

GRACE CONNECT

Connecting People and Churches | Fall 2020



FAITH
& VOTING



**A resource for networking,
inspiration, and information.**

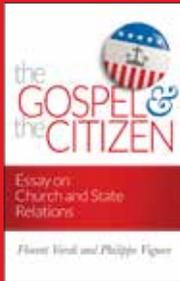
A community that nurtures prayer,
collaboration, and encouragement.

Your gift helps this ministry continue.
See the enclosed envelope for more information.

GRACECONNECT.US

Brethren Missionary Herald Company
PO Box 544, Winona Lake, IN 46590
574-268-1122 • 800-348-2756

BMH



How should a Christian
respond to the confusion
generated by the variety of
candidates for public office?

The Gospel and the Citizen
by Florent Varak and
Philippe Viguier
\$10.99

ISBN 978-0-88469-313-0

BMHBOOKS.COM

Brethren Missionary Herald Company
PO Box 544, Winona Lake, IN 46590
574-268-1122 • 800-348-2756

CONTENTS

3 A Sacred Honor

Voting is an honor we shouldn't ignore, but ultimately God is the one who seats kings and rulers.

4 Being a Witness

The church is to be a witness in word and in deed, no matter the situation.

6 WWJD? Jesus and Today's Political Climate

Jesus didn't teach us how to cast ballots, but He provided relevant guidelines to today's political climate.

10 Solving the Mystery

Wise instruction to become ministers of reconciliation in a broken world.

13 Adapting Technology to a New Normal

Pivoting to use technology in the age of Covid-19

15 Masking Up

Tireless effort provides cloth masks for community.

16 Food Distribution Gives Hope to Families

Community food drive provides opportunities to be hands and feet of Jesus.

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 Charis Fellowship. The publication's mission is to nurture Great Commission teamwork by connecting people and churches of the Charis Fellowship. Inclusion of an article or advertisement does not necessarily indicate endorsement by the Brethren Missionary Herald Company or the Charis Fellowship.

GraceConnect is available free of charge. To subscribe, to change your address, or to stop receiving the publication, please contact us at: *GraceConnect*, P.O. Box 544, Winona Lake, IN 46590; 574-268-1122; or email cpeebles@bmhbooks.com

Editorial Submissions: Any news and information from churches and people in the Charis Fellowship (Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches) is welcome. Letters may be edited for length or clarity. Opinions expressed are those of the authors, and there is no implied endorsement by the BMH Co. or by the Charis Fellowship. All Charis Fellowship churches have permission to use any *GraceConnect* content in church bulletins, newsletters, or websites as long as appropriate credit is given.

Staff: Liz Cutler Gates, *managing editor*;
Cathie Peebles, *circulation*; Terry Julien, *graphic design*

Board of Directors, Brethren Missionary Herald Co.:
Ben Russell, *chair*; Doug Courter; Tonya Fawcett; Scott Feather

Follow *GraceConnect* on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

A SACRED HONOR

I've voted in every presidential election since my college years, but I have to admit, this one has me in a quandary. I'm not sure either candidate is worthy of my vote.



I'll never forget voting in my first presidential election. As a college student 200 miles from home, I'd requested an absentee ballot. When it came in the mail, I wandered to the empty dining commons in my dorm, where I proceeded prayerfully to select my choice of candidates. It felt like a sacred honor.

Now we're in the midst of another election cycle in the U.S. I've voted in every presidential election since my college years, but I have to admit, this one has me in a quandary. I'm not sure either candidate is worthy of my vote. (There, I said it.) Yet, I know that come November 3, I'm going to have to indicate my choice. I'll do it knowing that God is in control. After all, He is the one who seats kings and rulers.

As I've watched this season progress, I was taken to a treatise written by French pastors Florent Varak and Philippe Viguier. *The Gospel and the Citizen* (BMH Books 2016) is a brief book that examines what role of Christians should play in politics. While written initially for a French audience, it has wide ranging insights for North American

readers. It's a practical small volume, but I particularly liked their wisdom about being a witness when it comes to exerting change on moral, cultural, or political structures, so we've included an excerpt in this issue. (The book may be ordered at bmhbooks.com.)

It's the one of several articles in this issue that I trust will provide perspective as you head to the ballot box this fall.

I know I've said it before, but this has been an unusual year. Life as we knew it has changed – from how we accomplish grocery shopping to how we do church. Early on, we at GraceConnect wanted to share how people in Charis Fellowship churches were faring in the midst of the pandemic. We began a series of feature stories of individuals and couples who were stepping up to the plate to meet needs in their communities. First published exclusively at graceconnect.us, we're sharing several of Faces of Grace stories here. If you'd like to read them all, go to graceconnect.us/category/faces-of-grace/. We plan to add more to the series throughout the rest of the year.

As you begin to consider year-end giving, I ask that you include GraceConnect in your plans. Your gift will enable us to continue to share the stories of God at work in the Charis Fellowship through a variety of platforms, including online, social media, and the pages of this magazine. An envelope is provided, but you may also go online at graceconnect.us and click on the blue "Donate Now" button. Your financial support of this ministry is now more important than ever!



Liz Cutler Gates, lcgates@bmhbooks.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.

BEING A WITNESS

by Florent Varak
and Philippe Viguier

In *The Gospel and the Citizen*, Florent Varak and Philippe Viguier outline five possible models for interaction between the church and the state: theocracy, lobbying, retreat, subjection, and being a witness. In this excerpt, they discuss the importance of being a witness when it comes to exerting change on moral, cultural, or political structures.

Excerpted from The Gospel and the Citizen, Essay on the Christian and the Church in Politics (BMH Books 2016)

The church is to be a witness of Jesus Christ, in word and in deed. It should testify to the transformation Jesus brings about in the life of those who believe in him, as well as in the local church. The church exists to be a witness and that is the essence of its influence. It does not exist to bring change to moral, cultural, or political structures here on earth.

