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Prayer



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PRAYER TIME

I've never been as good at prayer as I'd like to be.



My attention span seems to be that of a gnat (which, by the way, is about .210005 of a second, according to Google).

Ask me to pray out loud, likely you'll hear simple sentences and unassuming words. Sometimes I wonder if my spoken prayers sound more like the ubiquitous 7-11 worship songs of the 90s. (You know the kind – the ones that repeat the same seven words 11 times.) “Lord, give me wisdom, give me wisdom, give me wisdom...”

I'm better at putting words on paper, thoughtfully, rather than speaking extemporaneously. Even then, it's brief – maybe the professional consequence of being an editor.

I know the Lord hears my heart. In the end, I know it doesn't matter how I pray, it matters that I *do* pray, and that my prayers are not for man's ears, but God's.

Nearly 10 years ago, a job change meant a shorter commute to work. I discovered it allowed more time with God every morning. It's become one of my favorite times

of the day. During those moments, I've read through the Bible several times, journaled my thoughts, and recorded my prayers. Sometimes I've even prayed out loud!

It's nowhere near the two years that James Gribble spent in prayer more than 100 years ago as he awaited entry into Ubangi Chari – but it's a start. Gribble is just one of the Grace Brethren prayer heroes that Dr. Roger Peugh describes in this issue of the magazine in an excerpt from his opening talk at the 2013 Brethren World Assembly.

I'm encouraged by the increased focus on prayer in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. Several years ago, a group met for a daily prayer time in the early morning hours of national conference. Those brief moments

grew into monthly prayer sessions via conference call. They continue to gather to this day and are laying the groundwork for future ministries within the FGBC, just as Gribble, through prayer, laid the foundation for a ministry in the Central African Republic.

“Nothing is more astounding than prayer,” says Grace Brethren statesman Tom Julien, who also writes in this issue. “When I raise my head to God and call upon Him in faith, He hears, He decrees responses, He sends His angels to do His bidding, He opens doors, and He fills His servants with courage and power.”

It doesn't matter how you pray. It matters that you pray.



Liz Cutler Gates, lcutler@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.



CAPTIVATING *Prayer*

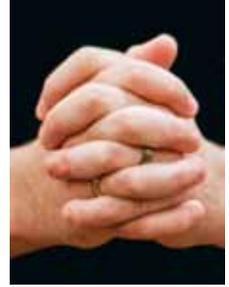


PRAYER IS INFINITELY
MORE THAN
SAYING WORDS.

by Tom Julien



HUMAN HISTORY IS WOVEN AROUND THE PRAYERS OF HIS PEOPLE.



Nothing is more fascinating than prayer.

Through prayer we have direct access to the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. The very thought is extraordinary. And we get a person, not an answering service.

Through prayer we have the incredible privilege of influencing history and impacting eternity. When we pray, things happen that would not happen if we did not pray. Of course some will say, “But what about predestination? Wasn’t everything planned by God before human history began?” Yes, but did you ever stop to consider that prayer was probably the main ingredient in the programming of human history? God knew whether we would pray even before the whole process began, and His answers were predestined into our lives. Human history is woven around the prayers of His people.

Through prayer we have the privilege of penetrating the veil that separates us from that invisible world of darkness, where we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but principalities and powers. The invisible world is just as real as the visible world, even though we are not presently equipped to see it. If God respects ungodly authority structures in the visible world, we can only suppose that He does the same in the invisible world. If there are obstacles in the visible world that require a great expenditure of effort, is it not also true in the invisible world?

Why Pray?

If there is anything indispensable for the Christian, it is prayer. In the Scriptures we are commanded to pray without ceasing. Look at these references: 1 Chronicles 16:11, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 55:17, Matthew 7:7-8, Luke 11: 5-8, 18:1:7, Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 1 Timothy 2:8, 5:5.

In view of these exhortations, we should need no further reason to make prayer the dominant activity of our lives.

Though prayer is one of the great *mysteries* of the Christian experience, the Bible gives us some glimmers of light about

its indispensable place in God’s dealings with His creatures. As we pursue these insights we gradually realize God’s intervention in our lives is limited by our willingness to invite Him. God respects our freedom. If we are content to try to be our own god, He allows us this independence. But He is pleased to reveal Himself and His power to those who make prayer their life principle.

Prayer is the means of infusing eternity into our lives. It is the means God has given us for rising from the kingdom of this world, which is in the hands of the enemy, and living in the kingdom of heaven. It is the means of transferring ownership for our lives, and all they touch, to our Lord and King. When we assume the role of god, we rule over a pitifully small kingdom. When we take our place in Christ at the right hand of God, we move our lives into His great plan.

What happens when we pray?

