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A BIBLICAL LOOK AT ISSUES

In a country founded by immigrants, I've found the discussions on immigration to be interesting and sometimes disconcerting.



Last year I began to volunteer with the English as a New Language class that my church sponsors.

On most Tuesday evenings from fall through spring, you'll find me at the local YMCA helping men and women (mostly from Spanish-speaking countries) learn the English language. As I got to know them, I realized they were probably much like my ancestors, who immigrated to the U.S. from European countries generations ago. They merely want a better life for themselves and their families. They have come because of political or religious persecution, for employment, or solely for love.

In a country founded by immigrants, I've found the discussions on immigration to be interesting and sometimes disconcerting. It is apparent there are no easy answers. The system is broken and needs a fix.

Putting politics aside, what does the immigration issue mean for us as Christians? How are we to respond when the new faces in our communities are a different shade than our own, the taxi driver wears an unusual headdress, and the cashier at the gas station speaks with an unfamiliar accent?

Immigration is just one issue addressed in recent years by the Social Concerns Committee, a standing committee in the Charis Fellowship (Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches) that proposes resolutions for adoption during the annual business meeting at national conference. These resolutions help local churches, pastors, leaders, and parishioners navigate what can often be murky waters when it comes to current social topics. See the resolutions from the 2017 conference here: charisfellowship.us/page/resolutions2017.

This issue is the first in a series that will tackle some of the topics addressed by the Social Concerns Committee. We hope that thoughtful articles written by Grace Brethren pastors, leaders, and professors will provide encouragement and clarity on a variety of topics that march across the headlines.

The men and women of my Tuesday night English class inspired this issue. I trust it will encourage you to reach out to those in your community have begun life afresh in a new and different land!



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A THEOLOGICAL AGENDA

by Jeremy Wike

**God explicitly
points the foreigner
out because they
are vulnerable. God
has no political
agenda; He has a
theological one!**



GOD DESIRES THAT OBEDIENCE TO HIM
SPILL OVER INTO THE BETTERMENT OF OTHER
PEOPLE—ESPECIALLY THE VULNERABLE.



The rancor swirling around social justice issues, such as immigration, among Christians is breathtaking. Could we heed James' advice and listen more before taking our positions of attack (James 1:19-20)? Take a fresh look at what the Bible says about immigration in general, devoid of the present situation in America. What does the Bible say about what to do with foreigners?

Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt. Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. (Exodus 22:21-22 NIV)

When giving Moses the Law, God commands Israel that they are not to mistreat or oppress a foreigner living among them. Why? Israel shared a similar history with those same foreigners (see also Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:18-19). You might say this is an application of the Golden Rule that Jesus later gave in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:12).

Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" (Deuteronomy 27:19 NIV)

Imagine for a moment that everyone in our churches shouted "Amen!" when we boldly pronounced our meticulous care for the most vulnerable in society. Does it matter that God said this to national Israel and not the Church?

It seems safe to say that God's heart for the vulnerable in society didn't morph from the Old Testament into the New Testament. If God wasn't clear enough when He gave the Law, He is even more forceful through the Prophets.

This is what the Lord Almighty said: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.' (Zechariah 7:9-10)

It is evil when God's people oppress the vulnerable, rather than help them. Notice how the "foreigner" continues to get lumped into lists of specific types of weak and defenseless people. God explicitly points the foreigner out because they are vulnerable. God has no political agenda; He has a theological one!

This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. (Jeremiah 22:3)

Jeremiah's list of vulnerable peoples is slightly different but still includes the foreigner. The constant theme we see is that God's heart breaks for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the downtrodden. God doesn't condone exploitation at the expense of the already-weak. This hits a nerve with God.

*"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?*

*Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
(Isaiah 58:6-7 NIV)*

Tell us how you really feel, God! In this diatribe, God doesn't care about his people's religious ritualism of giving up eating food for a day if they are willingly going to oppress others in distress. No, we are not under the Law. But we learn very important principles from this text.

First, obedience is not a matter of blind rule-following; it is more nuanced and comprehensive than that. God desires that obedience to Him spill over into the betterment of other people—especially the vulnerable.

Second, God is practical in how we roll up our sleeves and help the vulnerable. Remember how John chides the patronizing words of actionless Christians? This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let

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IMAGINE GOING TO A CHURCH SERVICE AFTER NOT EATING FOR THREE DAYS. HOW WELL WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO CONCENTRATE ON WORSHIP AND PREACHING FROM THE WORD?

us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18 NIV). In other words, act like Jesus and stop claiming our only calling is to meet people's spiritual needs.

For example, when you are hungry you desire food. Imagine going to a church service after not eating for three days. How well would you be able to concentrate on worship and preaching from the Word? I wouldn't be able to think about anything but the gnawing pain in my stomach.