According to this model, the church should not be a direct supporter of any particular political party, ideology, or economical system. It cannot be limited to any earthly regime. Outside of the kingdom of God, there is no corresponding system which fulfills the requirements given by God. The church walks in obedience to a totally different value system, which it first imposes on itself. It must not, through its teaching or by the public opinions of its pastors, back a specific political candidate, even one who rises up out of its own ranks.

It is our conviction that there is no such thing as a Christian law, a Christian culture, or a Christian political party, even though biblical values may at times be observed in all of these areas. There are only Christian men, women, and children living together in a local church community which should reflect the Savior and draw those who observe it into its fold. Individual Christians certainly have a natural influence on those who surround them through the Spirit and the Word of God. But each one should exercise this influence according to his or her own conscience without claiming to have received a specific calling or divine right.

Witnessing through the Word: The Gospel

The first time we see the word “church” in the Bible is when Peter realizes that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of the living God. Jesus tells Peter, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter [*petros*, pebble], and on this rock [*petra*, boulder] I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:17-18). Jesus builds his church through those who understand that he is the one sent by God to bring in the ultimate kingdom, and that even death cannot stand against it. This kingdom is based on “the things of God” (Matthew 16:23), which are revealed in his Word (1 Corinthians 2:1-16).

In three years, Jesus, the Word made flesh, trained eleven men whom he sent out filled with the Holy Spirit. These men were to proclaim forgiveness (John 20:20-23) and repentance (Luke 24:47), and to teach all nations how to follow Jesus as his disciples, through baptism and obedience to his teachings (Matthew 28:16-19).

The book of Acts, which covers the first 30 years of church history, tells us about the progress of the Word beginning in Jerusalem (Acts 4:4; 6:7; 8:4; 11:1; 12:24; 13:49; 19:10, 20). It shows how the disciples fleshed out the Word of Life (Acts 5:20), bringing about the conversion of thousands (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14, etc.). They also trained leaders who were responsible for the spiritual welfare of the early churches which then multiplied throughout the Mediterranean basin (Acts 14:23-24ff, 19:9-10, 20:17).

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A CHRISTIAN LAW, A CHRISTIAN CULTURE, OR A CHRISTIAN POLITICAL PARTY... THERE ARE ONLY CHRISTIAN MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN.



The apostles and their coworkers then wrote letters, or epistles, to the churches. We don't find any exhortation to believers in these letters telling them to take action to change society. On the other hand, the epistles invite Christians to live differently through the strength given to them by the gospel.

Witnessing through Example: Community

Jesus uses the word "church" a second time in Matthew 18. This entire chapter lays down principles for church life. Individuals gain entrance into the community of believers by personal conversion, not by cultural or family heritage. They are to adopt the humble attitude of a child, and heed how they live so as not to discourage the young and the fainthearted. They are to seek out those who wander from the fold with a compassionate heart, and consider those who persist in sin as nonbelievers. They are to forgive others graciously.

This is the calling of the church. It should be a testimony of radically different community life. Obviously, this isn't always the case. Even the first church, who was said to be "of one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32) as they shared all of their worldly goods, had much to learn. This local church, which was made up solely of Jews, showed a certain disdain for Samaritans and Gentiles. God had to intervene in spectacular ways so that church leaders could be shaken out of their prejudices (Acts 8:14-17; 10:9ff; 10:44; 11:17-18).

The social progress of this world is not the church's responsibility. However, it must serve as an example to those around it. The New Testament speaks of local communities where the poorest man can become an elder or "bishop"

as they were called at that time (1 Timothy 3:1-2). Women are co-heirs of the same spiritual grace and should be treated with deference by their brothers (1 Peter 3:7) and Christian masters are called to treat their slaves in a decent manner, without threatening them (Ephesians 6:5ff; Philemon).

The church speaks of the gospel and lives it out so that those who observe it may be led to Christ. The church should draw people to it and make them desire a changed life; otherwise it isn't doing its job. Such a testimony will certainly have an influence on those who observe it.

A Living Witness: The Church in the World

We distinguish the role of the church as a body (a legal entity represented by its leaders) from that of Christians who take public social responsibility through their professional, artistic, or familial involvement. This distinction between the disciple of Christ and the church is not always easy to identify in the New Testament, but it exists. For example, Jesus closes each of his letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor (Revelation 2-3) by calling each individual to listen to what he has to say. Paul also makes a distinction between the two spheres of responsibility when he invites the church to excommunicate a member who has committed incest but forbids them to judge nonbelievers: "God judges those outside" (1 Corinthians 5:13). Christians have to behave in a certain way, but that behavior is not necessarily to be expected by the world, and the church has its claims upon its members, not upon society.

Protestant tradition rightly recognizes that everyone is called to be useful to society. Whether artist or doctor, lawyer

or nurse, stay-at-home mom, or teacher, each disciple does his or her part "in God's name" to build up their community. These vocations are just as worthy, just as "religious" in God's eyes, as the call to full time ministry as a pastor or missionary. Our Christian conscience calls each one of us to excellence in our particular area of work.