Prayer is more than saying words. When we pray in faith, believing, forces are set in motion that would stagger our imagination if God caused the scales to fall from our eyes.

When we pray, God hears. We can pray at anytime, anywhere, under any circumstances. We can pray kneeling or standing, sitting or walking, eyes open or eyes closed. Every time we pray in faith, aware that God is there and that He is listening, God hears (Psalm 55:17).

When we pray, God decrees His answers. Read a few of the Scriptures promising answers to our prayers: Jeremiah 33:3, Matthew 7:7, 18:19, 21:22, Mark 11:24, Luke 11:13, John 14:13, 15:17, 1 John 3:22, 5:14. When we pray, God decrees His answer. And the Word that He decrees will not return to Him without accomplishing its purpose (Isaiah 55:11).

When we pray, God sends His angels as ministering spirits. God has many ways of answering our prayers.

His angels are ministering spirits, sent to minister on behalf of those who are heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). How many angels are without employment because Christians are not praying?

When we pray, God opens doors for ministry. Unless the Lord opens doors, our efforts are vain. When He is able to enter the doors of our churches (Revelation 3:20), He is able to open the doors of ministry (Revelation 3:8). When He opens doors, no man can shut them. Prayer is our only means of opening doors (Colossians 4:2-4).

When we pray, God fills His servants with courage. Prayer is the means by which we put on the whole armor of God. Paul asked for prayer so whenever he opened his mouth, words would be given him so that he could fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel (Ephesians 6:19-20).

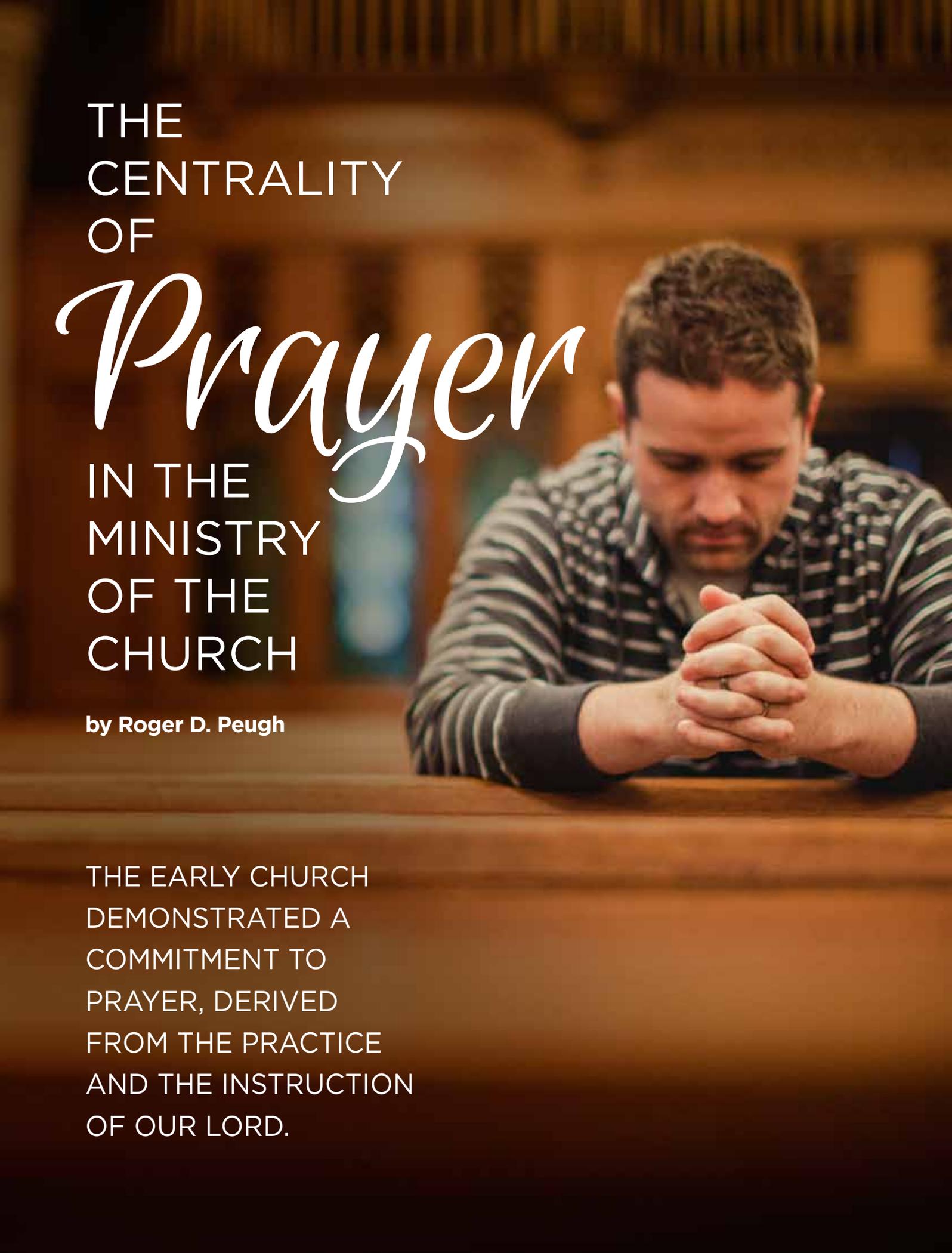
When we pray, the Spirit brings conviction to sinners. The Holy Spirit fills His people with power—so necessary to confront the forces of evil (Acts 1:8). The One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4). The Spirit of God convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8).

