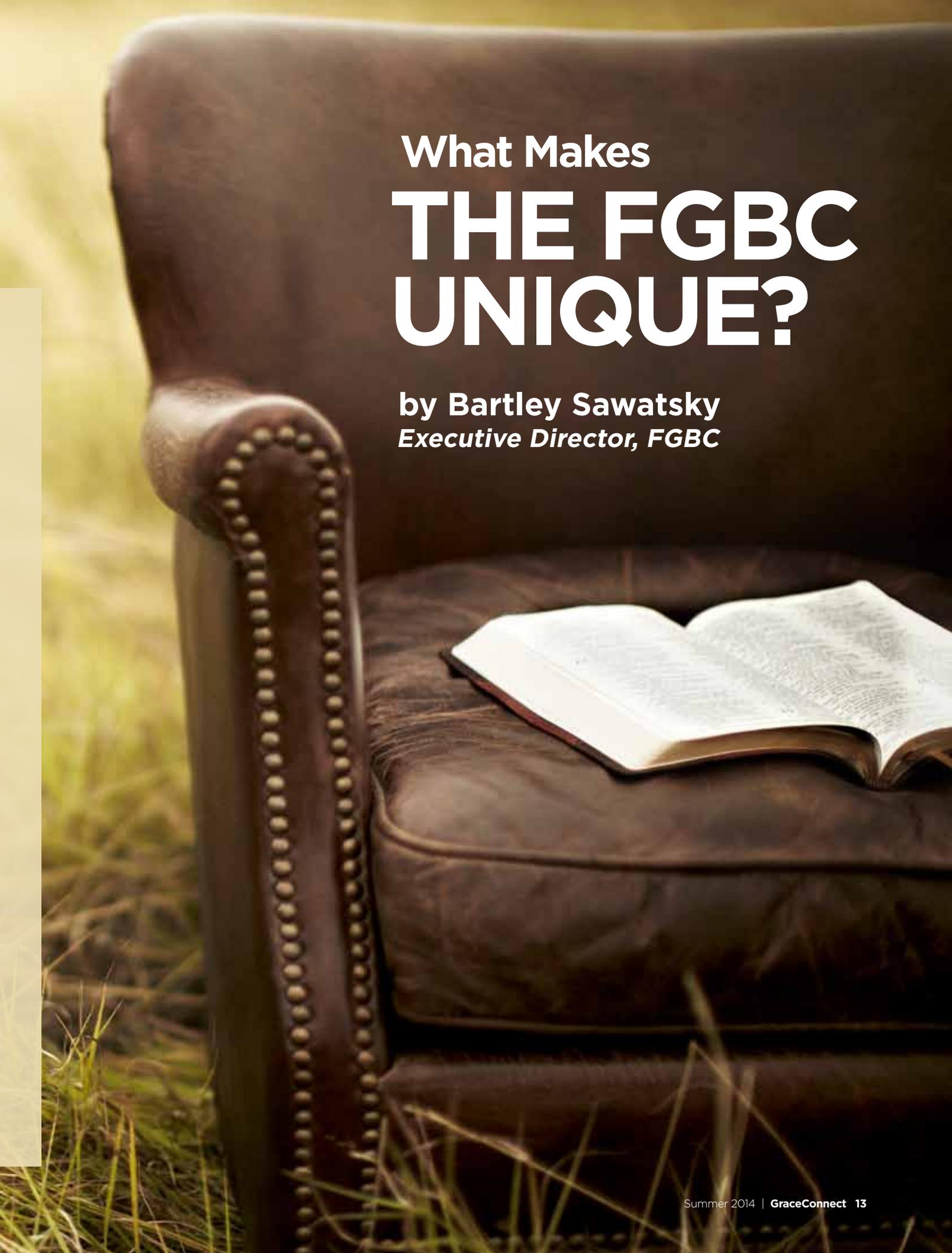
women spontaneously formed the Foreign Mission Society of the Brethren Church. Since that time, we have multiplied churches across North America and around the world. We have a hard time fellowshiping with people who don’t share this same value. We love the gospel of Jesus Christ and our passion to share it is what unites and drives us.

Grace-Oriented

As a young leader coming to the ministry out of a legalistic background, grace was a powerful new concept. When I connected with the Waldorf, Md., Grace Brethren Church while a student at Washington Bible College, it was refreshing to discover a church that didn’t feel the need to force everything into black or white categories. They gave people room to follow the Bible and the leading of the Holy Spirit in forming personal convictions in the “grey areas.” As I visited dozens of churches throughout the Fellowship, I realized the large majority of congregations held this perspective. Pastors were not forcing their own personal convictions on the people, and there was a sense of freedom I hadn’t experienced as a young person. I have come to believe grace is not only the name of our fellowship, but our greatest selling point. It defines our movement, something that emerging leaders inside and outside of our movement will find attractive.