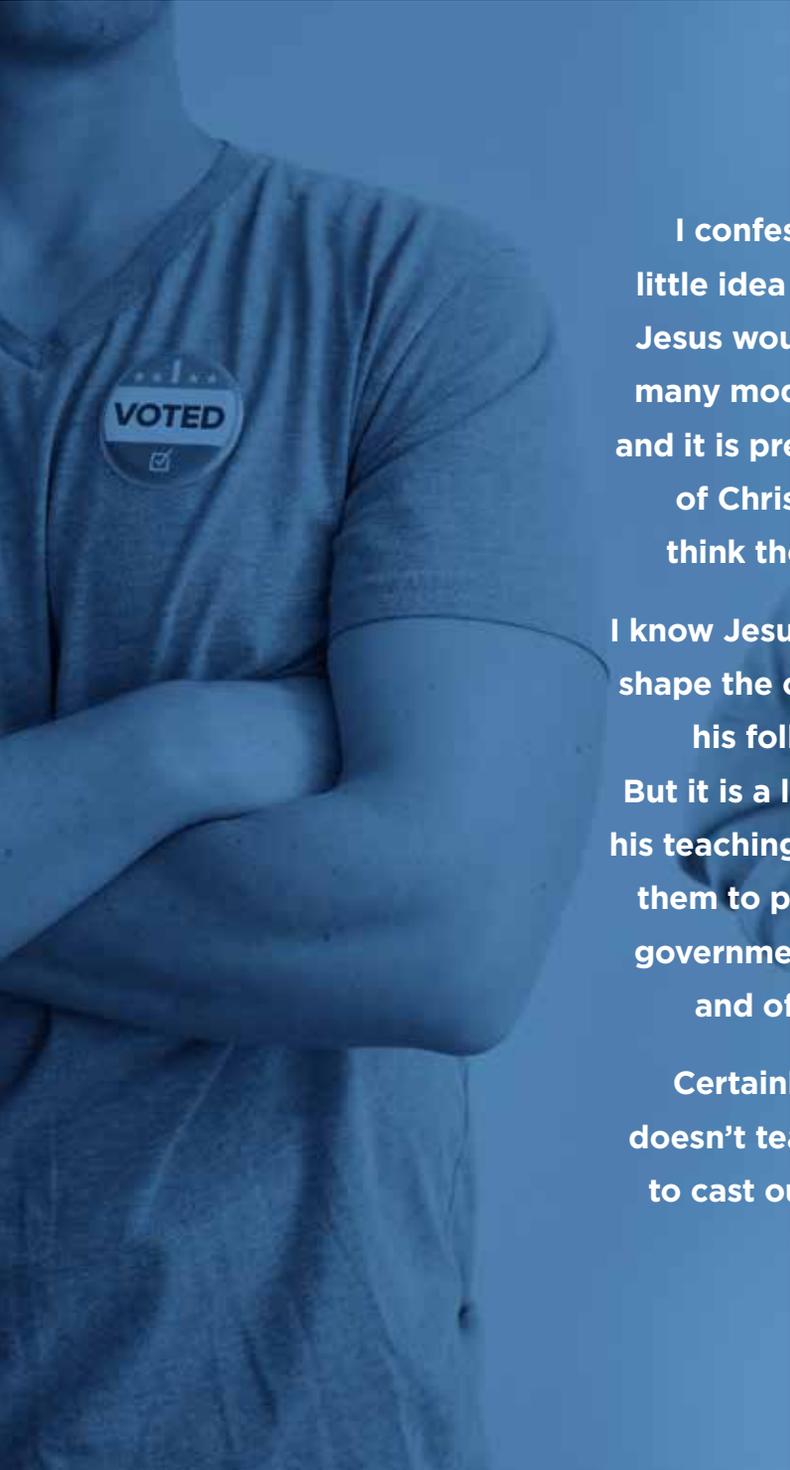
Many Christians make secular commitments that they believe to be in conformity to their specific calling, including in the area of politics. But these commitments should not be done on behalf of the church or in the name of Christianity. These decisions are made on an individual basis, according to each person's own conscience and value system. Our values are certainly influenced by our faith, but we must realize that a Christian who gets involved in politics will not usher in a "Christian society."

It is therefore legitimate that a Christian should get involved, if he considers it to be his role, in influencing society, whether it's as a legislator, an attorney, a mayor, a congressman, a police officer, or any other public office. He is obviously called to fulfill his duties with integrity, in other words, according to his Christian values. He should not do it, however, on behalf of the church or in the name of Christianity. It must be the commitment of a Christian, but not a Christian commitment. This is much more than a simple matter of semantics; it has to do with the authority and protection of the church's central message.