How to Pray

There is only one way to learn to pray—it is to pray. Prayer is a skill that takes practice, just as is true of all other skills. Cultivating a God-consciousness might be a struggle at first. If you are willing to persevere, “continuing instant in prayer” (Romans 12:12), both you and others will feel the impact.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:18 KJV).

Editor’s Note: Tom Julien is the equipping pastor at the Winona Lake, Ind., Grace Brethren Church, and director emeritus of Encompass World Partners. He has authored several books, including The Three Princes (BMH Books, 2011).



THE
CENTRALITY
OF
Prayer
IN THE
MINISTRY
OF THE
CHURCH

by Roger D. Peugh

THE EARLY CHURCH
DEMONSTRATED A
COMMITMENT TO
PRAYER, DERIVED
FROM THE PRACTICE
AND THE INSTRUCTION
OF OUR LORD.

PRAYER WAS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL, CRUCIAL, TO THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH.



Everyone who studies the life of Jesus Christ is struck by the intensity and the intimacy of his relationship with his Father. Regularly in quiet places, often early in the morning, often in the middle of a conversation with his earthly disciples, he looked up and spoke with his Father. His ministry began in prayer; it was bathed in prayer; and he ended his ministry praying on the cross.

Jesus prayed all night before choosing his disciples (Luke 6:12ff). In Luke 11:1, the disciples came to Him: “Lord teach us to pray.” Isn’t it instructive that they did not ask him to teach them to preach?

He carefully instructed his followers, especially Peter, to “watch and pray” lest they fall into temptation. The last night of Christ’s life, the three leaders of the eleven slept—after specifically being instructed by the Lord to watch and pray with him in his greatest hour of need.

They slept!

Three times the Lord came and rebuked them. Peter failed by denying our Lord Jesus Christ three times. Our Lord, with his exceptional grace, came to Peter, and, as recorded in John 21, he restored this disgraceful failure, asking Peter three times: “Do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord, you know I love you.”

Merely seven weeks after his disgraceful failure, Peter was anointed to preach the first sermon of the church age at Pentecost!

Peter, James, and John finally got it. Acts 2:42 records that the whole church continued steadfastly, faithfully, continually in prayer. After persecution in Acts 4, they immediately gathered for prayer, and the Holy Spirit shook the place. In Acts 6, the Apostles focused on “prayer and the ministry of the Word” rather than other good things, which could be cared for by other fine leaders in the church.

In chapter 12, when Peter was arrested and then released by that angel, he knew he would go to that house and

find them praying. He knocked on the door and they did not believe he could be there. Rhoda finally convinced them, and they listened to his report and then left.

The early church demonstrated a commitment to prayer, derived from the practice and the instruction of our Lord. Prayer was practiced and taught by Christ, practiced and taught by the early church in Jerusalem, practiced and taught by the Apostle Paul and his ministry teams. Prayer was absolutely essential – crucial – to the ministry of the church. God said through Paul: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). “Be fervent in prayer” (Col. 4:2).

James Gribble was born in Mechanicsburg, Pa. He died at age 40 in 1923, having been used by God to start a ministry in the Central African Republic (then called Oubangui-Chari and later, French Equatorial Africa).

Gribble was a man of prayer. After serving a year with the Africa Inland Mission (AIM), he decided to celebrate his one-year anniversary in Africa, November 29, 1909, with a night of prayer. His wife, Dr. Florence Newberry Gribble, wrote that this very night should be considered the birth-night of the Mission Oubangui-Chari. God assured him that night that there would be an evangelistic ministry in the area of Oubangi-Chari, though Gribble was uncertain if he would have a part.

Gribble’s mother had taught him to pray. He regularly spent hours in prayer.