We need to stop separating spiritual needs from physical needs. (I'm thankful to be part of a Fellowship that is doing wonderful things to intersect these two for the advancement of the Great Commission!)

I've only taken a selection of passages addressing the treatment of foreigners from the Old Testament. Our hermeneutical hurdle comes when we try leaping into the New Testament. What does it say about how to treat the foreigner?

Not much. We do have the oft-quoted scene from the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 25 where Jesus separates the "sheep" from the "goats." The line of demarcation is how the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison are treated. Jesus says, "...whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40). Other than this passage, the New Testament is virtually silent regarding the treatment of foreigners in the same sense the Old Testament means.

Is it because God suddenly laid aside His concern for foreigners? Is it because God only wanted Israel to care for foreigners and not His Bride, the Church? Is it because God forgot to mention it? Or is there a simpler way of evaluating the Testamental leap?

God didn't lay aside His concern for the vulnerable. God didn't have a different standard for the Gentiles than He did with ethnic Israel regarding foreigners. And He definitely did not forget to mention it in the New Testament. The answer is that the cultural situation changed between the Testaments.

National Israel in the Old Testament had borders and a theocratic government. When the New Testament opens, ethnic Israel is scattered, and Jesus is talking to them about how to treat the Romans, who aren't always the kindest of masters (i.e., Matt. 5:38-48). Israel was no longer a sovereign nation with borders and a theocratic government; Israel is under the thumb of Rome.

Any commands to not oppress the foreigner within the Roman context in the New Testament would have been odd. So, let's not argue from silence that the Bible has nothing to say to the Church about how to treat the foreigner. If anything, we need to evaluate our understanding of how our present national loyalties collide with what the Bible demands from us.

We could summarize:

1. God cares for the vulnerable in society.
2. The list of who is vulnerable may change, but God's heart is consistent.
3. Governmental policy does not dictate how the Church ought to care for the foreigner.
4. One's loyalties and preferences as the citizen of a country are secondary to God's expectations for how foreigners in that country are to be treated.
5. The Bible does not give us prescriptions for how America should address our immigration challenges as a nation. It does, however, give God's Church its marching orders to reflect the heart of God for all vulnerable peoples we might call our "neighbors" (remember the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37).

And one last reminder we could also conclude as well:

6. Our divided culture desperately needs to see a united Church that disagrees on the application of the text while maintaining a vibrant love and deliberate unity that only the Holy Spirit can produce (Eph. 4:2-7).

Jeremy Wike is the pastor of Community of Hope Grace Brethren Church in Columbia City, Ind.

JUSTICE AND COMPASSION IN IMMIGRATION REFORM

by Jesús Muñoz

How do we balance the need to enforce our laws and the need to show compassion to those living in our country illegally?

This failure to find the perfect balance is the reason this problem has not yet been solved by our political leaders.



ALL PEOPLE, REGARDLESS OF THEIR CITIZENSHIP STATUS, DESERVE BASIC HUMAN DIGNITY AND RESPECT.



At the heart of the political debate over immigration is the tension we often find in Scripture between justice and compassion. How do we reconcile that tension? How do faith-based people in a civil society do what's both moral and just? Can we be both, reasonable, and right? Immigration issues have divided the nation at this time, and we see a lot of hate and racism.

The Bible does encourage kindness toward the outsider and the alien. But it also specifically says we are to follow the laws and obey civil authority. Millions of immigrants have broken the law. And we are a nation of laws, but we need to be a nation that shows love and mercy to the foreigners too.

Romans 13:1 says, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God (NASB)." To be faithful to this passage, Christians have to respect the laws of our land, including the laws regarding legal immigration, and expect all people to obey the guidelines and requirements included therein.

We as Christians are called to live justly by obeying the laws of the government; we are also called to be compassionate people, showing grace to those in need. Respect for the law and the necessary recognition that illegal immigration is a violation of law does not require or even permit one to ignore the persons involved in the illegal immigration. All people, regardless of their citizenship status, deserve basic human dignity and respect.

How do we balance the need to enforce our laws and the need to show compassion to those living in our country illegally? This failure to find the perfect balance is the reason this problem has not yet been solved by our political leaders.

There may be lots of political positions that differ on how we accomplish it, but if we are going to err, we need to err on the side of God. If we do not, we will be in some way accountable to God for our failure to be obedient.

Most of us agree we should be as compassionate as possible; what we don't agree on is whether violators of immigration laws are "justly" punished. Some think these law-breakers are immoral, and that justice would, therefore, be done by sending them home. Others believe that they are helping to make this nation greater.

God had the same dilemma when man sinned against Him. Man needed to be punished for their sin, but at the same time,

God wanted to give grace. How could this problem be solved? Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice in our behalf, paying the penalty, and being the open door to God.