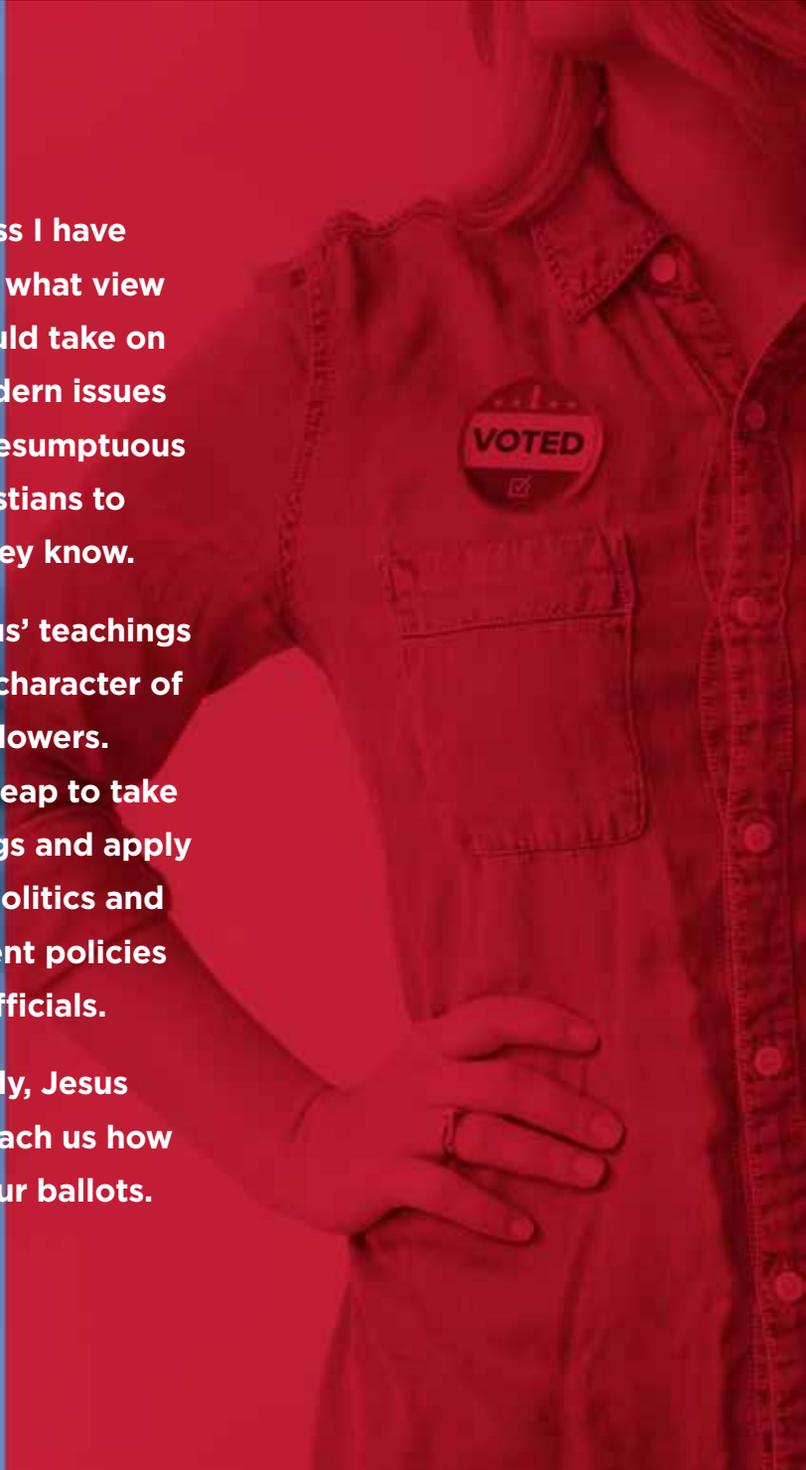
Florent Varak pastored the Grace Brethren Church in Lyon, France, for more than 20 years. He currently is director of the church equipping network at Encompass World Partners. Philippe Viguier is the current pastor of the Lyon church. Both are graduates of Master's Seminary.

WWJD? JESUS AND TODAY'S POLITICAL CLIMATE

by Donald Shoemaker



I confess I have little idea what view Jesus would take on many modern issues and it is presumptuous of Christians to think they know.



I know Jesus' teachings shape the character of his followers. But it is a leap to take his teachings and apply them to politics and government policies and officials.

Certainly, Jesus doesn't teach us how to cast our ballots.

THE CHURCH SHOULD USE ITS VOICE TO ENCOURAGE CIVILITY... BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT ARE FAILING AT CIVILITY, FROM THE PRESIDENT AND OTHERS AT THE TOP ON DOWN.



“WJD?” was asked by Al Sharpton and Doug Pagitt in a column in TIME (online, August 27, 2020). Pagitt is a political activist who leads a congregation in Minneapolis named Solomon’s Porch.

Weighing whether or not to support Trump this year, white Christians should consider a simple, familiar question: What would Jesus do?

This election is a test of faith—much like the one in the gospel story of Jesus’ temptation. Jesus does not give in to Satan’s promises, choosing integrity over power. Trump’s promise of white Christian supremacy is a similar test.

Truth be told, I’m pretty well versed in political conversations and I’ve never heard Mr. Trump promise any notion of “white Christian supremacy” in the U.S. *Evangelical Christians would disavow him if he ever did.* The authors must give evidence of this charge or be guilty of bearing false witness.

And truth be told, I confess I have little idea what view Jesus would take on many modern issues and it is presumptuous of Christians to think they know. I know Jesus’ teachings shape the character of his followers (for example, see The Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12). But it is a leap to take his teachings and apply them to politics and government policies and officials. Certainly, Jesus doesn’t teach us how to cast our ballots. Nor does he “test our faith” by how we vote in the upcoming presidential election.

I do know that his company of followers (the 12 disciples) included an anti-Roman zealot named Simon and a tax collector for Rome named Matthew. That’s quite a political spread and may have led to some heated discussion among the disciples. But maybe Jesus kept them quiet—political persuasions shouldn’t interfere with following Jesus anyway.

Here are five points on Jesus’ teaching that I think are relevant to today’s political situation:

1. Jesus taught that all human authority is given by God.

This is a great theme in the Book of Daniel: “The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes” (Daniel 4:25). When he was on trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, Jesus said to him, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above” (John 19:11).

Our citizenship enables us to select leaders and affect government in many ways. But ultimately God is in charge. This must not cause us to slack off, but it should encourage us.

2. Jesus taught about our duties to both the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of man.

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Luke 20:25).

Jesus taught that God’s Kingdom and Caesar’s realm are distinct, and we have duties to both. Jesus’ kingdom is unlike any kingdom on earth. “My kingdom is not of this world,” Jesus told Pilate (John 18:36).

By its nature, God’s kingdom is *all-inclusive* whereas Caesar’s realm is *limited*. To Caesar we give *limited loyalty*; to God we give *complete loyalty*.

We can and should fulfill limited duties as members of a particular “kingdom of man.” In sum, the New Testament teaches us: Pray for your rulers, pay your taxes, obey and show honor to rulers of both lesser and greater authority (see Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-5; Titus 3:1-2; 1 Peter 2:13-17).

The New Testament tells followers of Jesus how to live under authoritarian government. The right to vote would have never entered the authors’ minds.

How do we “give to Caesar” today as we live in a participative democracy? Churches can take positions and expend effort on moral issues, register voters, encourage members to write legislators and other political leaders on issues, and encourage their members to get involved in worthy causes and to vote (but not tell them for whom to vote).

The church should use its voice to encourage *civility*, for it is severely lacking in today’s supercharged political atmosphere. Both *left* and *right* are failing at *civility*, from the president and others at the top on down.