“He was known to rise every morning at two o’clock to pray for members of his own family, many of whom were as yet unconverted. He was up again at 4:30 a.m. for his regular devotions, which included all parts of the world.”¹

He would spend at least an hour praying in the morning. When he was sick and prevented from doing his other labors, “he simply added to his hours of daily intercession.”²

Prior to departure for Oubangui-Chari, James Gribble was busy. [His wife] records: “He was traveling,

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“LET’S PRAY ABOUT IT RIGHT NOW” IS A SENTENCE I PASS ON TO OTHERS.



preaching, giving illustrated lectures, or writing letters and articles for publication, but never was he too busy to pray. ‘Prayer is the greatest thing I have done today,’ he often said in his daily letters to his wife.”³ It is said of him that out of desperation for the Gospel “he had prayed literally night and day for the opening up of this particular portion of Central Africa to the Gospel!”⁴

They sailed in 1918 and arrived at the entrance to the Central African Republic in 1919, but they were denied immediate entry. It is well known that this little party of James and Florence Gribble, their daughter, Marguerite, and two single missionaries waited on permission to enter Oubangui-Chari (French Equatorial Africa). They spent two full years waiting, but they did not just twiddle their thumbs and grumble. Gribble was not passive – he prayed – at what came to be called “Camp Wait-Some-More,” in order to get into the country.

Could it be that the miracles that God has worked in that Central African country are traceable to the two years of prayer foundation laid before they entered?

While in ministry in Africa he wrote: “These are busy days here, but we do not allow ourselves to be too busy to pray. Intercession, in spite of the pressure of other duties, is the greatest work that any missionary can do.”⁵

I’d like to change that sentence.

Intercession, in spite of all of the other duties that a housewife could do, is the greatest ministry that a housewife can do. Intercession, in spite of all the other duties, is the greatest ministry any pastor can do. The same goes for truck drivers, doctors, lawyers, farmers. It is the only thing that has and leads to eternal benefit.

Sometimes Gribble would stop all his activities and devote a whole day to prayer. He writes in one of his letters: “Yesterday, I did nothing but pray. I literally spent the day in prayer, as I felt that we are facing a crisis in the work.”⁶

During their last year with AIM, it is recorded that “There were whole days which Mr. Gribble and his wife spent in no other service than prayer.”⁷

After graduation from Grace College, I began a ministry internship at the Elkhart, Ind., Grace Brethren Church while I studied at Grace Seminary. My mentor, Pastor Gordon Bracker, was a man of prayer. If it moved, he’d pray with it! He prayed all the time. He always said: “Let’s pray about it right now.” And we prayed anywhere.

He instructed me that after shaking the hands of countless people after church, I should wash my hands before leaving to rid them of the germs! Often he and I would meet in the men’s room by the washbasin. We’d share about people we had met during the morning services. He’d say: “Let’s pray about it right now,” so we prayed in the men’s room. We prayed in the parking lot, on the lawn, in the car, we prayed everywhere.

“Let’s pray about it right now” is a sentence I pass on to others. By the middle of the semester, the students in my prayer class report that they are using this sentence and praying with people on the spot. I respond that they are grandsons and granddaughters of Gordon Bracker.

Within the first months of ministry there, I was scheduled to meet Pastor Bracker on a Saturday afternoon at the church building. He arrived late, completely undone physically and emotionally. A man had taken a pistol and gone across the fields with the intention of taking his own life. Pastor Bracker had searched for him for many hours, carrying this man’s small child on his shoulders.

As the pastor came into the church auditorium, he took only several moments to briefly explain what had taken place and then said: “Let’s pray right now!”

We fell to our knees at the front bench of the church, and he began sobbing as he prayed. I was 22 years old and estimated once that by that time I had attended at least 1,000 prayer meetings—at the Harrah (Wash.) Brethren Church, Youth for Christ, Grace College missions prayer groups—but never one like this one. And kneeling beside him as he sobbed and cried out to God, I asked the Lord to teach me to pray like that.

(To finish the story, Pastor Bracker did not find the man that day, but he was found and lived many more years.)



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JEREMIAH 29:7



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“THE DEVIL DOES NOT FEAR OUR PREACHING, BUT HE IS TERRIFIED WHEN CHRISTIANS PRAY.”



I spent three years at Gordon Bracker’s side. This man of God impressed a deep mark on my life. He mentored me to pray.