The Gospel of Mark 7:26-30 tells the story of a woman, a Gentile, who asked Jesus to heal her daughter. Jesus said to her that it would not be right to take the children's bread and feed it to the family dog. In other words, Jesus reminds her that his ministry is first and foremost to the Jews. To give this woman bread might very well be to take it out of the mouths of those to whom Jesus already has responsibility. The woman replies, "Even the dogs under the table get to eat the crumbs." And Jesus praises her for her answer and her faith, healing her child.

Here in America, we know that the government's main responsibility is to the legally abiding citizens and residents, but there are plenty of crumbs under the table for those that are not only bread-eaters but also bread-makers. The reality of illegal immigration is not only that they are criminals who want to enter our country to do us harm, but the great majority of illegal immigrants entered America simply to earn a better life economically and educationally for themselves and their children.

1 John 1:9 describes the nature of the Heavenly Father as having both of these qualities. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God's justice, also translated righteousness, describes His perfect holiness as contrasted with our human sinfulness. God's compassion opens the door to forgiveness and salvation. God's compassion does not ignore our sin, but recognizes our sin and yet provides a way to redemption, the forgiveness that Christians believe was earned through the death and resurrection of the Savior Jesus.

One of the biggest problems in this immigration reform is that we do not want to reward those breaking the law with a path to citizenship. Many politicians are requesting that the immigration reform must have a path to citizenship, but most of the illegal aliens are more interested in finding rest from persecution and the opportunity to work and live in peace. Surveys of people who qualified for a green card during the Reagan era and had the opportunity to become citizens have not done it, but they enjoy working and living in peace. This is changing now because of the hateful persecution that immigrants are suffering.

The United States needs to create a set of laws that provide a way to redemption to the illegal aliens; we cannot allow the rule of

WHILE WE RESPECT AND ENFORCE OUR LAWS, WE MUST ALSO SHOW COMPASSION AND GRACE TO THOSE IN NEED.

law to be ignored consistently. The current immigration laws in America are not working. The millions of illegal immigrants in our country now must be required to admit their law-breaking and face some consequence; it may be a monetary fine or some form of criminal punishment. While we respect and enforce our laws, we must also show compassion and grace to those in need. There are children of illegal immigrants, who did not choose to break the law, we must punish the parents who did choose to break the law, but not the children that are innocent victims.

In Matthew 25, Jesus calls His followers to give aid to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, those without clothes, the sick, and those in prison. Christ's followers are to obey His instructions as He said, "to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40). I suggest that we begin to address the issue of illegal immigration by asking God to help us live our lives

under both circumstances, Romans 13 obeying the law and Matthew 25 providing aid to the stranger.

The Bible teaches that "everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities" (Romans 13:1). "Illegal" immigrants have violated the law. The biblical injunctions to honor authority should motivate us toward justice for them. When faced with a choice between biblical mandates, we should try to obey both. We need to reform our laws in a way that bring justice for those seeking to enter our country legally or illegally. But we need to be compassionate in meeting their basic needs while they are here.

Jesús Muñoz first wrote this article in response to questions by the Social Concerns Committee, which recommends annual resolutions addressing societal issues from the standpoint of biblical values. These resolutions are presented at national conference for approval by the delegates.

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FOLLOWING A CALLING



Many people come to the U.S. for a better life, religious freedom, or fleeing persecution. Gordi McIlroy came for love and a calling from God.

Raised in a Christian home in Northern Ireland, Gordi accepted Christ at age 11 during a Christian rock concert.

“As I grew in the Word of God, I learned of a mission organization in Northern Ireland called Exodus, a Christian alternative to the pubs and night clubs. Exodus also does overseas mission teams with a huge emphasis on discipleship.”

Having never been outside the United Kingdom, Gordi wanted to go to Chicago, until he heard that a team going to Uganda was going to put a roof on an orphanage.

“Being the only young qualified carpenter in the building, I began having an internal argument with the Holy Spirit,” he recalls. “I desired Chicago, but God was calling me to Uganda, so reluctantly I agreed to go.” The next year, there was another opportunity to visit the Windy City, but rather than working in a shelter as the team had previously, it was going to help with vacation Bible school at a Baptist church in a suburb.

That visit began a turn of events that found him in full-time ministry in the U.S.

During his time in Illinois, he caught the eye of the pastor, who saw a gifting in the young man. The pastor ultimately offered Gordi an internship at a church in nearby DeKalb, Ill.

“I sought God’s will and followed His calling,” Gordi remembers. “Ever since I have had an overwhelming desire to remain in ministry. I can’t even explain the joyous feeling of leading someone to Christ.”

