

GRACE CONNECT

Connecting People and Churches | Summer-Fall 2021



HOPE



STAY CONNECTED! Six Ways to Be Involved

- 1 Visit graceconnect.us for breaking news in the Charis Fellowship.
- 2 Sign up to get the weekly **GraceConnect e-newsletter**.
- 3 Subscribe to the quarterly **GraceConnect magazine** and have it sent to your home – at no charge! Send your mailing address to cpeebles@bmbhbooks.com.
- 4 Follow [facebook.com/graceconnectus](https://www.facebook.com/graceconnectus) for reports, photos, and prayer requests shared from Charis Fellowship churches.
- 5 Learn more about your faith through thoughtful articles on any of the **GraceConnect platforms** or through books available at bmbhbooks.com.
- 6 Give so that the media ministry of **GraceConnect** may benefit others. Send your gift to the address below or use the convenient online form at graceconnect.us. (See Donate Now! in the upper right corner.)

GRACE
CONNECT.US

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

CONTENTS

3 A Fond Farewell

It's been an honor and a blessing to share God's stories in the Charis Fellowship.

4 Visions of Rapture

Theology has consequences and it often blinds us from some themes of the Bible.

8 Finding Hope in a Radiant Face

We often find hope in an intimate, face-to-face encounter with Jesus.

12 Leading the Beat

Tom Avey's role has been as an "accompanist" for the Charis Fellowship.

16 Propelling Vision

A deep love for the Charis Fellowship prompted Tim Hodge to take on a new role.

20 Creating Connections

Through storytelling, Liz Cutler Gates has helped form connections in the Charis Fellowship.

24 Room at the Table

Community closet helps meet last-minute needs of foster care families.

GraceConnect, founded in January 2004 as *FGBC World*, is published 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@bmbhbooks.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 FOND FAREWELL

Forty years ago, I would have never guessed that I'd close my career working for the Fellowship. It's been an honor and a blessing.

In the 1980s, when I oversaw communications at Grace Brethren Home Missions, I was notified that I was eligible for the retirement plan. I wasn't too far out of college, so I calculated what year I would turn 65, then the retirement age. The year 2020 was the result. I remember thinking it seemed so far away.

Now 2020 has passed. I am heading for my assigned Social Security retirement date of 66 years and two months.

It seems like yesterday I was full of energy and enthusiasm as I was fresh out of college and beginning to work.

I hadn't planned to retire so early. That vim and vigor stayed with me through most of my working years. It wasn't until a second bout with cancer last year, that I began to think differently. While I had planned to work part-time after the end of 2020, last summer's chemotherapy sapped my energy and left me with lingering aches. The cancer was conquered, but it became obvious the Lord was leading me to step away completely from the organization I've loved and led for nearly 11 years.

Apart from a few years in small town journalism and a few more in higher ed communications, I've spent more than half my working time in the Charis Fellowship, whether for a national ministry or for a local church. I've seen churches begin and grow, reaching their communities for Christ. Sadly, I've watched some close, their ministry life over. I've watched our family of congregations wrestle with some pretty serious topics and come out much stronger. I've met wonderful Christian brothers and sisters from not only North America, but around the world.

It's a season of change, not just for me, but for GraceConnect and BMH Books (Brethren Missionary Herald Company). After I announced my retirement date, the GraceConnect/BMH board was approached by the Charis Fellowship council to consider a merger of offices. They wanted to bring Fellowship communications under their roof and felt that was the best way to do it. For many years, there has been an overlap of functions and they asked us to consider consolidating them.

The GraceConnect/BMH board contemplated the proposal in February and decided to look with favor upon it. It was contrary to what had been considered in earlier discussions. (Yes, this has been a topic of conversation for several decades.) Whereas the board in previous years felt the Lord leading them to continue as an independent organization and to serve the Fellowship well with communications and publishing services, this year it seemed the time was right. Perhaps this was the best way to foster the Great Commission teamwork that the board envisioned in 2002 when they approved our mission statement.

I'm confident in the wisdom of those on the board as they made this decision. The Brethren Missionary Herald Company has had a great run for more than 80 years and it's time to hand the responsibility for communication in the Fellowship to someone else. If approved by both boards and members, the merger will be consummated later this summer or early fall.

With my time winding down, this is the last issue of *GraceConnect* magazine I'll oversee. In these pages you'll find some well-written articles on the topic of hope, you'll say farewell to Tom Avey, who closes his career as fellowship coordinator after conference this summer, and you'll meet Tim Hodge, who succeeds Tom in the coordinator's position. Oh, and you'll read about me. (That was awkward on so many levels. Since we featured retiring Fellowship leaders through the years, my staff felt I needed to be included.)

Forty years ago, I would have never guessed that I'd close my career working for the Fellowship. It's been an honor and a blessing. I will miss the people and places I've experienced in our wonderful family of churches and ministries. In many ways, it truly is a "new day."



Liz Cutler Gates, lcgates@bmbhbooks.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.

VISIONS OF RAPTURE

THE PROBLEM WITH WATCHING AND WAITING

by Jeremy Wike

**Theology is a funny thing.
It has consequences.
It draws our attention to
certain themes in the Bible
and blinds us from others.**

I remember a pastor telling me once that he hoped that the world would rush toward evil sooner so we could expedite the Rapture. Crassly put, we should wish for more evil and suffering in the world so we Christians can escape sooner. I was a bit speechless when he said it so matter-of-factly, but as I've gotten older and seen deep human suffering, I find a range of emotions come to the fore. Certainly, God never intended our theology to siphon out compassion from us.

Theology is a funny thing. It has consequences. It draws our attention to certain themes in the Bible and blinds us from others. As we've all navigated this global pandemic, we see the effects of a culture that has lost its sense of hope in God's sovereign reign in the world. But far too many Christians use the future fulfillment of the visible reign of King Jesus as an excuse, worse yet a badge of honor, to sit idly looking into the heavens for the trumpet to sound and not around them for people to love as we are called.

I'd like to briefly revisit our theology of hope through the lens of the early church in Acts. What I trust we'll discover is a biblical picture of hope that is not devoid of theology but is dependent upon the truth of God's mission for His Church today. We ought not to use our hope in what is to come as an excuse to be, as the adage goes, "so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good."

ANYTIME OUR THEOLOGY DERAILS US FROM THE TASK OF ROLLING UP OUR SLEEVES AND LIVING OUT THE GOSPEL IN WORD AND DEED, WE'VE MISTAKEN OUR IDENTITY AS GOD'S PEOPLE.