Some of the prayer principles I have touched on:

1. Christ prayed, and instructed his followers to pray.
2. The disciples began leading the early church to continue steadfastly in prayer.
3. Paul prayed and urged all Christians to pray continually.
4. The mother of James Gribble taught him to pray; parents mentor their children to pray.
5. James Gribble was never too busy to pray. Prayer is a choice to express our utter dependence on Christ!
6. James Gribble prayed full days and full nights – after the model of Christ!
7. In 1921, there was not one single African believer in French Equatorial Africa. Today there are 4.4 million living in the C.A.R., with more than 2,000 Grace Brethren Churches and more than 200,000 believers in those churches, not to count the many Christian denominations which also have wonderful Christian churches there. The Joshua Project web site reports that 74 percent of the population in C.A.R. is “Christian” and 32.3 percent evangelical Christian. God has worked in answer to the prayers of many and a whole nation has been touched with the living gospel of Christ. God hears and answers prayer.
8. Gordon Bracker mentored me in prayer: the best teaching of prayer is doing it with somebody. Whom are you mentoring in prayer? It is the responsibility of parents and Christian leaders of every generation to mentor the next generation to be praying men and women of God.

In my youth, I heard that Billy Graham was supposed to have said: “Take the Holy Spirit out of the church and 90 percent of the activities would go on uninterrupted.” We could re-formulate that sentence for today and say: “Take prayer out of most churches and 90 percent of

the activities of that church would continue on without interruption.”

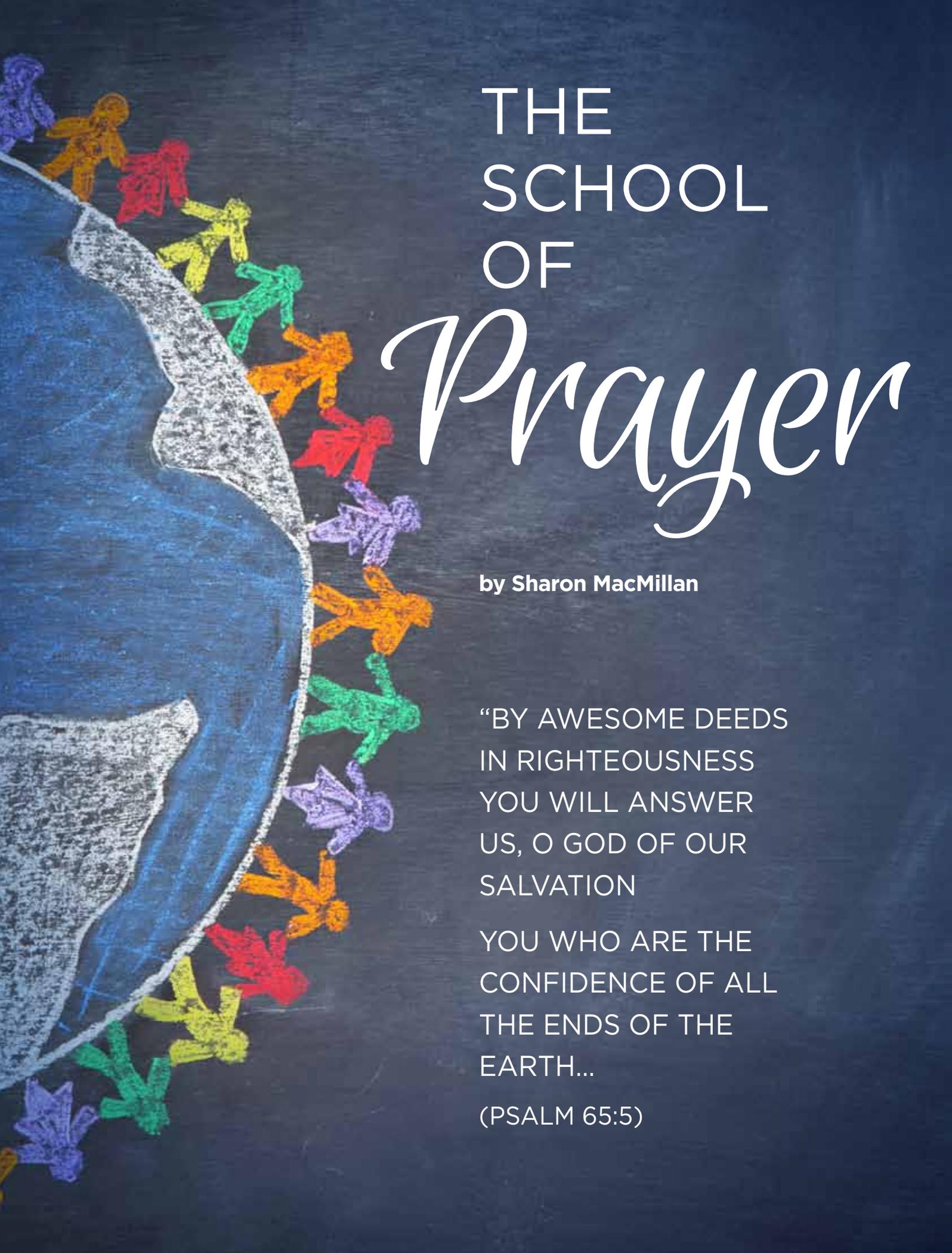
Activities at most churches now are done without much more than token prayer—a prayer at the outset asking God to bless the meeting and our plans. There’s little sense of desperation.