When the internship was over, he returned to Northern Ireland passionate about reaching the lost and teaching the Word. “God opened a door, and I accepted a calling as the director of Youth and Family Ministries in St. James’s Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland where I ministered for four years,” he said.

In 2004, he met Ashley, who had come to his country for the summer on a Youth for Christ mission team.



Gordi and Ashley McIlroy and family

They were married in October 2005 in her home state of Pennsylvania. They had planned to return to Ireland to minister, but on the night of their wedding rehearsal, he received a call from a church in Parkesburg, Pa., with an offer to become their director of Christian education.

Since October 2015, he has served as the Oxford Campus pastor at Gateway Grace Community Church, a Charis Fellowship congregation in Parkesburg, Pa. (Scott Feather, lead pastor).

For Gordi, moving to the U.S. has been easier because of previous connections and his marriage to an American citizen. “At the same time, it is a challenge as I left all my family in Northern Ireland for the long term,” he says. “I miss them and the country a lot, yet I am super grateful for the opportunities God has given me to be ministering here in the U.S.”

With Ashley, he shares a “passion to reach the lost, see them join the church family, and grow together as believers,” he says.

“God has been so good at making a way throughout Ashley’s life and my life to make His will be done,” he says. The couple has two boys: Silas, who is 6, accepted Jesus at Gateway when he was 4, and Tait, who is 18 months.

“We are excited to see how God uses us to continue to grow Gateway Oxford Campus and continue to daily trust God and his perfect plan,” he concludes.

I WAS A STRANGER AND YOU TOOK ME IN

by Alan Weisenberger

Soheil had finally arrived at LAX. After fleeing Iran because of political persecution and spending two and a half years in Turkey waiting for his refugee status to the United States to be approved, the 24-year-old was ready to launch his new life in the United States of America.

But his US contact who was supposed to meet him at the Los Angeles airport didn't show. He had cleared immigration and met with the representative from the IOM (International Organization for Migration) for a welcome and brief orientation. Now he was sitting alone in an airport where he knew no one and was not comfortable with his ability to speak the language. What should have been the best day of his life had become the worst. Not knowing where to go or what to do, he pondered whether to get on a plane and return to Turkey. Fortunately, an IOM representative spotted him sitting alone and helped him get connected with the local World Relief office.

The next day, I met Soheil through my volunteer work with World Relief. Over the coming months, I walked with him through his journey to get acclimated to his new country.

His first job was as a part-time janitor at Grace Church of Orange. For a while, he held down multiple part-time jobs simultaneously to make ends meet. Now he has a good job as a limousine driver and pursues his passion for photography on the side. As his fifth year in the U.S. approaches, he's excited to begin the process of applying for U.S. citizenship.

Engaging with people who are culturally different than us can be difficult. It forces us outside of our comfort zone: Struggling to understand and be understood; unintentionally insulting and being insulted; each of us having expectations that we take for granted but the other doesn't. Dozens of Scripture passages—from the warning of judgment on “those who turn aside the alien” in Malachi 3 to Jesus' words in Matthew 25 about caring for him when we care for strangers—make it clear that God expects us to do exactly that.

According to a Lifeway Research study in 2015¹, only 12 percent of evangelicals say the Bible is the primary

influence of their view on immigration. Perhaps that's because only 21 percent have been encouraged by their church to reach out to immigrants in their community. Another study² shows that 34 percent of Americans believe that immigrants negatively impact American culture. But among white evangelical Protestants, those holding a negative view increases to 53 percent, even while 73 percent say that the arrival of immigrants “presents a great opportunity to share Jesus Christ and make disciples of all nations within our own communities.”³ Why do Christians hold such a negative view in the face of such an excellent opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission⁴ to make disciples and the Great Commandment⁵ to love others?

Once convinced that it would please God for us to engage with those He moves within our borders, how do we go about that? Here are some of the practical ways churches, individuals, or families can demonstrate God's love for immigrants:

Basic Life Skills

We take these for granted, but they might be new to them depending on where they're from. The best way to recognize these needs is to just spend time with them. Everything in this list is from my personal experiences with immigrants.

- How to cross a street at a crosswalk (push a button, wait...)
- How to open a bank account
- How to register for classes
- Restaurant and shopping protocols (paying with a debit card, who/when/where to pay, tipping, even how to pour sugar from a dispenser without unscrewing the lid!)
- How to use the fixtures in an American bathroom.
- Take nothing for granted: One morning I picked up a Sudanese refugee after checking him in at a motel the night before on his first day in the US. The bed and bath-

2 christianpost.com/news/white-evangelical-immigrants-threaten-american-values-prri-160380/

3 lifewayresearch.com/files/2015/03/Evangelical-Views-on-Immigration-Report.pdf

4 Matthew 28:19-20

5 Matthew 22:35-40

1 lifewayresearch.com/files/2015/03/Evangelical-Views-on-Immigration-Report.pdf

ENGAGING WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE CULTURALLY
DIFFERENT THAN US CAN BE DIFFICULT. IT
FORCES US OUTSIDE OF OUR COMFORT ZONE.



room were untouched – he had slept on the floor because he didn't want to be a bad guest and mess anything up.