A Primer from the Book of Acts

The dramatic events of Jesus' death and resurrection did little to dissuade the disciples from anticipating the fulfillment of God's promises to the nation of Israel. Who wouldn't want to get out from under the heavy hand of Rome, especially if you had heard stories of old when Israel was a sovereign nation as in the days of David and Solomon?

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6 NIV). In other words, "When are you going to crush the Romans and bring peace for us once and for all?"

Of course, the disciples wanted that! God had promised His people Israel future glory even after exile in texts like Isaiah 54:7-8: "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back...but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the Lord your Redeemer." Who wouldn't want to usher in that return to the glory days of old?

Jesus, however, did not deny the disciples' hope in the promised future in response. Nonetheless, he redirected their attention to their mission in the present:

"He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be

my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'" (Acts 1:7-8 NIV).

Jesus gave the disciples a mission to drive their hope, instead of permission to hope they could escape their mission. The same holds true for us today. Anytime our theology derails us from the task of rolling up our sleeves and living out the gospel in word and deed, we've mistaken our identity as God's people.

The Gospel Extended to Gentiles

As Peter's encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10 testifies, the realization that the gospel message was extended to Gentiles could not have been more profound. To the Jews, Gentiles were despised lawbreakers who did not circumcise, honor the Sabbath, nor refrain from eating bacon. Yet Peter says after a strange vision and a divinely-appointed encounter with a godly Gentile in Acts 10:34-36:

"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."

And who are the messengers of this "peace through Jesus Christ"? We are, of course. How can we watch the depth of human suffering

physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually and still not be moved to be the hands and feet of the One who still "heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3)?

We know how this story ends. As the hymn goes, our "hope is found on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness."¹ Yet this ought to propel us to engage with the brokenness of our world even more! None of us knows when Christ will return. But what we do know is that we will want to hear the words "Well done, good and faithful servant" when we meet our Lord.

We are susceptible to falling into the same trap as the disciples when we choose to sit on our hands and hunker down in our cynicism and inaction in the world. We must go where people are and hear the stories of authentic human brokenness. They expect to hear judgment and condemnation from Christians because there are too many who have poorly represented Jesus. But it's a powerful thing for broken people to experience unconditional love when they feel so much guilt and shame. What we think about politics, critical race theory, and or the national debt pales in comparison to what we truly believe to be our mission as proclaimers of "the good news of peace through Jesus Christ."

¹ *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*, Edward Mote (1834)

**LET'S MAKE SURE
2021 ISN'T THE LAST
YEAR THEY GET *clean*
WATER.**



Any and all donations to the Hocking Legacy Fund will provide sustainable rural water delivery in the Central African Republic.



water for good
waterforgood.org/hocking



July 14-17, 2022
Grace College and Seminary
Winona Lake, Indiana

• • •

FOCUS RETREAT DATES IN 2021/22

Central: October 04 - 06, 2021
East: October 18 - 20, 2021
Southwest: January 24 - 26, 2022
South: March 07 - 09, 2022
Northwest: May 23 - 25, 2022

charisfellowship.us



**Reach
FOR NEW HEIGHTS.
Invest
WITH GBIF.**



GRACE
BRETHREN
INVESTMENT
FOUNDATION
INVESTMENTS WITH
ETERNAL VALUE

GBIF.COM

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 Demand Investments, 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 Demand Investments. The Demand Investments are unsecured obligations of the Foundation that are not insured or guaranteed by any government agency or other third party.

OUR HOPE IS IN THE RETURN OF THE KING, WHO WILL MAKE ALL THINGS RIGHT AND REWARD THOSE WHO SERVE FAITHFULLY AS STEWARDS OF HIS MESSAGE AND RESOURCES.



I've never seen someone repent of their sin because I heaped guilt and shame upon them. As a pastor, I find that people already have enough of that in their minds. Moreover, I have witnessed deep repentance from sin because I extended grace when someone thought I would extend guilt and I extended compassion when the person thought I would extend condemnation. The world is dying to see the power of God's grace in action through us, the Church! How can we stand by waiting to be whisked away when there is work to be done!

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples were shellshocked. "What about those promises to make all things right for Israel?" The two angels redirected their attention to the present, just as Jesus had done a few verses prior:

And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10-11).

An Inspiring Transformation

There was work to be done, there were people who needed to hear the good news about Jesus, and there was no doubt that the promises of God were as secure as ever. The

transformation of the Church in Acts is inspiring for us today.

When the disciples stayed comfortable and secure in Jerusalem among the Jews up until Acts 7, God had to supernaturally interrupt them so that they would continue their mission He gave to them. Acts 8:1-3 tells us that Stephen was stoned to death. A zealous Jew named Saul began searching for Christians to put in prison. The Church was scattered because of persecution. Things looked devastating! Talk about taking away the Christians' freedom! That's not fair!

Where did they scatter?

"Throughout Judea and Samaria." Precisely the places Jesus told the disciples they would be "his witnesses" (1:8). God used a large-scale interruption among His Church to further His mission. That is precisely what God is doing right now with His Church. I certainly don't know everything God is doing, and I certainly grieve the collateral damage of this global pandemic (just as I would grieve Saul's persecution of Christians in Jerusalem). One thing I do know: Jesus hasn't moved from his position at the right hand of the Father and He's coming back someday. Nothing can change that.

Our hope is what gives us the courage to do the hard work of ministering in a changing world that continues to stack the cards against the Church. History teaches us that the Church is always at its

best when it operates from positions of weakness, not from positions of power. Our hope is not that public legislation will tip the scales back into our favor, nor is it that things will return to a previous era. Our hope is in the return of the King, who will make all things right and reward those who serve faithfully as stewards of his message and resources.

As Paul tells his crescendo about the return of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15, he says: "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 56-57). Then he takes the most obvious turn after giving a profound theology of hope to the Church in verse 58: "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

There's work to be done and people are dying to know the source of our hope. Your labor, my brothers and sisters, is not in vain! Jesus is coming soon enough, though waiting for the Rapture while the world suffers is not our marching orders. Our mission is not to help bring Jesus back to the world, but rather to help bring the world back to Jesus.

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

FINDING HOPE

IN A RADIANT FACE by Timothy D. Sprankle

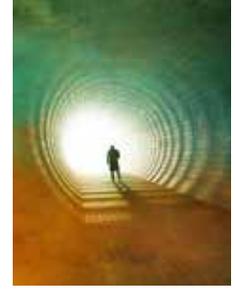
We all have custom-designed faces: fearfully and wonderfully made, definitive and unique. This means despite feeling invisible, we are often recognizable.

