

# THE VOICE NEWSLETTER

~Conference Edition~

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July 2020

## **PRESIDENT'S CORNER – Pastor Jonathan Edwards**

Greetings dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

I am writing today with a sad heart because we weren't able to gather together for worship, fellowship, encouragement, and teaching at this year's National Conference. I trust God that this was His will for our fellowship at this time, knowing that His plans and purposes are greater than ours, and that "even though a man makes plans, the Lord directs his steps" (Prov. 16:9).

Our present circumstances due to the Covid-19 shutdown and subsequent stay-at-home orders have brought to the forefront the importance of discipling relationships. The first relationship affected was the gathering of the saints for worship at the local church level. Many people have struggled because they haven't been able to attend church. Our struggle reveals a truth that isn't always obvious under "normal" circumstances: that the foundation for discipleship in the present age is the local church. Though we can find hundreds of hours of great theological teaching and encouragement online, we can't replace the personal fellowship that happens when believers gather together for worship – that which the New Testament calls "koinonia." As shutdowns end and the local church gathers to meet again, may we be especially thankful and grateful for the discipling that occurs at our weekly meetings.

Secondly, we ought to learn from the shutdown that one-on-one or small group discipling is a critical component of the command to "Make Disciples" (Matt. 28:19-20). Many states allowed gatherings of 10 or fewer, which would enable one-on-one or small groups to meet. While the gathering of the local church on a weekly basis helps to train us theologically and fulfill the commands of Christ, small groups can help believers bear each other's burdens. Some of these are too difficult (i.e. embarrassing or painful) to share in a larger setting, or there may not even be an opportunity to share. Smaller groups also help bring accountability to our lives and cultivate trust between brothers and sisters in Christ. May we have a renewed dedication for small group and one-on-one discipleship.

In granting us another year to examine the theme "Make Disciples," I hope that as a Fellowship of churches we will work hard at disciple-making during our weekly gatherings. I also hope that we will work to cultivate small group and one-on-one relationships. In my opinion, one of the most significant aspects of Jesus' training of the twelve disciples was the time He invested in them "outside" of formal teaching – He lived life with them, and they saw from His example what godly living should be. May we be willing to open ourselves up to our fellow brothers and sisters, inviting them to spend time with us. May we invest in them and show, by example, what it means to follow Christ.

## **CORNERSTONE GRACE BRETHREN CHURCH – MANSFIELD, OHIO**

Pastor Les Vnasdale's wife, Ruth, had breast cancer surgery on Friday, June 26. She was able to return home on Saturday. Praise the Lord that no cancer was found in the lymph nodes which were removed. Pray for wisdom for the oncologist as she recommends follow-up treatment and for Les and Ruth as they make decisions.

## **GRACE BRETHREN CHURCH – LIMESTONE, TENNESSEE**

Pastor Bob Skeen's wife, Denise, has been diagnosed with stage two breast cancer. Please continue to pray as she undergoes treatment and surgery. Your prayers are greatly appreciated.

## **NEW TROY GRACE BRETHREN CHURCH – NEW TROY, MICHIGAN – Pastor Bob Mensinger**

God is continuing to bless here at New Troy.

This was a very busy month. Pastor Bob is not able to call on people because of the Coronavirus restrictions put in place by our governor, but this has led to another ministry. We now have a website in place at [ntgracebrethrenchurch.org](http://ntgracebrethrenchurch.org) where people can read about our ministry and history and listen to Pastor Bob's sermons on mp3's. Also, we now have hi-speed internet with Comcast and have an email address for the church – [newtroygbc@gmail.com](mailto:newtroygbc@gmail.com). Pastor Bob also has his Sunday sermons uploaded as mp4's on Youtube and facebook. Just type in Robert Mensinger at both places and scroll down for the messages.

We finally began having morning services May 31<sup>st</sup> and also an evening service last Sunday, June 14. The turnouts have been ok considering the circumstances. Some are still not comfortable in worshipping live. We did a belated recognition of mothers on June 7 and recognized fathers on June 21. We still have not had Sunday School or Wednesday night services, but plan to begin them in the near future.