3. Jesus taught us the priority of Kingdom Values.

“Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness...” (Matthew 6:33).

We must always maintain a distinction between the ultimate issues of the Kingdom of God and the penultimate possibilities of the political process. The latter are worthwhile but not perfect. They are secondary and not

Working With Charis Churches To Preserve Our Gospel Footprint

ACROSS THE USA AND CANADA

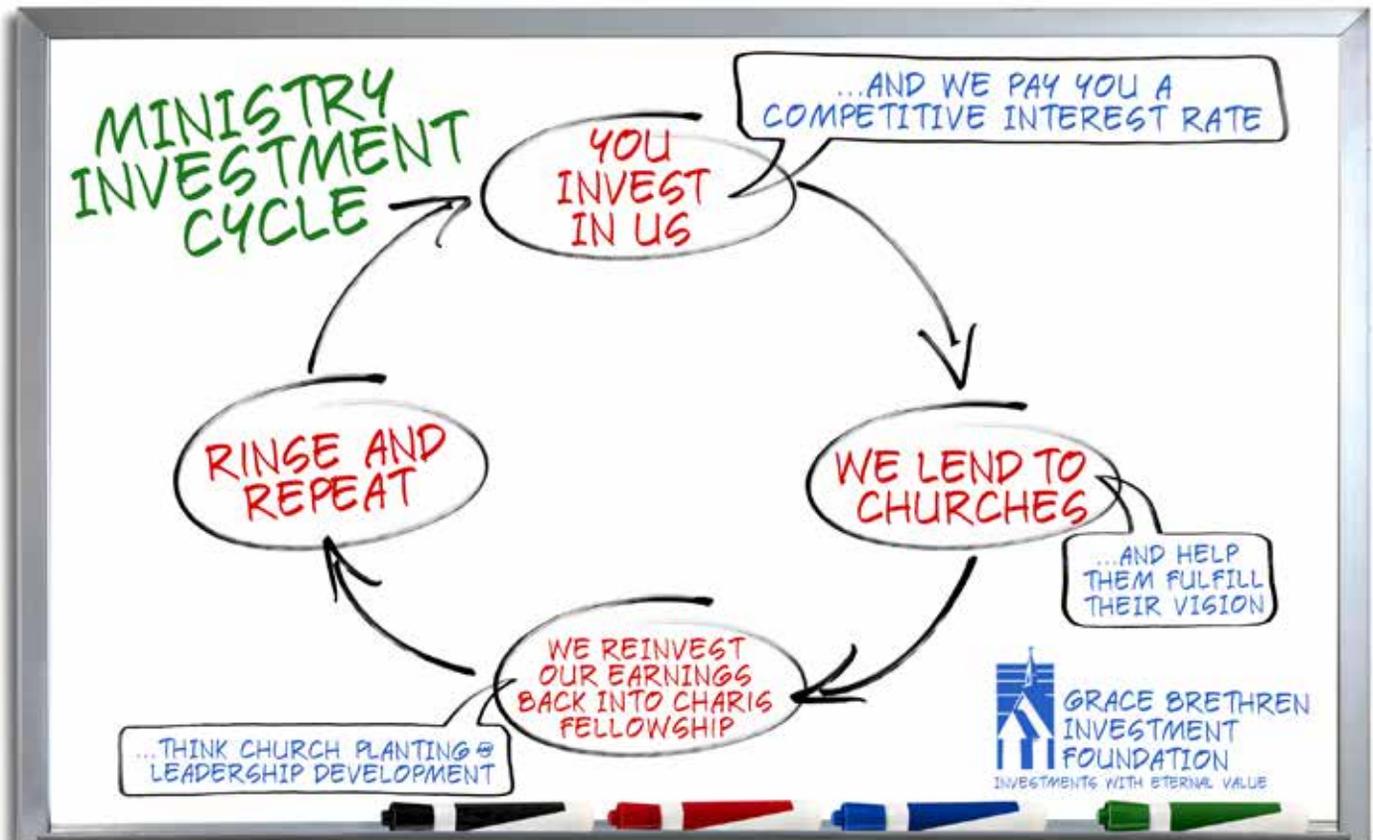


REFRESH · REVITALIZE · RESTART

Charis Fellowship Churches across the country are working in partnership with Assist Church Expansion to plan for a healthy, vibrant future.

Contact us to inquire about how we can help your church see a brand new day.

1.855.444.4510 · www.assistcx.org · nathan@assistcx.org



NOTE: This material shall not constitute an offer to sell or the solicitation of an offer to buy, nor shall there be any sale of Investment Accounts, in any state or other jurisdiction in which the Foundation has not authorized the making of any such offer, solicitation or sale (or in any manner or to any persons not consistent with any limitations on such authorization). The offering is made to eligible persons in authorized states or other jurisdictions solely by the Foundation's Prospectus, which more fully describes certain risks involved in a purchase of Investment Accounts. The Investment Accounts are unsecured obligations of the Foundation that are not insured or guaranteed by any government agency or other third party.

SOME CHRISTIANS DON'T LIKE TO HEAR ME SAY THIS, BUT THE CHURCH MUST BE WHERE A CONSERVATIVE REPUBLICAN AND A LIBERAL DEMOCRAT CAN JOIN HANDS AND SING,



The Dunker Church at Antietam

primary. They need the church's voice and attention but must not get top billing.

Our churches must teach on morally laden issues and proposals like good or bad legislation or initiatives. But be sure that the biblical "connectedness" is made clear. Of course we must be sensitive to the congregation and visitors in such matters, but avoiding the topics should not be considered an option.

4. Jesus taught his followers to be "people of peace."

Our fellowship of churches was known in years gone by as German Baptists or "Dunkards" (referring to how they baptized). It had a little meetinghouse where the Battle of Antietam was fought during the Civil War. Antietam was the war's bloodiest battle. The reconstructed church structure stands today as a witness to a Christian group committed to peacemaking.