I always selected a study table on the second floor of Morgan Library next to a window. I liked the natural light and signs of life visible through the glass: verdant lawn, budding trees, flitting birds, and students walking across Grace College campus. Most importantly, the view gave me a vantage point to spot her face. I could locate it from two hundred yards away. Her face was radiant. Her name was Liz. Eventually, we wed.

The face is a remarkable subject of study. For the most part, every face boasts two eyes, two ears, one mouth, and a nose. Forty-two muscles control countless facial expressions. A layer of skin covers the skull and interlocking jawbone. Hair sprouts from the crown and brow and, perhaps, the cheeks, upper lip, ears, nose, and chin. Within this basic framework of common features, an infinite variety of faces emerges. No two faces are exactly alike. Even identical twins have distinctions—moles, birthmarks, wrinkles, and scars.

We all have custom-designed faces: fearfully and wonderfully made, definitive and unique. This means despite feeling invisible, we are often recognizable. Surprisingly, this fact remained true during a global pandemic, when half our face was concealed by a thin layer of cloth. Our eyes don't lie; nor do

ONE OF THE MOTIFS USED IN THE BIBLE TO DEPICT CHRISTIAN HOPE IS AN INTIMATE, FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS.



the bridge of our nose, forehead, and brow.

You have a face. So do I.

So did my wife-to-be. This explains how I could spot her in a mob of freshmen making their way to Alpha Hall to beat the lunch rush. Or, how I could locate her on the opposite side of chapel in a dimly lit room. Or, how I can still easily distinguish her from the other end of the grocery store on a busy Saturday.

I know her face. It radiates and draws my attention.

Faces get our attention because we give them attention. We wax and shave them, put on makeup and moisturize them, stare at them in the mirror and take selfies of them. We straighten and whiten our teeth, choose glasses with chic frames, style our hair for the season, and shoot Botox into our lips. We want to put our best faces forward because we are known by our faces.

Your face radiates you to others. My face radiates me. Through our faces, we reflect our selves to the world. However, in the words of Paul, this reflection is “dim” or “dark” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

I may find my wife’s face radiant, but my knowledge of her is limited. My knowledge of myself is limited. My knowledge of everyone, including Jesus, is

limited. And only by Jesus am I fully known. This leads to a lingering experience of “dimness” in our “evil days” (Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 5:16).

We are not our full selves yet. Our status as saints may be secure in Jesus, but the fullness of our glory, which is Christ’s glory shared, has yet to be revealed. We press on in hope of this glory.

One of the motifs used in the Bible to depict Christian hope is an intimate, face-to-face encounter with Jesus. This imagery likely alludes to Aaron’s moving benediction over the people of Israel. Before reaching the Promised Land—living between Exodus and Arrival—the high priest prayed words of hope over God’s people. To this waiting-and-wandering generation, he said,

“The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:24-26 ESV).

This pronouncement of blessing became a refrain in Israel’s poetry and prophecy. Though not exact parallels, the following verses hint at or draw from Aaron’s prayer: Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalms 27:1, 34:5, 50:2, 80:1, 94:1; Isaiah 10:17, 60:1-3; Micah 7:9; Malachi

4:2. Likewise, echoes appear in Zechariah’s prayer at the news of God’s coming salvation through Messiah (Luke 1:78). Aaron’s blessing and its echoes anchored hope in God’s saving grace, lasting favor, and coming peace. More importantly, the facial imagery implied God saw, knew, and drew close to his people. He turned toward his people; he spotted their distinct faces. In his theological dictionary of the Old Testament, VanGemmeren summarizes,

“The form of the blessing assumes the specific benefits of God’s favor, grace, and peace will result from God’s moving toward his people... Israel clearly regarded God’s shining face as a guarantee of blessing that was sufficient for many different circumstances.”¹

Jesus had a face. He had two eyes, two ears, one mouth, and a nose. His skin probably was not white; his teeth were likely out of alignment. In fact, according to Isaiah 53, he doubtfully drew a second glance. But his face was unique—fearfully and wonderfully made—and radiant in that it perfectly expressed the nature of his heavenly Father (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus still has a face. He beams a glorious smile from his resurrected body seated at God’s right hand. His face looks down from heaven

¹ VanGemmeren (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* [vol 1], (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 324-325.



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

InspirePastors.org



DO GOOD
WHEREVER YOU ARE

BUILDMOMENTUM.ORG/URBAN-CENTERS

 Los Angeles • Philadelphia

Comprehensive, prayer-focused content
for everyone interested in missions.

A video as well as photos and prayer
points for each day of your week,
delivered every Monday morning.

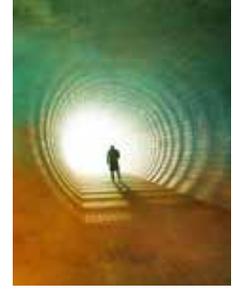


Subscribe to the NEW PrayNow today!

EncompassWorldPartners.org/Subscribe

Photo designed by rawpixel.com / Freepik

EXPOSURE WITHOUT EMBRACE LEADS TO SHAME...
CONVERSELY, EMBRACE WITHOUT EXPOSURE MAY
ENCOURAGE HIDING OR DISCOURAGE GROWTH.



with pity, compassion, and prayers for his people (Hebrews 4:15-16; cf. Romans 8:34). He can spot us from across the cosmos slogging through our light and momentary sufferings (2 Corinthians 4:17). And he knows we will be radiant.

We are not there yet.

Glory and radiance (or radiant glory) are our destinations as disciples of Jesus. Paul, Peter, and John developed this theme. Our theology books explain it. We have been justified; we are being sanctified; we will be glorified (Romans 8:29-30). The precious blood of Jesus saved us, but we only enter his glory when he is revealed (1 Peter 1:3-19; 17-21). Our full status as adopted sons and daughters will be fully realized when we see the face of Christ (1 John 3:1-3).

A remarkable transformation awaits us when the face of Jesus shines on us. Not only will we become the fullest version of ourselves, but we will be fully known. In his closing reflection in *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes,

“The more we get what we call ourselves out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become. There is so much of Him that millions and millions of ‘little Christs,’ all different, will still be too few to express Him fully... It is no good trying

to ‘be myself’ without Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own hereditary and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires... It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.”²

Without trying to yield my theology to psychology, I wonder if there isn’t something powerfully humanizing, healing, and, therefore, hopeful, in having every aspect of my life totally exposed and completely embraced by Jesus. The combination is important. Exposure without embrace leads to shame. Paul writes, “Hope will not put us to shame” (Romans 5:5). Conversely, embrace without exposure may encourage hiding or discourage growth.