Help Them Find Work

While 42 of the 400 wealthiest people in America are immigrants⁶ and in 2016 about 10,000 millionaires moved to the US⁷, the majority of immigrants are in the lower economic strata, especially during their first years getting settled in the US. Some of the ways we can help include:

- Connecting them with potential employers
- Assisting with resume writing and job applications
- Practicing interview skills
- Helping them use online resources, job fairs, and other tools to locate jobs
- Provide odd jobs while they're looking for permanent work

Transportation

- Shopping
- Appointments (medical, training, job interviews)
- School or work
- Church
- Helping them learn to use local public transportation: buses, trains, taxis, ride-sharing services

ESL (English as a Second, or New, Language) training

This is one of the most popular ways churches engage with immigrants. Whether in classroom settings or informal discussion groups (including Bible studies), improving their English is vital to most immigrants. Your local college may be an excellent place to engage international students in this way.

Other Training

- Tutoring
- Computer skills
- Driving (Unless you're a trained driving instructor, I suggest having them take a course first and then spend time with them behind the wheel to sharpen their skills.)
- Other life/vocational skills, such as woodworking, auto repair, gardening, cooking, sewing, or other hobbies you can share with them.

(continued on page 13)

⁶ [washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2016/10/05/a-record-number-of-the-u-s-billionaires-are-immigrants](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2016/10/05/a-record-number-of-the-u-s-billionaires-are-immigrants)

⁷ [nytimes.com/2017/02/25/your-money/wealth-immigration-millionaires-australia-canada.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/your-money/wealth-immigration-millionaires-australia-canada.html)



(top) Grace Church of Orange (Mike Sciarra, pastor), sponsors a bike repair ministry in the Hispanic neighborhood near the church.

(bottom) Soheil driving for the first time driving with his new license.

WANT TO KNOW HOW TO HELP AN IMMIGRANT? LET THEM HELP YOU. BEING USEFUL INCREASES DIGNITY.

Material Needs

- Show them where to shop for bargains
- Furnishing their home
- Children's toys
- Food and Clothing
- Once a month, Grace Church of Orange (Mike Sciarra, pastor) does free bicycle repair in a supermarket parking lot in the local Mexican community. Donated bikes are fixed up and given away.

Their Number One Need: Friendship!

- Spend time with them
- Engage in things that interest them. The first day I met Soheil, his few possessions included a nice camera. I took him to the local pier to shoot some pictures.
- Share meals with them, at home and out on the town
- Invite them to church
- Introduce them to others
- Offer to babysit
- Organize soccer clubs or other events at local parks in immigrant communities

In addition to engaging in the opportunities above, churches can also equip their people to engage well with immigrants by:

- Teaching what the Scriptures say about immigrants. For starters, research the Hebrew word, “ger,” which is used over 90 times in the Old Testament. It is usually translated as “alien,” “foreigner,” “sojourner,” or “stranger.” But it could easily be translated as “immigrant.”
- Making your facilities available (free or at minimal cost) to immigrant congregations. The inconveniences this inevitably creates are a good opportunity to train your congregation in “regarding one another as more important than yourselves” and “looking out not only for your own interests but also the interests of others”⁸.
- Taking leaders of immigrant community churches under your wing for discipleship, fellowship, accountability, and friendship. This can be done one-on-one or in a group setting. If you know how lonely leadership can be, imagine being a leader in a foreign culture. And while you're shepherding them, don't be afraid to let them shepherd you! Meaningful relationships require mutual trust and transparency.

⁸ Philippians 2:3-4

Less than two months after Soheil's arrival, the Orange County Register wanted to do a story on a refugee's first Christmas. So our family was hosting not only our first refugee, but our first newspaper reporter and photographer as well. The reporter asked Soheil about his favorite memory since coming to the US. His answer: helping me put up the Christmas lights on the front of our house. Want to know how to help an immigrant? Let them help you. It's hard to always be on the receiving end. Being useful increases dignity.

I get choked up as I remember the 52-year-old Sudanese man who broke down crying as he climbed out from behind the wheel of my car and stared at the paper in his hand. It said that he'd just passed his driver's license test. The first driver's license in his life. I had spent many nerve-wracking hours letting him practice in my car. Driving is an important skill when you live in Orange County, Calif. I've helped at least six immigrants (including Soheil) get their licenses. (Warning: This one takes nerves of steel and a car with an emergency brake you can reach from the passenger seat!) So how do you help an immigrant? You help them accomplish their dreams and ambitions.