The reality is that we live in perhaps the most crucial age of human history since the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ! Worldwide moral breakdown has never reached this level. Our job is enormous, and this is not the time to twiddle our thumbs. This is a time for us to pray. Whom are we teaching to pray? About what are we praying all night?

The church will have no meaningful effect against the erosion of society simply by holding more programs and polishing better sermons. Someone said: “The devil does not fear our preaching, but he is terrified when dedicated Christians pray.”

*Editor’s Note: Dr. Roger Peugh is campus prayer coordinator and part-time instructor at Grace College and Theological Seminary, where he regularly teaches a class on prayer. He is the author, with Dr. Tammy Schultz, of *Transformed in His Presence: The Need for Prayer in Counseling* (BMH Books, 2005). This article is based on his challenge at the Fifth Brethren World Assembly held in Brookville, Ohio, in 2013. The complete talk is part of the book, *Brethren Spirituality: How Brethren Conceive of and Practice the Spiritual Life, which contain the proceedings of the conference, published in 2015 by the Brethren Encyclopedia Board. It is available online at Amazon.com.**

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- 1 Gribble, *Stranger than Fiction*, 1949, p. 85-86).
 - 2 Gribble, *Undaunted Hope: Life of James Gribble* (Ashland, Ohio: The Brethren Publishing Company, 1934; reprint, Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1984), 42.
 - 3 Gribble, *Undaunted*, 171.
 - 4 Gribble, *Undaunted*, 47.
 - 5 Gribble, *Undaunted*, 318.
 - 6 Gribble, *Undaunted*, 300.
 - 7 Gribble, *Undaunted*, 102.



THE
SCHOOL
OF
Prayer

by Sharon MacMillan

“BY AWESOME DEEDS
IN RIGHTEOUSNESS
YOU WILL ANSWER
US, O GOD OF OUR
SALVATION

YOU WHO ARE THE
CONFIDENCE OF ALL
THE ENDS OF THE
EARTH...

(PSALM 65:5)

MORE THAN 30 YEARS AND MANY PRAYER JOURNALS
LATER—SOME ACTUALLY FINISHED, GOD IS STILL SMILING AT
THIS NEW STAGE OF LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL OF PRAYER.



In the 1980's, I had a crazy idea. I wanted to begin praying for the world. I pulled out a big piece of paper and designed a prayer list with many columns to pray for the nations as requests came through what was then Grace Brethren International Missions. Columns were created for national concerns as the cultural war against the Church heated up. Grace Brethren North American Missions was exploding with new church plants that needed prayer. There was a column for our own ministry as pastor and wife and for my family—not in that order of priority. I believed that if I showed God I meant business, the world would change. I'm sure that He was smiling at my well-intentioned efforts.

That's what they were: good intentions. The overall prayer scheme was too difficult to implement for very long. I still had four young children to raise, a husband to support, and many activities at church that needed my attention. Failure to be faithful was a natural consequence.

Not to be deterred, I delved into the classics on prayer, such as E.M. Bound's treasure, *The Power of Prayer*. I learned from biographies of the lives of those who learned the disciplines of faithful, consistent prayer, such as Praying Hyde, who actually died praying on his knees.

More than 30 years and many prayer journals later—some actually finished, God is still smiling at this new stage of learning in the school of prayer.

I was once given a plaque that reads: "Through prayer, God changes things." It may be true but I learned: "Through prayer, God changes me." God has taught that being still before Him leads to letting Him control the method, the content, and the results. I don't have to be the brains in our partnership.

How did He teach me? He brought spiritual mentors into my life who modeled an intimacy and dependency on Him. When they prayed, they entered God's holy ground and confidently believed His Word. They prayed for His desires to come to pass. They didn't seem pressured or forced into some method.

Seventy-four-year-old Mrs. Amyrauld loved her Heavenly Father with all her heart. Her relationship with Him showed me the beauty of being intimately connected to

God's heart through prayer. They talked over everything from her Bible lesson that she was going to teach to her shopping list and what she was to eat. God had revealed Himself to her. You knew it from how she prayed.

Another mentor in my school of prayer was my mother, Elly Hansen. Communicating with God was a long-time practice for her. Her friends brought their prayer requests because of her confidence and hope in her God. Mom modeled how to intercede for missionaries who depended on her and others like her to bear fruit in seemingly impossible environments. It is no surprise that one of her daughters became a missionary, for Mom's heart for the world was transmitted to her children.