We just want to thank Pam O'Kinsky for her service with the Voice. She kept us on our toes with reminders and encouragement to get our articles in on time. Thanks Pam, great job! Pastor Bob Mensinger, NTGBC

## **LIVE-STREAM CLASS ON THE KINGDOM OF GOD (2 credit hours)**

The class will be held Saturday mornings 8:30-10:30am (EST) from August 1, 2020 to October 3, 2020 at the Orrville Grace Brethren Church building, and can be watched live over the internet. This course will be taught by Pastor Ike. He will use Dr. John Whitcomb's syllabus, which can be ordered from Whitcomb Ministries. A student is not required to have had Hebrew or Greek for this course, so it is available to anyone who would like to participate, either for credit or audit (\$50 to audit; \$100 to take for credit). Those taking it for credit will have collateral reading assigned, a paper and also will take a mid-term and final exam for the course grade. If you are interested in taking this course, please register with Pastor Joshua Steiner by July 20, 2020 in order to obtain the required course materials on time for the first class. You can reach him at [strivingforphilippians314@gmail.com](mailto:strivingforphilippians314@gmail.com) or by calling 330-683-3526.

## **VANDALIA GRACE BRETHREN CHURCH – ENGLEWOOD, OHIO**

On June 14, 2020 our dear brother James Belton, passed from this life into the presence of the Lord. Though now absent from our lives and from his mortal body he is present with the Lord. He was 77 years old.

James Olan Belton Jr. was born in Syracuse, New York, March 7, 1943. He graduated from High School in 1961, and went into the United States Air Force the following year. While stationed in Pforzheim, Germany he came to know the Lord Jesus as his Savior. By 1966 he had finished up his military commitment and returned to the US where he worked briefly for Siemens of America before returning to Germany to work for the United States government. It was there he met his wife Sibylle whom he married in the fall of 1967. Their daughter, Sabine was born the following year. From 1969 to 1970 James worked for the United States Government in Brindisi, Italy and then moved back to Germany where he worked for WANG Computers, first in Düsseldorf, then in Frankfurt.

While attending an English speaking Southern Baptist church in Walldorf, the pastor and a deacon went to their home. Though this pastor had never done such a thing before, he felt that he had to tell James that God wanted him in the ministry. Moving back to the States in 1977, James attended the Empire Baptist Seminary from which he graduated with a B.D. Degree in 1980. He wanted to go back to Germany but his pastor felt that he should have some pastoral experience in the States first. He took the pastorate of the Osceola Baptist Church in Osceola, New York where he ministered for four years. While there they met the Dr. and Mrs. Whitcomb who had a great influence upon their lives. They became dear friends and Dr. Whitcomb encouraged James to go to Grace Seminary. In 1987 James graduated from Grace Theological Seminary with the M.Div. degree. Sibylle graduated

the same year from Grace College, with a BA, and Sabine from Warsaw High School. That same year they entered missionary service with Grace Brethren Foreign Missions and began a church planting ministry with the Jim Fredericks family in Calw, Germany. Starting in 1989 James began a new ministry in Blumberg, Germany, a town that had only one believer when they began the work there. At that time they joined the Conservative Grace Brethren Churches International. In 2000 the Beltons moved to Dresden, in the old East Germany and started a new church there. In 2005 they returned to the U. S. where they have ministered in the Vandalia Grace Brethren with pastor Everett Caes.

Until his death, James had continued contact with all three churches they started in Germany. Sibylle even now continues this ministry.

(Submitted by Pastor Peter Peer, Columbus, OH)

### **BEREAN FAITH FELLOWSHIP – MT. VERNON, OHIO – Pastor Gordy Harmon**

Praise the Lord for His faithfulness!! We opened our doors again on May 3rd with nearly 100% attendance, and a couple of visitors!! God is working a work in us, we are praying God will work through us to reach out!! Because of COVID shutting down nearly the entire USA, Pastor Jeff Eno and his wife, Pat; left the warm breezes from the south and came home to frigid Mount Vernon earlier than they expected and parked their RV in the church lot. Because of their daily presence, they have worked to make inroads to some of our neighbors and regularly invite them to church. We have had one neighbor, Henry, venture inside the church for a couple of Sundays as a result of our ladies working outside and inviting him to come on Sunday morning. Pastor Jeff and Pat have passed by his house often to encourage his return...Pray for Henry!!