Demonstrating Christ's love to immigrants is guaranteed to write stories into your life about joys and successes, about being used by God, and about challenges, heartaches, and frustrations. But all of those stories are about God's transformative work in their lives and in yours.

Helping immigrants isn't about “what's in it for me,” it's about “what's in me for them.” I have a Savior who made the greatest sacrifice in human history because He loves me. And there are more than seven billion other people in the world today that He loves just as much.

With His love in me, I have to ask myself what is in my life that I'm not willing to sacrifice — to put at risk — to demonstrate Christ's love to those in need. I don't have a choice about whether to do it; I can only choose how to do it. Want to help an immigrant? Be the love of Jesus to them.

Alan Weisenberger is an elder at Grace Church of Orange in Orange, Calif. and serves on the board of Encompass World Partners. He also volunteers with several other organizations serving refugees, the homeless, and disaster survivors.

FINDING SALVATION

by Jesús Muñoz

Back in the country where I was born, I was a devoted and faithful Catholic; at least that is what I thought. I attended church faithfully at least twice a year, Easter and Christmas. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was unknown to me.

Because of the civil war in the country, I was forced to leave to save my life. When I came to the United States of America, I was invited to church by my brother. To my surprise, we went to a church that didn't have the statues of the saints around the building, nor did it have the crucified Christ at the center. I thought, well, this is another country and they do things differently here. My brother, who had come to the USA about six months before me, had gone to a Billy Graham crusade and had received Christ as his Savior and was attending this church. At this church, I heard the Gospel for the first time.

I received Christ as my personal Savior three months later. Since that moment, I have felt a deep desire to share with others the new freedom that I experienced. God gave me grace and many people also accepted Jesus as their Savior, and this led us to start a new church. I enrolled in a Bible institute and continued sharing Christ and helping in the local church. Within a few years, we had started another church, and I became the pastor of it. Since then, we have started nine churches and participate in helping to start seven more churches.

I have seen first-hand how God transformed the lives of thousands of people when they accepted Jesus as their personal Savior and seeing many of them dedicating their lives to serve God as pastors here in the USA and other



Jesús and Rosa Muñoz

countries. I cannot say that coming to the USA saved my life and the lives of all those people, but I can say that God used this country and their missionaries for me to come to a saving knowledge of Christ and to share Him with others that are in desperate need of a Savior.

I know that this story is not the only one because many people coming to this country have heard of Jesus here and have been transformed as I was. I don't know if I or any of those thousands of people would have become Christians if we had not come to this country, but I know with certainty that immigrating to this country is what God used to reach me and to reach those with whom I have shared Christ.

Jesús Muñoz is director of Ethnic Ministries for Encompass World Partners. A native of El Salvador, he came to the U.S. in 1980. He has been instrumental in helping establish new ethnic congregations in the Charis Fellowship.

Immigration Reform

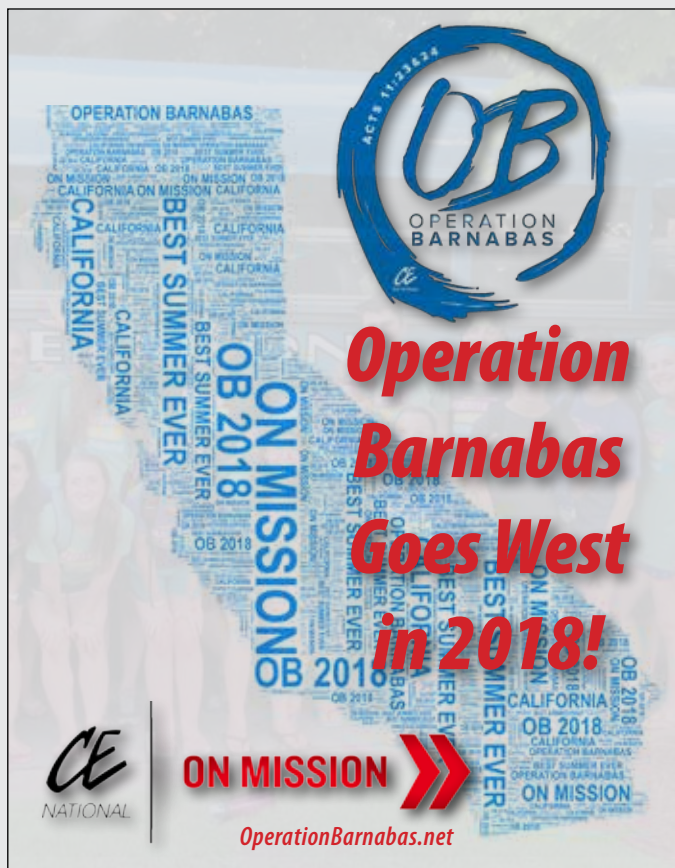
At Access 2017, the national conference of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (now Charis Fellowship), a resolution on Immigration Reform was adopted.