As followers of Jesus, we should want to grow, inching ever closer to glory each day. Indeed, this is our hope. But we must not depersonalize “the glory” to which we are called. As wonderful as streets of gold, glassy seas, and endless Hallelujah choruses may sound, the hope of heaven is in a face. Our hope is a living hope (1 Peter 1:3) because a risen Savior anchors it (Hebrews 6:19).

² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 190.

I am convinced that Peter—who witnessed the glorious face of Jesus during the transfiguration and after the resurrection—equated his heavenly hope with the face of Jesus.³ He wanted his suffering readers (and us) to do the same. He wrote, “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13 ESV).

In modern terms, Peter suggested taking a seat by the window on the second floor, keeping one eye on the books and the other looking out. Hope is on the horizon, coming on the clouds, with a brilliant face (Titus 2:13). And when he appears we will be like him because we shall see him as he is. We will see him face to face (1 John 3:2; 1 Corinthians 13:12). We will be fully known—exposed and embraced—basking in the radiance of Jesus’s glory.

Timothy D. Sprankle is a husband, father, and pastor of Leesburg, Ind., Grace Church since 2007. He has co-authored two commentaries, co-leads the Charis Symposium, and has never considered Botox treatments for his radiant face.

³ We know this is what Stephen saw moments before his death. And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:56). Stephen, face shining despite the barrage of stones, cried out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit... Lord, do not hold this against them.” (vv. 59-60). He went down in a blaze of glory.

LEADING THE BEAT

Tom has learned that the true power to get people to work together is relationship.



photo by Jer Nelson

“AN ACCOMPANIST’S JOB IS TO MAKE THE SOLOIST SOUND BETTER THAN THEY WOULD WITHOUT YOU,” HE STRESSED. “SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO LEAD THEM BY GIVING THEM A BEAT OR A MELODY LINE, BUT YOU ALWAYS WANT THEM TO SOUND GOOD.”

Tom Avey started as an accompanist in his local church. “That’s my training for just about everything I’ve done in this job,” he confessed.

In July, Tom steps down after 23 years as Fellowship Coordinator, serving the Charis Fellowship by planning conferences and retreats, facilitating Fellowship Council and corporation meetings, serving as a center for information in the Fellowship, and finding ways to connect pastors and leaders wherever possible.

“An accompanist’s job is to make the soloist sound better than they would without you,” he stressed. “Sometimes you have to lead them by giving them a beat or a melody line, but you always want them to sound good.” It was at the Grace Brethren Church in Maitland, Fla., where he first started his accompaniment gig by playing the piano for the choir and soloists, in addition to congregational singing. It was also where he felt the call to full-time ministry.

He remembers being irritated at last-minute requests to use his talents. “I didn’t have time to prep, so it would sound bad,” he recalled. “But the Lord convicted me about that. I remember distinctly saying to God, ‘my piano, as meager as it is, is Yours, not mine. I will never say no to playing the piano for somebody.’”

That pledge was the seed that God used as he became involved in the leadership of the youth group and other activities at the church, and eventually leadership roles in the Charis Fellowship.

Tom was 16 when he first attended the Maitland church with his parents, who

had just moved to Florida for his father’s job with the Bendix Corporation. His mom and dad moved on to a different church, but he stayed. It was his initial connection to the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, now Charis Fellowship, and it was where he met his wife, Sandi.

“Our dating days were in ministry,” he recalled. The church had a Saturday night ministry called Youth Ranch, which was patterned after, but not affiliated with, a similar program sponsored by Florida Bible College. More than 60 young people would attend the ministry at the Maitland church each weekend.

The couple married in 1971. “She graduated from high school, went to [Brethren National] Youth Conference to quiz for [the] Florida [District] that summer, and was married September 1,” said Tom. “I was 20 and she was 18.”

Within a few weeks, they moved to Winona Lake, Ind., so Tom could attend Grace College.

“We were [in Winona Lake] for four years, then the Maitland Grace Brethren Church was looking for a youth and music director, so I went back,” he added. The plan was to eventually return to Indiana to finish college and seminary. But God had other plans.

After serving at Maitland, he and Sandi attended the Grace Brethren Church in Orlando, Fla., about half an hour away where Tom would often play the piano. When Ed Jackson, the pastor, announced his plans to return to ministry in Alaska, he recommended Tom as his replacement. “I had never preached before in my life,” Tom noted.

But the congregation had confidence and extended a call to him to be their pastor.

“I was there for six years,” he recalls, acknowledging. “It was a good time, but I grew it from [an attendance of] 110 to 60.”

He’d already given his resignation to the elder board at Orlando when he received a call from Jerry Young, pastor at the Grace Brethren Church in Lititz, Pa., in 1986. It was an invitation to interview for the position of church administrator, which today might be considered an executive pastor position.

“We spent a couple of days there and decided to do it if he offered [it],” Tom remembered. They moved in January, arriving in time to kick off a \$3,500,000 building project at the church. He spent the next 11½ years there, while he and Sandi raised their four children in the community.

“There came a point where I had this feeling that if something else came along, I could do it,” he said.

A new position for a Fellowship Coordinator had been created within the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. It would be a full-time position, building on what Charles Ashman had done part-time for many years as Conference Coordinator. National ministries pledged to support the new position, along with an increase in Fellowship fees of \$1 per person in local churches.

The new role was offered to Tom, and he recognized it was time to expand his accompanist role.

“I love the Fellowship,” he said. “It had a huge impact on my life. Everything I

“I’M ADMINISTRATIVELY WIRED,” HE ACKNOWLEDGED. “MY FAVORITE BIBLE MISQUOTE IS ‘WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER, SOMEONE HAS TO ADMINISTER.’ I LIKE TO GET THINGS DONE.”



Tom was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree by Grace Theological Seminary at 2021 commencement ceremonies. Pictured with Tom are Dr. Bill Katip, left, and Dr. Ron Manahan, right.

know and do is wrapped up in this Fellowship since I was 16 years old,” he added. Tom felt there was a need for the new position and found that it fit his gifting.

“I’m administratively wired,” he acknowledged. “My favorite Bible misquote is ‘where two or three are gathered together, someone has to administrate.’ I like to get things done.”