Biblically Grounded

“The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible.” It may be a bit overstated when analyzed closely, but this has been the mantra of our fellowship for many decades. Attribute it to our Anabaptist roots — we will not allow culture, tradition, government, or anything else detract from the preeminence of the Scriptures. We submit to the Bible and its authority. We hold to it unwaveringly and unashamedly. Our history began with a sincere group of men and women trying to understand the Bible and put it into practice for themselves. In fact, they were so committed to the Scriptures alone that they refused to form any other creed. Through the years we have been known for holding to a historical-grammatical hermeneutic. In a world where many churches are caving in to cultural pressure and popular opinion, our fellowship perseveres as a defender of biblical truth. It is not unlikely that many Bible-loving believers from vacillating denominations will make their way into our fold as time progresses.



What Makes
**THE FGBC
UNIQUE?**

by **Bartley Sawatsky**
Executive Director, FGBC

Finding a denomination that is both biblically grounded and culturally progressive is becoming increasingly uncommon, yet it is a hallmark of our movement.

Culturally Progressive

Groups that hold a high view of Scripture are prone to becoming fixated on doctrine and, in time, becoming cultural separatists. Thankfully, that has not happened to our movement. At every turn throughout our history, we have been the branch of the Brethren that chooses to engage the culture. In Germany, we tried to reform the dead state churches. Once in the U.S., we embraced the English language and American culture. By the end of the 1800's, we became known as the "Progressives" because we chose to use progressive ministry and evangelism methods. In 1939, we officially adopted the name "Grace" and once again affirmed our position as a culturally progressive fellowship. Finding a denomination that is both biblically grounded and culturally progressive is becoming increasingly uncommon, yet it is a hallmark of our movement. As one of our most respected voices has often said, "The essence of the church never changes, but the expression of the church must constantly change." The core of our fellowship still believes this.

Committed to Personal Holiness

If finding a fellowship that is both biblically grounded and culturally progressive is rare, then add to that mix an even rarer ingredient — a commitment to personal holiness. As Pietists, our tribe has always placed a high value on the transformative power of the gospel and on the believer's personal responsibility to grow in Christlikeness. In a day and age when churches tend to overlook the need for ongoing sanctification, our churches remain committed to personal holiness. From among our ranks have risen organizations like CE National and Momentum that never stop strategizing on how to challenge our people to become stronger disciples of Christ. Seeing people come to Jesus is why we exist, but we aren't into easy-believism. Jesus commissioned us to make disciples — people who are transformed into his very image.

Relationally-Wired

Lots of discussion could be had as to why the Grace Brethren have always maintained a "fellowship" model rather than embrace a more popular and corporate "denomination" model, but this reality has remained an integral aspect of our brand. Perhaps it is the lingering reaction to the German state church that birthed our movement. Whatever the reason, it distinguishes our group in a nation that largely embraces top-down authority structures. What this means on a practical

level is that fellowship, not structures, hold us together. The churches in our ranks enjoy their autonomy while benefitting from the support and accountability of a larger network. Our decentralized "starfish" system (see *The Starfish and the Spider* by Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom) means that leaders can emerge from any part of our fellowship and influence the entire group, so long as they work along relational lines. Over the years, many national ministries have emerged from among our churches in order to serve our greater movement, and we have great stories of cooperative grassroots efforts.

Postscript

There are many denominations that possess one or a number of these characteristics. The Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches is the only group I know of that incorporates all six. This combination does not make us the "best" evangelical group, but the ingredients form a recipe that is both nutritious and delicious — one that I can sink my teeth into.

The success of our fellowship will rest on our ability to keep these values strong. They have made us what we are, and they will take us into the future. It is essential that we recognize these values clearly and see how they form the foundation of our movement. They form a cohesive and unique identity. Should we lose sight of them, we will begin to identify ourselves with inferior ideals or practices that are not foundational to who we really are. This would be more than just unfortunate; it would be detrimental.

Personally, I get excited about a list of values like this. I love the missional and biblical tenacity, and I love the tension created by values like grace and progressivism. It is the tension between these values that makes our identity so rich and compelling.

What do you think?

What makes the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches unique? What identifies our movement? What makes us different from other evangelical fellowships or denominations?

Simply post your thoughts at [facebook.com/graceconnectus](https://www.facebook.com/graceconnectus) or send a note to Bartley Sawatsky at bdsawatsky@yahoo.ca.

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