The resolution calls Charis Fellowship churches to prayer, discussion, and action toward addressing the problem of the undocumented immigrant in a God-honoring way. It also encourages respectful, open-minded, and solution-focused dialogue, and churches to be the "reconciling presence of Christ" in the

midst of a broken system that creates rancor, resentment, racism, selfishness, fear, exploitation, danger and disregard for law.

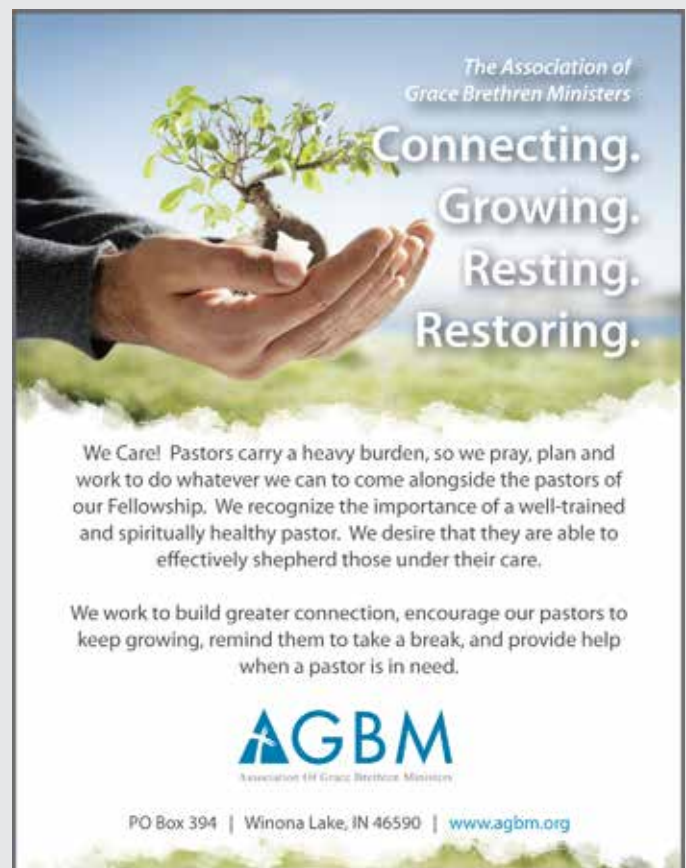
It recognizes that meaningful solutions to the immigration problem are not easily reached and that the solutions must come through a determined will to reach them. "We deplore the present situation when our Federal Government is unable to resolve key immigration issues year after year," it concludes.

Read the complete the resolutions adopted at Access 2017 at charisfellowship.us/page/resolutions2017.



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NEW NAME

BOLSTERS VALUES AND MISSION

Charis Fellowship is the new “doing business as” name for The Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC). The announcement was made during a live stream video event on November 7, 2017, from Grace Church, Bath Campus, in Akron, Ohio.

The new brand comes after many months of brainstorming sessions, research, and professional input.

Charis means “grace” and is representative of the congregations and ministries that affiliated with the Grace Brethren movement. Most churches within the fellowship already use the word “Grace” in their title, but it also is found in the names of other congregations not partnered with the FGBC.

A word that means “grace” creates an identity for a fellowship that shares a common commitment to understanding the word of God (biblical truth), living as the people of God (relationship), and fulfilling the purposes of God (mission).

Charis is also a nod to the global movement with which the network of churches is aligned – the Charis Alliance, a network of similarly-focused groups of evangelical believers around the world who seek to share experience and resources, and to partner with one another in ministry.

The word “fellowship” has been retained to be consistent. The FGBC had frequently been referred to as “Fellowship” by its members. Keeping the word in the title allows for continuity with the past and is a freshening of the current name.

“Our Fellowship places a high value on biblical truth, biblical relationship, and biblical mission,” said Tom Avey, fellowship coordinator. “This mission drives us to actively start new

churches, develop leaders, and do good in our communities for the sake of the Gospel.

“The name, Charis Fellowship, calls to where we have come from and assures that we are only getting strong in these values and mission,” he added.

A new logo is a part of the rebranding. The graphic C in the logo consists of three sweeping flags that represent the core elements of biblical truth, biblical relationship, and biblical mission. The colors of the logo, steel blue, sage, and sky, correspond with each of the elements.

The Charis Fellowship began in 1939 as the National Fellowship of Brethren Churches, though its roots reach to 1708 when a small group of sincere Christ-followers committed to form a church that would be faithful to the teachings of the New Testament. The name changed to Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches in the mid-1970s. The Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, Inc., will continue to be the legal name of the group.