“I discovered that Tom was a model of organized flexibility,” said Bob Fetterhoff, who served as moderator/executive director from 2011-2013. “If I didn’t know what to do, or what I wanted, Tom already had a plan in mind that would probably work. If I knew what I wanted, he was flexible enough to adjust his preference or approach to meet any

reasonable request I had. He was always kind, considerate, and willing to try some new idea. Furthermore, he was not threatened when a new idea surfaced that could have impacted his own comfort.” (Bob served many years as senior pastor at Grace Church, Wooster, Ohio, and is now the pastor of development there.)

Bartley Sawatsky, who served as executive director from 2014-2016 and is the lead pastor at Renew Church, Mississauga, Ontario, found the same flexibility. He remembers a scouting trip to Washington, D.C., to plan national conference, which was held there in 2014. As they shot footage for promotional videos, Bartley remembered some of the “silly ideas” he had, yet Tom played along.

“I look back on that and laugh, and I’m reminded of just how flexible Tom was with me and some of my strange ideas,” he added.

“Tom has served in a place where he has needed to take so many people’s feelings into consideration but seeing him be able to have fun like that speaks a lot to his wisdom and discernment,” Bartley said. “I also recall many times where I could see Tom wrestling with complex issues and working behind the scenes to help various parties in the Fellowship work through difficult matters. He truly has been the glue that has held things together in so many ways.”

Bartley is not the only one who has observed that Tom has been the “relational glue” that encircles the Fellowship.

“He has connected people who needed to be connected and has also kept people connected that needed to be kept connected,” noted Phil Sparling, currently executive director of the Fellowship and pastor of Grace Community Church, Auburn, Calif. “Working with autonomous churches and ministries without any true authority over them is a very difficult assignment. Tom has learned that the true power to get people to work together is relationship. I can see how this approach has become our Fellowship’s widespread currency for collaboration.”

Galen Wiley, now retired from full-time ministry, was on the leadership team that hired Tom and was among the first, as moderator (now executive director), to work with him.

“I appreciated him so much as he worked alongside me in planning and leading such an exciting conference that year in

“FRANKLY, I BELIEVE GOD USED TOM AVEY STRATEGICALLY TO KEEP US UNITED IN YEARS WHEN WE COULD HAVE SPLINTERED INTO MANY DIFFERENT CAMPS.” -BOB FETTERHOFF

Columbus, Ohio,” remembered Galen, who led the Fellowship in 1998-1999. “I especially appreciated how he helped me in so many ways at conference and Focus Retreats on exalting Christ as we focused on the phenomenal reality of ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory.’”

As an accompanist, Tom has played a part in shaping the Charis Fellowship.

“He managed to learn the names and responsibilities of most pastors and missionaries connected to our Fellowship in the U.S. and around the world,” observed Bob. “He leveraged this personal connection to gain support for the launch of the new Charis Fellowship. Frankly, I believe God used Tom Avey strategically to keep us united in years when we could have splintered into many different camps.”

“Tom didn’t wield power, but he had a lot because of his role,” added Bartley. “But he always used it for what he thought was best for the Fellowship. I’m not sure where our Fellowship would be today without his sacrifice.”

From his office in Winona Lake, Ind., Tom has led from behind, but he’s quick to admit he had help in the form of first Sandy Barrett, who served until 2018 and in the last few years, Sharmion Bowell. Both women have been strategic in managing day-to-day operations, facilitating conference planning, and overseeing the myriad of other details associated with leading a group of churches.

“Sandy’s excellent and tireless work was a crucial part of the national office,” stressed Tom. “Sandy has been succeeded by Sharmion, who continues that tradition of excellence and dedication.”

Tom is reticent to consider that there might be other things he could have accomplished in his role. “I don’t tend to think about things that way,” he admits. “I’m sure if I scratched my head long enough, there’s some stuff we could have gotten at.”

Outside the office, he served on the Grace College and Seminary board of trustees for 15 years, including six as its chair. During his tenure, Dr. Ron Manahan was selected to succeed Dr. John Davis as president. The school recently recognized Tom with an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree.

“Tom served the Lord in local church ministry, was the Charis Fellowship leader for nearly 24 years, and was on the Grace Board of Trustees for 15 years (including serving several years as the chair),” said Dr. Bill Katip, Grace College and Seminary president. “It was our privilege to honor Tom in this way.”

When he’s not traveling throughout the Fellowship, Tom and Sandi are involved at Community of Hope Grace Brethren Church in Columbia City, Ind. (Jeremy Wike, senior pastor). He serves on the elder board and helps in other ways administratively, while the two are part of a small group.

Now that retirement takes him off the road, he looks forward to more involvement in Community of Hope. Otherwise, he is not sure what he’ll be



Sandi and Tom Avey will celebrate their 48th wedding anniversary this year.

doing, though he intends to work some, including consulting for the Charis Fellowship. He notes that he and Sandi will celebrate their 48th anniversary this year. “For most of those years, I’ve never been sure what I was going to be when I grow up,” he said. “None of this was part of a plan.”

Part of the plan, though, is spending time with their four children and nine grandchildren.

Some say his absence will leave a hole.

“I’m not sure how we are going to manage that without him, but I’m optimistic that we will find ways,” concluded Bartley. “We will never be able to replace Tom and the range of skills he brought to the job, but I am prayerful that we will find ways to keep being a family that is committed to one another. I trust that the new leaders will draw upon Tom’s knowledge and experience. His understanding of leadership is strong having served in the ‘second chair’ for so many years.”

PROPELLING VISION

by Randi Walle

Over the past year Tim has been transitioning into the position of Charis Fellowship Coordinator as Tom Avey moves into retirement.



TIM GREW UP IN ADELAIDE, A CITY IN SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA, WHERE HE CAME TO KNOW THE LORD AS HIS PERSONAL SAVIOR AT A YOUNG AGE.

“I deeply love our Charis Fellowship and feel that God has given me a passion to help propel our Fellowship forward in the days ahead,” said new Charis Fellowship Coordinator Tim Hodge. Over the past year Tim has been transitioning into the position as Tom Avey moves into retirement after 23 years faithfully serving in the role. (See related article, page 12.)

Tim grew up in Adelaide, a city in southern Australia, where he came to know the Lord as his personal Savior at a young age. His father was actively involved in door-to-door evangelism, and Tim credits his parents' example as a main factor in his early acceptance of Jesus.

“As a teenager I renewed the commitment and surrender of my life to Jesus and asked Him to use me however he wanted to, wherever that may be,” Tim recalled.