Jesus taught us The Beatitudes (Mt. 5:1-12), which should mark our political discourse. Be poor in spirit (not proud or haughty or arrogant in spirit). Be mournful and meek. Hunger and thirst after righteousness. Be merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers. Rejoice in persecution. Those who show these qualities become salt to the world and a light that cannot be hidden.

Today's political atmosphere creates political enemies. One Seattle council member boasted, "I don't have any Republican friends." Sad commentary. Well, if they're not friends, how should political enemies be treated?

Jesus taught, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" (Matthew 5:44, 46-47).

5. Jesus taught that he would build his church through his disciples who are obeying his Great Commission in the world.

The mission of the church is not necessarily to transform governments. The church's mission is to create new followers (disciples) of Jesus throughout all the world. This is done by baptizing people who confess Jesus and, very important, teaching them to obey all that Jesus has taught us (the Gospel of Matthew, itself, is a "training manual"). Read Matthew 16:18 and 28:18-20.

As the church obeys and expands in this world, the church will find itself intertwined with cultures and governments. There is no way to avoid this. We must engage these with care and determination. We don't have the luxury of withdrawal from our culture or the political process. Jesus' followers are loyal citizens, but "when push comes to shove" we take our stands.

Our churches can't escape politics, but we can rise above it. Our message is not political. We come together to uplift God's Kingdom and hear from Jesus. The unity of the church must transcend all political and secular alliances.

Some Christians don't like to hear me say this, but the church must be where a conservative Republican and a liberal Democrat can join hands and sing,

*We are one in the bond of love...
Let us join our hand that the world will know,
We are one in the bond of love.**

**The Bond of Love, by Otis Skillings, c. 1971 Lillenas Publishing Co.*

Donald Shoemaker is pastor emeritus, Grace Community Church of Seal Beach, Calif. From 1985 to 2019, he served as chair of the Charis Fellowship Social Concerns Committee, helping shape resolutions that express the convictions of the Charis Fellowship on certain contemporary social issues. This article was originally prepared for the Men's Fellowship at the Seal Beach church. Don regularly writes at donaldshoemakerministries.com.

SOLVING THE MYSTERY

by Viki Rife

Our experience with mystery-solving helps us identify with the Apostle Paul... God opened his eyes to The Mystery. The clues had been there all along, in the Scriptures Paul so devotedly studied.

It took a special revelation from God, though, to help him put the clues together and see the answer.



If you have ever read a mystery novel, you know how each clue tugs at your mind, pulling you into a deeper search to solve the mystery. The clues make so much sense once the mystery is explained!

Our experience with mystery-solving helps us identify with the Apostle Paul. As a staunch Jewish leader, he was committed to making sure his people benefitted fully from their special standing with God. He was so zealous that he was willing to travel outside his own nation to bring back those he considered were not upholding God's expectations.

Then God opened his eyes to The Mystery. The clues had been there all along, in the Scriptures Paul so devotedly studied. It took a special revelation from God, though, to help him put the clues together and see the answer. The Mystery seems to have transformed his whole perspective on life. He never got over the wonder of it. Again and again his letters emphasize how crucial The Mystery was to every decision he made.

What was The Mystery? Listen to his own description:

"Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 3:2-6 NIV).

This, then is The Mystery that captivated Paul: People who had been separated were now one body. God does not discriminate; he loves all humans equally and wants to unite them through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul elaborates earlier in the same letter:

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them



PAUL NOW MADE INTENSE SACRIFICES TO HELP RECONCILE HIS FORMER ENEMIES TO GOD. WHY? BECAUSE IN UNDERSTANDING THE MYSTERY, PAUL ACCEPTED A SACRED TRUST.

to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Ephesians 2:14-18).

Christ’s love gave Paul a deep, enduring love for the Gentiles, whom he once viewed as enemies. The dividing wall of hostility was gone, put to death by the sacrifice of Christ. Paul now made intense sacrifices to help reconcile his former enemies to God. Why? Because in understanding The Mystery, Paul accepted a sacred trust. Here’s how he explains what drove his commitment:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf. Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

That one paragraph is so rich it deserves to be unpacked. Let’s list some of the basic concepts:

1. God made us a new creation.
2. In that unique creation, he reconciled us to himself through Christ.
3. He also gave us the ministry of reconciliation—a chance to be part of The Mystery of reconciling the world to himself.
4. He has committed the message of reconciliation to us!
5. We are God’s ambassadors; he is appealing to the world through us.
6. We are to be imploring people on Christ’s behalf to be reconciled to God.

The call to be Ministers of Reconciliation is implied throughout Scripture, but with the revelation of The Mystery, the entire New Testament becomes an instruction manual for God’s ambassadors. Reading it with a heart that understands God’s desire for reconciliation

is essential for those he has entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. In a divided world, we can be confident that we have the solution to The Mystery which eluded rulers and nations throughout history. Our God has the power to break down walls of hostility and make us one.

How does The Mystery affect our decisions? If it is as important to us as it was to Paul, we will view each person we encounter through the lens of God’s desire for reconciliation. Our purpose in every relationship should be to help others be reconciled to God. That difficult person in your life is someone God wants to heal and restore, whether that person is an unbeliever or a brother and sister in Christ. The needy or clueless people you hate to see coming? God wants to show His love to them through you. Those individuals who have political or theological stances that rub you the wrong way? They need for you to respond to them as Christ would, gently bearing with them.

This doesn’t mean, however, that we enable toxic behavior. Think of how we use the term “reconciliation” with our bank account. We can’t just act on whatever number we ended up with each month. Instead, we need to carefully examine our figures to see if they measure up with what our bank says is actually in our account. In the same way, we need to make sure that our decisions and actions are truly reconciled to the truth of God’s perspective.