Please continue to be in prayer for BFF—in November once again the note for our building and property will come due. We have been blessed by multiple gifts from friends and churches in the fellowship. (Thank you brethren for your prayers and gifts!) We hope to be able to pay down the note completely or at least enough to be able to secure a loan from a bank and not face these deadlines. And pray with us that Pastor Gordy could serve the flock of God full-time.

We are looking forward to NET2020 being among us July 16-19. They are coming to encourage us and we know they surely will. This will give us opportunity once again to get know other faces and names of our brethren who share a like precious faith. This also grants us opportunity to bless, and minister, and encourage them in their ministry to our churches.

May God grow our churches spiritually and with numbers who long to know and live for Jesus. When Jesus comes May we be found being faithful...loving one another as we contend for the faith!

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### **HOME MISSIONS**

#### **REVITALIZE VERMONT —Pastor Bryan Maley, Evangelist - Irasburg GBC and Lamoille Valley GBC**

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Genesis 18:14

Even with COVID being on the rise, the church marches on!! COVID has slowed things down a bunch in Vermont, giving more time for Bryan to be with family, but also more opportunities to be in contact with those whom he is discipling. He reports many victories and some set backs.

Pastor Bryan will not be going church to church this summer, presenting the work, giving a live personal update, seeking prayer and financial support as he would normally plan on doing after conference. That is a prayer concern. The real burden on his heart is to bring discipleship to our churches. He has personally seen the effects and the fruit of making disciples. He has discovered that discipling isn't hard to do, but it does require commitment. (This is not surprising!)

Bryan has discovered spending time with people, taking an interest in their everyday life: working a job, doing a project, serving and doing ministry, fishing, hunting, gardening, working on a car. Making the most of everyday opportunities, even sharing a drink of water, can be turned into a spiritual conversation (John 4). These things can lead to spiritual talks and opportunities to share the gospel. He has shared quite enthusiastically that you do not have to hold a theological degree, "It's not complicated—just spend time with people." Pastor Bryan is working in conjunction with the leadership of the Vermont churches to put together a discipleship training plan, something he can reproduce and make available to our churches; Ideally to personally present a 2-3 day seminar at your church— and then help the church to implement it. To stop the overall movement of trying just to bring people in, but rather taking the hope and power of the gospel out. And once the person is born again, bring him to church, encourage him to be baptized, and teach him all things. Some things at the church with the pastor, some things with the saints, some things one by one with the person(s) who led him to the Lord. It's a process that involves and blesses and rewards the church (the body) of the living God—It's an eternal investment in things above!!

Support for Revitalize Vermont is down about \$4,000, that means there is opportunity for you brethren to give. You as an individual or you as a church could opt to send a one-time gift, or you could purpose to give a monthly or quarterly gift. If you choose to become a monthly or quarterly supporter please let Pastor Bryan know, it helps him a bunch in planning and budgeting. Would you please prayerfully consider supporting the Revitalize Vermont Work financially.

While preparing this report I received a NEWS FLASH from Bryan...BREAKING NEWS—It is reported that angels are rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:10) because a 14-year-old girl received Jesus after hearing the Good News from four others. Information is still coming in, I cannot confirm if social distancing was being adhered to or if masks were being worn. There were no reports of property damage or looting, BUT I can report an abundance of JOY!! Pastor Bryan says he will investigate / follow-up and report back—HALLELUJAH!!

Pray for the Maleys: Roxy, Alex, Aubrey, Camden, Braiden, Torri and Pastor Bryan!

Praise for Camden, Graduating Class of 2020—with a celebration on August 8th!! (Want to send a card? 1346 VT Route 58W; Irasburg, VT—05845)

Pray for Pastor Bryan as he labors to prepare the discipleship training plan

Pray for Pastor Scott Libby and Pastor Ethan and our churches

Pray for the financial support of Revitalize Vermont

Pastor Bryan says he will be sending out a video update—coming your way soon!!

(Report submitted by Pastor Gordy Harmon, HMP)

## **FOREIGN MISSIONS UPDATES**

### **MISSIONS UPDATES VIA CGBCI YOUTUBE CHANNEL**

Here is the link for the CGBCI Mission Updates: [CGBCI 2020 Mission Updates](#). If you are reading this newsletter in paper form, please visit, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). When the page appears, type "CGBCI" in the search bar at the top. The update videos will appear with other videos from the past.