After high school Tim earned a Certificate in Mechanical Engineering at the General Motors plant in Australia, and he completed training as a tool maker and metal fabricator.

“During this time,” Tim said, “I further matured as a Christian, while also gaining understanding in what it is like to be a part of a secular work environment.” He spent time volunteering at his church and gaining ministry experience while saving up funds for ministry training.

Having visited friends in the U.S. as a young adult, he was open to pursuing ministry training here if God opened that door. He wrote letters to several Christian colleges requesting catalogues. None of the colleges sent what he asked for, except for one he never reached out to: Grace College and Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Ind.

“I never wrote to them or had even heard of them, but somehow they got my info and sent exactly what I was looking for.”

Having felt God's peace that this was where he should study, Tim moved to Indiana in August 1997, his first experience with the Midwest.

“Moving from one culture to another is always a big adventure. When I first arrived everybody just sounded American to me,” he recalled. “I actually didn't pick up on

the range of accents until after my first few weeks when I began to realize there were some significant differences!”

Adjusting to life in a new setting, Tim remembered feeling the less-obvious cultural differences with his first experience in the cafeteria. In Australia, schools generally don't have cafeterias and lunch trays. “After several moments of awkwardness, I had to ask someone what I was supposed to do.”

Shoveling snow was another big adjustment Tim mentioned, as his home climate was similar to southern California.

Tim was first introduced to the Charis Fellowship through his professors at Grace and by attending Community Grace Brethren Church in nearby Warsaw, Ind. In his junior year, he met his future wife, Heidi, who is the daughter of Pastor Larry Humberd (and the late Joyce Humberd) from Lehigh Valley Grace Church in Bethlehem, Pa. Heidi attended Grace College for one year before moving back to Pennsylvania to attend nursing school. The two maintained a long-distance relationship until he finished his studies in Winona Lake. The couple married in December 2001, and God has blessed them with four children: Noah (16), Luke (14), Abigail (10), and Benaiah (7).

Tim worked at Lehigh Valley Grace Brethren Church for two years as an associate pastor, specifically working with youth and young adults. In 2004 God opened an opportunity with Grace Family Church in New Holland, Pa., where he served as youth and young adult pastor during a challenging ministry season. After two years, and also serving as an interim pastor, Tim was asked to assume the position of the lead pastor. He continued in that role for the next 15 years, guiding the church to a position of greater health and vibrancy.

During his time in New Holland, Tim became more active in the Fellowship, serving more than 10 years on the leadership team for the Northern Atlantic District, and several years on the Fellowship Council. He was part of the rebranding team that recommended the adoption of

TIM WILL BE THE SECOND PERSON TO SERVE THE FELLOWSHIP IN THIS CAPACITY. THIS ROLE DIFFERS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WHO SERVES FOR AN ELECTED TERM IN A PART-TIME CAPACITY WHILE REMAINING A PASTOR AT HIS HOME CHURCH.

the name Charis Fellowship and also provided input into the development of various materials and resources for the Charis Fellowship that are currently in use or still in process.

In November 2020 Tim accepted the position of Fellowship Coordinator.

A statement provided by the Fellowship explains the role: “The Fellowship Coordinator provides leadership and administrative excellence to the Fellowship Office for the purpose of sustaining a culture of gospel movement through celebration, collaboration, catalyzation, and commemoration; working together with interdependent local churches, national ministries, and

cooperating organizations that are passionate for biblical truth, biblical relationships, and biblical mission.”

The position is a full-time employee of the Fellowship. It was created in 1998, and Tom Avey was the first to fill that role. Tim will be the second person to serve the Fellowship in this capacity. This role differs from the Executive Director (formerly called Moderator), who serves for an elected term in a part-time capacity while remaining a pastor at his local church.

As a college student Tim wrote a paper on triune immersion baptism. Jim Custer, now senior pastor emeritus at Grace Polaris Church in Westerville, Ohio (Mike Yoder, lead pastor), encouraged CE National, now

ABUSE

POVERTY

EDUCATION

NEGLECT

HEALING
...begins with family

Join the **GROW** family and together we can heal children and their families, providing hope for their future.

GROW
healing begins with family

<https://grow-worldwide.com>

Rewrite Their Future

ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT GROW UP IN A CHARIS FELLOWSHIP CHURCH, TIM SAID HE “QUICKLY CAME TO LOVE AND EMBRACE THE FAMILY THAT I FOUND IT TO BE.”

known as Momentum Ministry Partners, to publish it as a book, *Could it be Three*. A follow-up book on baptism, *Dividing Waters*, was also published, and Tim has written and contributed to several other printed materials used by the Charis Fellowship.

Although he did not grow up in a Charis Fellowship church, Tim said he “quickly came to love and embrace the family that I found it to be.” His first experience with three-fold communion was as a college student at the Warsaw church, and he was later baptized by triune immersion as a seminary student by one of his mentors, Dr. David Plaster.

“The investment that various Charis Fellowship leaders made in my life during college and seminary had a profound impact and helped me grow further in my understanding and appreciation of our tribe,” Tim said. He has also become a “passionate student of Grace Brethren history amassing a notable historical collection.”

When it comes to his new role, Tim shared that the Fellowship Office is tasked with helping continually create and sustain a culture of movement within the Charis Fellowship. Part of Tim’s vision is to “find ways to do what we’ve been doing even better and more effectively, to work hard at fostering interdependence, and to explore the best ways to communicate effectively in our current day and age.” He also wants to “provide additional levels of clarity on who we are, how we operate, what we’re doing, and where we’re heading” so that everyone can have a better understanding of what a blessing it is to be part of the Charis Fellowship.

When Tim offered his life in service to God as a teenager more than three decades ago, he had no idea that God would call him to the other side of the world to serve Him. But Tim willingly and faithfully followed God’s leading in his life to leave his home country, pursue ministry training at a school he had never heard of, and settle in Pennsylvania to serve local churches and to eventually help lead a national network of churches.



Tim and his wife, Heidi, with their children, Abigail (front), Benaiah, Luke, Noah (back)

“Throughout all those life events,” Tim said, “my relationship with Jesus has been the constant focus, the source of strength and wisdom, and the priority through which both personal and ministry decisions are made. Although I know it will be incredibly challenging, I am excited for the future and what God will continue to do to impact the world for Jesus through the collaborative ministry of the Charis Fellowship in the coming days.”