We are called to be reconciled and to reconcile others to the way God keeps accounts. How we do it, however, is the challenge. When we keep the love and compassion of Jesus in mind, instead of our own hurts and offenses, we can respond to the most difficult relationships as Jesus did, full of both grace and truth.

There is no room for hostility in God’s children—that’s what Jesus came to destroy. Instead, each of us we must continue to dig deeply and wholeheartedly into God’s Word for Christlike answers to the conflicts that enter our lives. As the Charis Fellowship, we must together seek guidance from God to address the problems currently plaguing our society. He has provided the wise instructions we need to become Ministers of Reconciliation in a broken world.

Viki Rife is the executive director of Women of Grace USA.

A DECADE OF WORK
10
A LIFETIME OF HOPE



To rescue at-risk children, restore their broken lives, and equip them to impact their families and communities.

10th Anniversary
GROW
Grace Refuge Outreach Worldwide
พันธกิจช่วยเหลือคนไร้บ้าน

For more information, visit our website at grow-worldwide.com or contact:
Jeana Harley - Executive Director
jharley@grow-worldwide.com
(330) 465-9617

REWRITE THEIR FUTURE



IT'S HARD TO STAY healthy WHEN YOU'RE DRINKING FROM A mud hole.

innovate. invest. empower.

Learn how you can provide lasting, clean water to the Central African Republic at waterforgood.org

water for good

Urban Hope | PHILADELPHIA Urban Hope | LOS ANGELES

Thanks for Partnering with Us in These Life-Changing Ministries!



ON MISSION 

CENational.org

INSPIRE
Charis Pastors Network



Catalyzing growth in our Charis Fellowship churches by **ENCOURAGING & EQUIPPING** our pastors.

InspirePastors.org

ADAPTING TECHNOLOGY TO A NEW NORMAL

Like many churches in the age of Covid-19, folks at the Grace Brethren Church in Brookville, Ohio (Rick Hartley, lead pastor), found it was necessary to jump to a digital format to broadcast services and keep the congregation informed.

Church member Karen McDorman, a real estate broker by trade, was ready.

She had already been working on the church website and had activated 'Google my Business' on the site.

"Our notice in the community and hits online skyrocketed after I added a photo and some information," she recalls. She shared the analytics report with Pastor Rick and both could see the advantage of using the technology to reach their community for the Lord.

She realized the church also needed to establish a public Facebook page, something that was already planned, in addition to the update of the church website. "If we were going to get all these people to check us out, we wanted them to want to know more about us, what we believe as a church, and welcome them to be a part of it," she added.

"As timing would have it, our proactive mode quickly became reactive mode with the onset of the Coronavirus and the shutdown," she stressed. "Like most churches, we were now scrambling to be able to keep our church family connected and live stream services."

But she also admits: "God's timing is always perfect..."

Previously the church only posted an audio file of the sermons to the website. Now, as churches plan for re-opening, they are seeing the need to keep streaming worship services, using a variety of social media platforms.

"At first I thought there weren't as many watching compared with the number of attenders," notes Karen. Then she realized that what looks like one individual logged into the broadcast on Facebook might be a family of four.



Many in the church have hosted "watch parties" on Facebook and encouraged their friends to join them. The result was many people participating who might never have entered the church.

The public Facebook page went live in late April. "It is growing in 'likes' and 'followers' and we now have a public place to post our sermons, links, and an explanation of what it is to be part of the Charis Fellowship," adds Karen.

For a smaller church like Brookville, a quality digital footprint has become vital. "The visibility is so important because it gives us a chance to take what we have in our culture (Internet) and use it for a higher purpose: redeeming it for Christ," she says.

Pastor Rick, Karen, and others in the church are seeing the value of continuing to stream services via a variety of social media platforms while encouraging attendees to share watch parties and make it generally easy for the public to find. "It is the future of reaching the unsaved and serving the saved," stresses Karen.

This story first appeared at graceconnect.us as part of the Faces of Grace series during the Covid-19 pandemic.

LINKING YOU TO OUR FELLOWSHIP'S MILITARY AND VA CHAPLAINS.



PRAYER. COMMUNICATION. TRAINING. RECRUITING. SCHOLARSHIPS.

SUPPORT OUR TROOPS. SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER AND BECOME A MEMBER AT EAGLECOMMISSION.ORG.

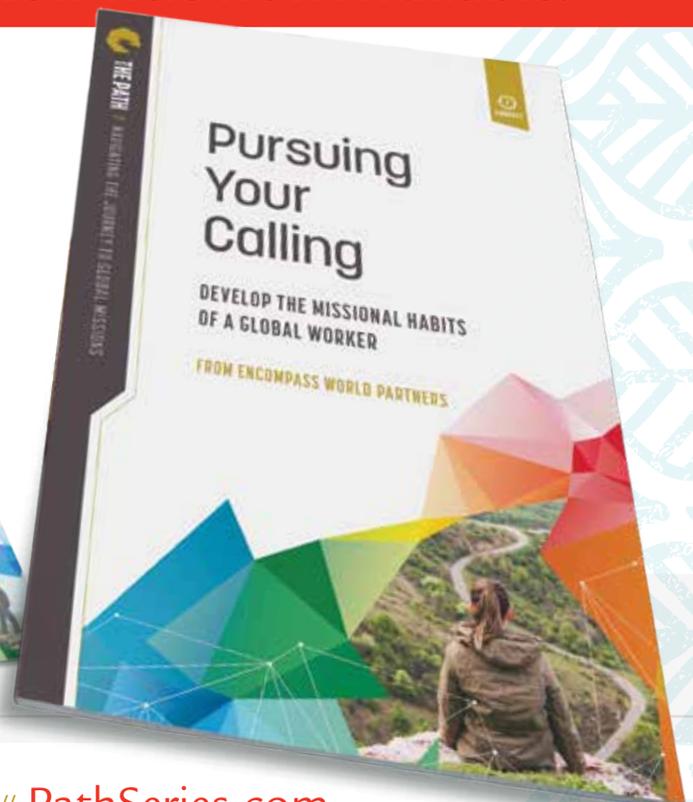


Navigate the journey to global missions

Just as travel tools and resources guide us to destinations, give us insights, and point the way, the books in *The Path Series* will help you explore your calling and navigate the journey to global missions.