At this stage in the school of prayer, I have priceless partners who share burdens for the nations. A friend took me to the McClain Hall tower at Grace College where we prayed throughout the day with a few breaks in between. We've gone to nearby gardens to meet with the Lord. We know what each of us is praying before we open our mouths. Prayer has deepened our bonds of love as no other activity.

The world continues to tremble from the increasing effects of sin. But Jesus' Kingdom ambassadors are not like the frog in the kettle, unaware that the temperature is increasing. We are commanded to be wise, understanding the will of the Lord. We are to be on watch as the five virgins in Jesus' parable, waiting for Christ's coming with our lamps trimmed. There is no time to be apathetic about praying for the needs of the world, for Christ could make His appearance at any time. He wants us to be found watching when He comes. We don't need to check off our prayer list like a to-do list of tasks. But we are people who share His heart for His kingdom to be established here as it is in Heaven. We learn His heart by being in His presence, seeing things from His perspective.

Women of Grace USA has been through ups and downs, turns and tilts through transitions towards new methodology in a drastically changing society. I am convinced that if it were not for a dependent prayer culture, this organization, committed to discipling women, would not exist today.

Two years ago at the Women of Grace USA Fall meeting, the board began to recount all that God had answered on our behalf over the past few years. We were stunned at the

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IN HIS PRESENCE, SEEING THINGS
FROM HIS PERSPECTIVE.



pile of colored sticky notes each board member posted on the wall that day. We took them down, placed them on the counter, and sang and prayed with thanksgiving for the many breakthroughs in ministry. That moment enabled us to continue to trust God alone for our existence, for our present need, and for our future. We have collected more than eight pages of answered prayers and are convinced that God is active, powerful, and has a plan for us as an organization, if we remain dependent on Him.

Under the leadership of Sally Miller, a prayer force of more than 100 women (we think there are more as they invite others to join them) take the requests from each Women of Grace USA board member and intercede with fasting on the 15th day of each month.

Because of Jesus' work on the cross, every believer is a royal priest, called to intercede for others. The dear men and women that I pray with in regular conference-call prayer meetings for the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches are people who know their God; they are people of vision and passion for God's will to be done on this earth. Both men and women bring something unique to our 45-minute prayer meeting.

So where am I in the school of prayer? As with all believers, I know I won't graduate until I get to Heaven and maybe even then I will lack the praise that God is worthy to receive. But each of us, as His redeemed ones, possess all that we need now to participate in the school of prayer, learning to pray for His will to be done among us and in His world. That is all that matters in the end. It's all for His glory forever.

God has heard our request to pray globally and Psalm 65:4 gives a blessing to those who pray (the context of the psalm implies prayer):

*"Blessed is the man You choose
and cause to approach You
That He may dwell in Your courts.
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house,
Of Your holy temple."*

Editor's Note: Sharon MacMillan lives in Tracy, Calif., where her husband, Robert, is pastor of the Grace Brethren Church. She leads a monthly conference-call prayer time on behalf of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. She also serves on the Women of Grace USA board.

PRAYER CALL

About 12 people from around the U.S. who are committed to praying for the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC) meet monthly via conference call.

"The prayer is sweet and the answers have been encouraging," says Sharon MacMillan, who leads the sessions from her home in California. Others participate from Indiana, Ohio, and other states.

"We are looking for ways to multiply this effort so that more people can form groups to pray for our fellowship and our national organizations," she adds.

She suggests gathering several people together to pray through the FGBC Handbook for the people, churches, and organizations of the Fellowship. If not able to meet personally, she recommends using a conference calls service such as GoToMeeting or a video chat platform such as Skype or Google Hangouts, which allow for multiple users.

"I have taken the Handbook to our conference calls and have had interceders pray for the Fellowship Council,

and the initiatives they want to present," she recalls. "Now I am praying through the districts for the staff members of each local church that makes up our Fellowship. I find this invigorating and draws me closer to my brothers and sisters."

(An online version of the printed Handbook is available at fgbc.org.)

She envisions a global prayer network and invites people to be a part. "That is the dream," she says, "to make prayer the first thing we do before we plan and act."

If you are interested in leading a group that prays regularly for the global ministries of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, or would like to participate in one, go to fgbc.org/page/prayer for more information.

Women who would like to participate in the Women of Grace USA Prayer Force should contact Sharon at gleskfam@mac.com or Sally Miller at samiller@innernet.net.

PURSUING COMMONALITIES

Thirty delegates represented 19 countries with established Grace Brethren churches or ministries.