CREATING CONNECTIONS

by Randi Walle

“I didn’t set out to break the glass ceiling,” she stressed. “I’ve found that if I follow God’s leading, He opens the doors.”



photo by Jer Nelson

“HER CONTRIBUTION TO THE FELLOWSHIP AND THE BODY OF CHRIST IS SO MUCH GREATER THAN ALL THE PUBLISHED MATERIALS SHE CREATED AND CONNECTIONS SHE HAS MADE.”

“I am honored to have been in this role.”

This fall, Liz Cutler Gates will retire after 11 years as executive director of the Brethren Missionary Herald Company. She has led the organization through a rebrand, created new platforms for sharing information, and archived large amounts of Grace Brethren history, all while establishing and maintaining relationships with Fellowship members, pastors, and leaders all over North America.

“Her contribution to the Fellowship and the body of Christ is so much greater than all the published materials she created and connections she has made,” said current BMH board president, Ben Russell. “Perhaps her greatest contribution is how she exemplified the attitude and actions of a servant leader.”

Liz reflected on her long career in journalism and communications. “I’ve always enjoyed writing, but never felt I could be a fiction writer,” she admitted. “My senior year in college, I was editor of the yearbook. I enjoyed recording the events of the year for my fellow students. I remember walking back to my dorm one night. I still didn’t know what I was going to do after graduation and I thought, ‘If only I could edit yearbooks the rest of my life!’ It was a silly thought, but in essence, that’s what I’ve done. I’ve recorded the events and stories of God’s work through the people of the Charis Fellowship. I view myself as more of a reporter than anything else,” she added.

Liz grew up in northeastern Ohio attending Grace Church, a Charis Fellowship congregation in Wooster (Nick Cleveland, senior pastor). At seven years old Liz walked down the aisle and professed her faith in Jesus Christ, under the ministry of Kenneth Ashman. Since then, her confidence in the Lord has steadily grown. “Faith is a journey,” Liz said, “There are ups and downs, but God’s been beside me all the way.”

Liz received a bachelor’s degree in Speech Communication with a minor in Journalism from Grace College in Winona Lake, Ind., where Terry White was one of her professors. After graduation, she spent more than a year working at a local free shopper before moving on to the *Times-Union*, the daily paper in Warsaw, Ind., during which she started working towards a Masters in Journalism at Ball State University. She completed the degree in 1985.

After about three years, she was approached by Larry Chamberlain at then-Brethren Home Missions, the church planting organization within the Fellowship, for a role in communications. Feeling she was supposed to work in secular journalism, she turned down the job.

Shortly after that she had an encounter that changed her mind.

“One night I was called to photograph a fatal car accident,” Liz recalled. “When I got there, the fire department was using the jaws of life to cut the driver and passenger out. As I was talking to the sheriff’s deputies, it became obvious that the victims might not know the Lord. God used that experience to nudge me toward ministry.”

She began to realize she could use her gift of writing to share the Gospel in a variety of platforms. She called Larry back and asked if she could reconsider her answer. She worked for the organization for the next eight years, first as a promotional secretary and later as the director of public relations. It was during that time she began traveling throughout the Fellowship to tell the stories surrounding church planting efforts in the Fellowship. One of her responsibilities was to create content for the Home Missions pages in the *Brethren Missionary Herald* magazine, not realizing that the namesake organization would play a role in her future. Her time at Home Missions also provided a foundation for many of the relationships that would later bode well for her in the Charis Fellowship.

Liz admitted eventually she grew restless in small town Winona Lake and God led her to Columbus, Ohio. She took a job at the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service at The Ohio State University (now Ohio State University Extension) editing curriculum books, primarily for 4-H, but also for the agriculture, home economics, and natural resources programs. As a farm kid in Ohio’s Wayne County, she had participated in 4-H. “It felt a little like giving back,” she remarked.

After eight years, she moved on to work in the communications department at the Grace Brethren Church, Columbus, Ohio (now Grace Polaris Church, a Charis Fellowship congregation in Westerville, Ohio, Mike Yoder, lead pastor). That stint ended in a budget cut, but it was during that time

WHEN ASKED WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO WATCH A FORMER STUDENT'S CAREER BLOSSOM AND FOR THAT STUDENT TO EVENTUALLY SUCCEED HIM, TERRY SAID, "ANY TEACHER'S GREATEST THRILL IS TO WATCH A STUDENT BECOME BETTER THAN HIM."

that she met her future husband, Doug, in the singles group at the church. The two were married in 1994.

Eventually, Liz went back to work at The Ohio State University, this time as director of communications at the Moritz College of Law, a role she held for ten years.

Through all of her career moves, she stayed in touch with her former journalism professor from Grace, Dr. Terry White.

In 2003, Terry became the executive director of the Brethren Missionary Herald Company and helped revive the dwindling ministry through a focus on book publishing, starting a blog — a new concept at the time — and a producing tabloid-sized newspaper, *FGBC World*. He recommended she serve on the board for BMH, which she did for one year, after which Terry invited her to join the staff as editorial director.

"It was a full-circle moment — coming back to Winona Lake to work in a Fellowship I loved," she remembered. While the *Brethren Missionary Herald* magazine had ceased publication in 1996, she now had responsibility for *FGBC World* and would occasionally post to the blog.

When Terry began to look for a successor, he knew Liz would be a good fit. "I was very happy to turn the organization over to her," Terry said, "she's a very good storyteller, very good journalist." After interviewing with the board of directors, Liz accepted the lead role. In doing so, she became the first female director of a national organization in the Charis Fellowship. "I'm very proud of that," Terry said.

"I didn't set out to break the glass ceiling," she stressed. "I've found that if I follow God's leading, He opens the doors." That was certainly the case in this instance. The position didn't require that the individual hold elder status in a church in the Fellowship, so she felt comfortable accepting it. She credits Larry Chamberlain, along with Dr. Lester Pifer, then executive secretary at Home Missions, who had confidence in her abilities and had invited her to join their executive staff, thus starting her on the path to service in the Fellowship years before.

When asked what it was like to watch a former student's career blossom and for that student to eventually succeed him, Terry said, "Any teacher's greatest thrill is to watch a student become better than him."

One of the biggest projects Liz tackled during her time at BMH was a rebrand of the organization in 2013. Focusing on communication, conversation, and conservation, GraceConnect was established on the communication side, with a variety of platforms, including a new e-newsletter and increased visibility on social media platforms. Conversation was a nod to not only the longer articles in the new *GraceConnect* magazine, but the books published under the BMH Books label, which would provide Grace Brethren authors a platform for publishing. Conservation focused on preserving the history of the Fellowship, something BMH had been doing "one day at a time throughout its history," she remembered. She's worked closely with Grace College history professors Dr. Jared Burkholder and Dr. Mark Norris to ensure that the events, people, and organizations that shaped the Charis Fellowship would not be forgotten.