New Title Now Available!



 **Encompass®**
WORLD PUBLISHING

Learn more and purchase online // PathSeries.com

MASKING UP

SWEET LEADS EFFORT TO SEW FACE COVERINGS

Ann Sweet admits she hadn't used her 55-year-old sewing machine for more than 20 years when she started making cloth masks to meet a need in her community due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

But her passion for helping others caused her to dust off her machine and start sewing. That has led to nearly 2,000 masks that have been distributed in the Warsaw and Winona Lake, Ind., communities. (See update below.)

She started making a few masks for the local sheltered workshop. Then friends discovered what she was doing and asked her to make some for their personal use. Warsaw mayor, Joe Thallemer, a former neighbor, enquired if she'd make masks for the workers in city departments. She complied on all accounts.

About the same time, Dave Rank, pastor of community impact at Winona Lake, Ind., Grace Brethren Church (WLGBC), discovered her efforts. Soon she was not only sewing but was coordinating an effort among about 30 women and men, mostly from the church, to provide cloth masks for local businesses, community organizations, health care facilities, and retirement homes, including Grace Village Retirement Community.

"Ann is very connected to people throughout Warsaw/Winona Lake," says Dave. "Those connections have led word-of-mouth among those connections about the need for masks – and the mask sewing ministry at WL."

"God's grace is amazing," says Ann, who has attended the church for about 30 years. She said that just when she thinks they have run out of materials, more appears. Mudlove, the ceramics studio known for its inspirational bands, provided elastic cord. Church members donated fabric. After she broke her last sewing machine needle, Lowery's Sewing Center owner Adam Harmon (who also attends WLGBC) opened on a Sunday afternoon so she could replenish her supply. Contributions to the church's Care Fund have covered other expenses.

Then the Warsaw mayor called again. "He asked us to provide 200 masks a week for the foreseeable future," she said. These are being distributed at local fire stations at no charge to area residents. The first day, she delivered 200 masks at 10 o'clock in the morning. "They were all gone by 3," she remembers, "and they asked for more. We will get caught up," she adds resolutely.



"I come from a family that always did things for other people," Ann remembers. "We were poor, if somebody needed something, we did something." While she found that wasn't always so in the real world, she's been a tireless advocate for the less fortunate. She's worked with the Red Cross and World Compassion Network, both which she considers "very practical organizations."

Tireless at the age of 73, she doesn't plan to stop making masks.

“I’m planning to work all summer at this,” she says, with an eye to an expected recurrence of the virus later this year. “When we get all caught up and everybody has a mask, we’re still going to make them for Fall.”

“I’m healthy. My family is healthy. God gives us one chance each day and we need to live that in service with whatever talents we have,” she stresses. “If nobody was helping me, I would still try my best and pass out as many [masks] as I could.”

This story first appeared at graceconnect.us as part of the Faces of Grace series during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since it first ran, Ann and her team have continued to sew. They have stitched 10,300 masks for the community as well as the WLGBC church family, including more than 1,500 handmade masks for Warsaw Community Schools for use by staff, teachers, and students.

FOOD DISTRIBUTION GIVES HOPE TO FAMILIES



Josh and Lindsey Knipple knew there were needy families in their community even before Covid-19. Johnstown, Pa., had once been a thriving coal and steel town, but as those companies closed or left, the local economy suffered. As a result, residents were left without jobs, or could only find low-paying ones at best.

When the couple saw a church in nearby region was serving more than 1,000 needy families in a weekend, they decided to get involved at home. “Where we are, there was a food need even before the pandemic hit,” he says.

He gathered fellow members at Liberty Grace Church in Johnstown, Pa. (Doug Black, pastor), made contact with organizations that could provide food in bulk quantities, and partnered with other churches in their community through an organization called Greater Things Ministry. “Many churches were looking for places to do ministry,” he adds.

The result was a bi-weekly effort to deliver produce, meat, fruit, and other perishable items to the impoverished in the region.

Twenty churches in the Johnstown area jumped on board, providing funding and volunteers to help. (It costs more than \$3,000 each time for two semi-truck loads of food.)

The first event was held at Beulah United Methodist Church in Johnstown. He says that the response was so overwhelming that it was moved to the local high school, where it’s continued to be held.

Since early May he estimates they have served about 500 families a week. Volunteers arrive

early to help sort help sort items into boxes for easy delivery, then stay to load items into the trunks of recipient’s vehicles. Local police and fire departments are on hand to direct traffic.

“We have been able to be the hands and feet of Jesus,” says Josh. “It’s been awesome seeing high school football players from rival schools serving together.”

Every vehicle gets one box loaded with 35 to 40 pounds of nutritious, fresh fare. A tent nearby offers patrons the opportunity to pray with someone, if desired. “There are five to six women who say they can’t do much, ‘but I can pray,’” notes Josh.

Helping people unite for a cause comes naturally to Josh, a former pastor who serves as connection director with Crucified Ministries in Johnstown.

While the food drive initially was held every two weeks, they have since transitioned to a monthly effort. “It’s an incredible thing when churches are able to work together across denomination and across race,” says Josh.

“Josh and Lindsey have a passion for meeting the needs of our community,” says Pastor Doug Black. “The food distributions have given hope to families and built relationships across all of the churches and ministries in our area. I am so thankful for their hearts.”

This story first appeared at graceconnect.us as part of the Faces of Grace series during the Covid-19 pandemic. Josh and his team have continued to serve their community by providing high quality food items on a monthly basis. Their goal is to serve 600 families each time.