### **INDIA – Submitted by Pastor Ike Graham**

Persecution Relief reports that a teenage boy in Odisha was murdered and dismembered by Hindu activists in early June. This happened about 60 miles from Brother Nehemiah in Odisha. The men in Odisha have confirmed this report and Brother Nehemiah told me (Ike Graham) that he has been threatened similarly. Odisha has been one of the most persecuted places on earth, as far as Christian persecution, for years. It is not getting better. These men are the most serious, dedicated, bold Christians that I know. There are 3 major church planting locations in the state of Odisha; Golamunda, Umarmkote and Semla.

GOLAMUNDA: There are 14 church planters who have started 16 churches and are working on 4 more. From February of 2019 to June 2020, they shared the Gospel 2,192 times and had 684 responses. "Responses" means that people either listened to the entire Gospel presentation and indicated that they wanted follow-up, or they called later and are still discussing the truth. Currently, there are 594 believers in the 16 churches. Of that number, 73 have come to Christ since February 2019.

SEMLA: There are 5 church planters who have started 5 churches. Since February of 2019 until now, they have seen 12 new believers added to the churches. This is their net gain because they lost 16 people.

UMARKOTE: There are 4 church planters and they have planted 4 churches. Since February 2019 until now, they have seen 24 new believers added to the churches. This is their net gain because they lost 15 people.

Since February of 2019 until the present, there has been a net gain of 189 Christians in all the churches. Of that number, 86 of them are new Christians. This brings the total number of believers in the CGBCIndia to 1,514. All the church planters continually express their gratitude to us for our prayers and financial support.

### **PNG TEAM #1**

Hello from Papua New Guinea! As a team, we're excited to update you all on the big picture of what's happening and how we're moving forward in ministry here in PNG!

Visit the Newfields blog for updates <https://newfields.wordpress.com/> Email [craigmnoyes@gmail.com](mailto:craigmnoyes@gmail.com)

### **PNG TEAM #2**

For updates on PNG Team #2 – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/MillersinPNG/>

We'd love to hear from you! Send us an email: [JoshAndAutumnMiller@gmail.com](mailto:JoshAndAutumnMiller@gmail.com) and let us know what you're curious about or if you have a question (or two) that we could answer in a future blog post or email.

## **MYANMAR**

The COVID-19 situation - The country of Myanmar has 234 confirmed cases as June 4, 2020. The government has imposed very strict rules and regulations to combat the virus. They have cut off all the transportation means such as buses, trains and even personal vehicles to curb the spread of the virus. As a result of these laws, many are without jobs and are having difficulty returning home. Strangely enough, one of the Burmese pastors, a Canadian citizen, has conducted a revival meeting at the beginning of the spread of the virus in our country. Now he is on trial and he was denied bail. If convicted, he will face jail time for his violation. On the other hand, the Buddhist extremists have used this as propaganda saying, "Christians are the ones who spread the virus". They are trying to create hatred toward Christians. Please pray for our country.

YANGON – We have been staying with our in-laws, and we are waiting for the time the government will reopen the transportation operations. Two weeks ago, out of desperation to go home, we tried to hire a car service, but the drivers are not willing to go down to Yangon, because when they return, they have to be quarantined for 21 days. Now, we are hoping we will be able to go home soon.

During our stay in Kanpetlet, we visited Mt. Victoria, one of the famous mountains in Chin State and enjoyed our time together. We also used our time for Bible study and writing a book in Burmese. Dee Htoo visited his parents. Due to travel restrictions, he is not able to return to Yangon. Please pray for God's guidance for us.

KYAUK THU - Naing Ling and Hlui Mana are doing well. Due to the regulation that prohibited "more than five people gathering" they have had difficulty visiting homes. Last month they both went to their sending Church and Hlui Mana got married! They are planning to stay in Kyauk Thu. Please pray for their journey and for their service to the Lord. Thank you so much for bearing and standing with us. Your partnership is very much appreciated.

On behalf of the team, Naing Bu

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*"The Voice Newsletter"* is the communication tool of the Conservative Grace Brethren Churches International; and edited by Pastors Ike Graham and Les Vnasdale.

### **News Articles and/or Mailing Updates:**

Please forward all info to Pastor Chris Knight at [cgbivoicenews@gmail.com](mailto:cgbivoicenews@gmail.com)

Snail mail to: PO BOX 58, Listie, PA 15549