"It was the most interesting and challenging time to figure out how to best meet the communication needs of the Fellowship," she added.

The weekly *GraceConnect* eNews is now sent to more than 1,400 subscribers.

"Liz was always so encouraging to me," said Sarah McMahan, former eNews coordinator. "She inquired about my family and cared about my life outside of work. She helped me develop my writing style and taught me how to develop articles in a unique yet informative way. I am thankful for all I learned during my time under Liz's leadership with GraceConnect!"

The magazine, which had been established in 2010 under the *FGBC World* logo, was redesigned with an eye to tackling current event topics from a biblical perspective and is now sent to nearly 1,800 subscribers at no charge.

BMH Books continues to release titles in the niche of theology and Christian living. Currently there are more than 70 titles in the publishing house's catalog, with many of them among the 27 ebooks that are available. Liz has worked to make sure many BMH classics remain available either through ebooks or the print-on-demand platform.

A big part of Liz's role within the Fellowship was establishing and maintaining relationships with others in the Fellowship. "Everyone knows Liz. She's done a great job of building the communication network of the Fellowship," Terry said.

“LIZ HAS HAD A PASSION TO CONNECT NOT ONLY LEADERS, BUT PEOPLE IN THE CHURCHES WITH EACH OTHER THROUGH THE POWER OF STORY.” -VIKI RIFE

Building the communication network of the Fellowship meant hours of phone calls, email messages, and long distance travel for Liz, an admitted introvert. She frequently attended Focus retreats, Momentum Youth Conference, and the National Conference where she met with leaders, pastors, and delegates from all over the country. Often, she'd add a visit to a local church as part of her travel plans. "I will miss interacting with people on a regular basis and seeing them at conferences and retreats," she said.

Ben, who also serves as campus pastor at Grace Church of Sebring, a Charis Fellowship congregation in central Florida, first met Liz in 2011 while attending Great Commission Bible Institute. While planning the GraceConnect rebrand, Liz visited Ben's class to get feedback from a group of young people on the layout, feel, and content of the magazine. Ben said, "I remember feeling honored to be made a part of the process. She left an impression on me then, and looking back on it now, I can see she was simply doing what she has always done. She treats others the way she would want to be treated."

Liz also lead GraceConnect in collaboration with other ministries. She has helped develop brochures and other marketing materials for the Charis Fellowship, overseen production of the Charis Fellowship Handbook, traveled to Bangkok to cover the Charis International Leadership Encounter for Encompass World Partners, and produced the e-newsletter for Inspire Charis Pastors Fellowship, among others. More recently, *GraceConnect* partnered with Women of Grace USA to present a monthly Writers' Workshop that offered instruction and guidance to emerging writers.

"Liz has had a passion to connect not only leaders, but people in the churches with each other through the power of story," Viki Rife, executive director of Women of Grace USA, observes. "I've been inspired by her sacrifices of time and energy to keep communication flowing."

Liz also partnered with others in the broader Brethren family to ensure that publications vital to shared histories were protected while making sure they were available broadly for research. She was part of the Brethren Digital Archives committee that, in 2009, began the work of digitizing old Brethren periodicals. Eventually funding to complete the first phase of the project was secured through donations and from Lyrasis. Twenty organizations and libraries from



Liz and Doug were married in 1994. He continues to be one of her biggest cheerleaders.

various groups that trace their spiritual heritage to Alexander Mack, including BMH and Grace College, were represented on the committee that oversaw the scanning of nearly 24 publications beginning in 2011. A number of them dated back to the late 1800s and some were in the German language. Publications from the Grace Brethren movement included the *Brethren Missionary Herald* (1939-1996), *Grace Journal* (1960-1973), and *Grace Theological Journal* (1980-1991). These are now available online at the Internet Archive (archive.org) and have become a vital resource for historians, researchers, and genealogists around the world.

Liz has served not only BMH well over the last decade, but the Charis Fellowship as a whole has benefited from her voice and influence in recording history and reporting news. After she retires, she said the first thing she and her husband are planning is a trip to Hawaii with their Life Group from Winona Lake, Ind., Grace Brethren Church (Kip Cone, lead pastor).

ROOM AT THE TABLE

by Carolina Keegan



**While not everyone
is called to foster,
everybody is able
to do something.**

“Did you see her smile?” Andrew Simkins, a volunteer at the Room at the Table, asked as Stacy Engle’s foster daughter picked out items. Together, they filled multiple bags with a wide variety of articles.

Room at the Table is a ministry for foster and adoptive families in Kosciusko County, Ind. (or those fostering children from the county). Similar to a traditional clothes closet ministry, it offers children’s clothing, diapers, wipes, toys, and other items at no charge. The only limitations set on items are for diapers and pull-ups: families can get only one large package or two small packages per child.

“Foster care is my passion,” said Janice Workman describing her nearly 30 years of caring for children. While not everyone is called to foster, she said, “everybody is able to do something.”

When families receive a phone call to welcome a child into their home, things move quickly and often the young person is in their home within a few hours. Janice found it difficult to find things she needed on short notice. As a result, in July 2019, she, Joye Andrew, and Jennifer Hotchkins spearheaded the development of Room at the Table at the Winona Lake, Ind., Grace Brethren Church (Kip Cone, lead pastor).

“I love that there’s this resource for foster families,” said Engle. “We did not have anything for a little boy when he was placed with us,” she said. She was able to get a swing, a playmat, and diapers from the closet for the boy. Room at the Table saved them from the expenses of those things.

COVID-19 did not shut them down, Janice said. People were not allowed into the closet for several months during the pandemic; however, families could email needs and pick up items outside. They also did not accept any gently used clothing for several months. The closet opened back up in the fall of 2020 and is now running at full capacity.

While hosted by the Winona Lake Grace Brethren Church, Room at the Table is part of a local coalition of churches that are involved in supporting different aspects of foster care. One church cleaned and repaired several bicycles that were given out. Another congregation gave \$1,000 to purchase needed items, while yet another partnered with a food bank to provide a huge supply of over-the-counter medications.

It is a “good picture of the body of Christ,” Janice said.

A longer version of this story appeared in the GraceConnect eNews, the free e-newsletter that shares what God is doing in the Charis Fellowship. To subscribe, go to graceconnect.us/subscribe.