The week was highlighted by the unanimous approval on Wednesday of the Charis Commitment of Common Identity (CCCI) as the fresh expression of the core beliefs and values of the global Grace Brethren movement.

Seeking a way to work together as a united movement for the cause of Christ, representatives of Grace Brethren ministries from around the world met for the Charis International Leadership Encounter (CILE) in early November in Bangkok, Thailand.

Thirty delegates represented 19 countries with established Grace Brethren churches. Another 16 steering committee members, staff, and advisors rounded out the attendance at 46. The meetings were held at the Vertical Suite Hotel, where conference participants were also housed.

The week was highlighted by the unanimous approval on Wednesday of the Charis Commitment of Common Identity (CCCI) as the fresh expression of the core beliefs and values of the global Grace Brethren movement. (Read the document at charisalliance.org/english/documents.html.)

It was the culmination of several days of discussion in which the delegates met according to language group – English, French, or Spanish – to discuss the proposed final document. Much of the earlier work had taken place in various regions around the world where there are Grace Brethren churches.

On Friday, before the group concluded their sessions with the celebration of three-fold communion, each signed the approved Commitment of Common Identity. They also discussed how to move forward with the creation of the Charis Alliance, an association that seeks to promote

fellowship and cooperation on the regional and international level among the churches that endorse the Charis Commitment to Common Identity.

The week also included reports on progress in the three areas of the Commitment to Common Mission — church planting, leadership development, and integrated ministries. That document had been approved at the 2008 meeting of the Charis Alliance in Bad Homberg, Germany, and the presenters referenced research done in 2008 with surveys taken in 2015. (The Commitment to Common Mission was ratified by the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches and its national organizations in 2009.)

Florent Varak, reporting on leadership development, said that he saw a wide variety of leadership training. “I think it’s a very positive thing for our movement,” he said. “We want our leaders of our movement to be well trained.”

Paul Klawitter, reporting on church planting, looked at efforts on the five continents where Grace Brethren ministries occur. He noted perseverance in the midst of difficulties such as war, famine, economic instability, and religious opposition in Africa and Asia. In Europe and Latin America, he observed collaborative efforts among Grace Brethren movements and in partnership with other evangelical denominations. In North America, he cited the lack of a “cookie-cutter approach” with much good experimentation, as church planters reach out in a post-modern world.

“A lot of people are doing this in a very natural way and we’re just now starting to identify some of the different areas that they are working,” said Jason Weimer following his talk on integrated (or holistic) ministries. “Christians almost intuitively figure this out because we’re looking at the world.”
(continued on page 19)



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Photos by Liz Cutler Gates and Rainer Ehmann

- 1 Edgar Cruz Moreno and Arnulfo Vieyra of Mexico pray with Daniel Barbita of Uruguay.
- 2 Conference participants take a break from touring.
- 3 On Thursday, the group visited historic sites in Bangkok.
- 4 Members of the Charis steering committee answer questions about a recent revision. Left to right are Dave Guiles (coordinator), Keith Shearer (United States), Francois Ngoumape (Central African Republic), Florent Varak (France), and Eduardo Pizzi (Argentina).
- 5 Signatures on the Commitment to Common Identity
- 6 With a raised hand, Daniel Barbita, of Uruguay, casts his vote for the Commitment to Common Identity.
- 7 Malcolm Stephens of the United Kingdom share about Grace Brethren ministries there.
- 8 Keith Minier, a delegate from the U.S., signs the Commitment to Common Identity.



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(continued from page 16)

We know that God called us out of the world but he's also commanded us to go back into the world."

See interviews with Varak, Klawitter, and Weimer, along with other video from the week, at vimeo.com/channels/charisalliance

For more details on the CCCI and Charis Alliance, see charisalliance.org or graceconnect.us.

- 9** The Charis Steering Committee: left to right, row 1, D. Guiles, F. Ngoumape, S. Aoki, W. Hannah; row 2, E. Pizzi; row 3, F. Varak, Y. Betelmbaye, R. Ehmann, J. Nunez, K. Shearer
- 10** It was not uncommon for the group to join in prayer. One morning, concerted time was spent praying for various international situations.
- 11** Participants at the 2015 Charis International Leadership Encounter
- 12** Francois Ngoumape (Central African Republic) makes a point during French language discussions while Yerima Betelmbay (Chad) reviews the Charis Commitment to Common Identity document.
- 13** French-speaking delegates discuss the Commitment to Common Identity.
- 14** Spanish-speaking delegates from Central and South America engage in lively discussion.
- 15** Jason Weimer, director of Transformation Works Network for Encompass World Partners, reports on integrated (or holistic) ministries during Monday's session.
- 16** The week concluded with three-fold communion on Friday night.



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