Today the movement is made up of more than 260 autonomous churches in the United States and Canada, more than 30 national and cooperating ministries, and 20 cooperating districts. Outside of North America, more than 20 evangelical groups are part of the Charis Alliance.

Those present at the live announcement of the new name.



**CHARIS
FELLOWSHIP**
Truth · Relationship · Mission

GAINS THOUGHTS

**I'm just saying; I know
the Charis Fellowship.
(Nice new name!)**

**And even as I served
26 years at The Chapel,
an independent church,
I have kept many
connections and touches.**

**May I offer some
observations from an
insider who went another
direction not far away?**

When my parents separated in the late '40's and waved goodbye to the church we attended (and the wave was returned), our grandparents took my brother and sister and me to the new start-up Grace Brethren church meeting at the Harrisburg, Pa., YWCA.

Then when our grandparents donated land for a new church building just a block from our houses, we were there "whenever the doors were open," as one verse says. My brother was head usher at age 16, and I was his assistant at 15. I won the national youth preaching contest when I was 16. We prayed with the church on Wednesday evenings and went out on visitation on Thursdays. Of course, there were four or five sessions every Sunday.

Bear with me. Then I went to Grace College and Seminary for eight years, including teaching journalism at the college; served two years as associate pastor with one of the most conservative and best Grace Brethren pastors; before loving 15 years as pastor at Ashland, Ohio's Grace Brethren Church, with a simultaneous seven years as lead director at CE National in Winona Lake, Ind.

My last two years of that I was also moderator of the national Fellowship and chair of the two-year study committee on Brethren distinctives.

I'm just saying; I know the Charis Fellowship. (Nice new name!)

FOR THE KINGDOM FROM AN OUTSIDER-FRIEND

And even as I served 26 years at The Chapel, an independent church, and then began coaching pastors and teaching these last eight years, I have kept many connections and touches.

May I offer some observations from an insider who went another direction not far away?

Celebrate your relationships and friendships with each other. You can be close to many in ministry, but there are strong connections with partners in the Fellowship. Enjoy those for sure. Keep them candid and major on unified goals. These connections can be so supportive and joyful.

Never go back to arguing about smaller issues and areas of distinctives rather than majoring on mission and what unites! I remember writing on my national conference business agenda, standing on the platform while moderating, “What am I doing leading a meeting with people arguing about nuances of words?”

It does seem like those days are over, and that there is grace (or is it *charis*?) for differences in practices. There is so much for all of us to do, and it seems like liberty calls us to keep featuring what is especially clear and our main mission.

Forget forever the little fundamentalist legalisms that scared us about dancing and people who differed on wine. My fourth

grade Sunday school teacher told me that if I were in a movie when Jesus returned, I wouldn't go along back to heaven. I was scared to death when I came out of *King Kong*, the movie.

I think we all agree that we need to be hard on ourselves and easy on others. And *King Kong* really would not have been worth it, if my teacher's theory had been true.

Rejoice together in the mutual embracing and proclaiming of our verbally inspired Bible. Many denominations and fellowships have fudged on that central one. Or at least on teaching it like it deserves expository centrality.

I will say that I used to smile when comrades boasted that we were a “non-creedal church,” while reciting a sort-of creed, “The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible.”

Join the many who do not wave goodbye to the hurting people churches used to neglect, and who gain ground for grace in their communities, starting ministries or partnering with others. Many good churches waited too long on this, thinking only that mission was about crossing the salt-water, but it is never too late.

Cherish your national and worldwide combination ministries. They seem robust and creative, and most of us who knew Winona Lake, Ind., as the Holy Land can accept that some of them have moved

to other spots! And the ones that have stayed there – those I still know best – are vibrant and good for the churches and many others.

Be glad for what looks like undeniable honor to younger pastors too, with allowance for them to lead and model church life and mission. It seems like there is honor also to the veterans without establishing a “Good Ol’ Boys” club” that has hurt so many fellowships and denominations.

Give thanks for the strong mood of love for other churches and fellowships, with little thought that you are Lone Rangers or the only true deposit place for God's grace! No one ever really believed that, but it might have sounded so at times.

I will always be grateful for those who remained encouraging friends when I made the hard decision to go to another church, and I threw away the nasty notes that called it heresy. I am sure they did not really mean it!

I just wanted to give thanks to God for you, and to commend you for wonderful gains for the kingdom of our Lord and Master, whom we serve together.

Knute Larson coaches pastors and churches, majoring on pulpit, leadership, and daily grace. He draws from his 41 years of experience as senior pastor of two churches: Grace Brethren Church, Ashland, Ohio, and The Chapel, Akron, Ohio.

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