

The History and Ministry of Grace Fellowship Church 2000 - 2020

Compiled 12.2020 for the Hinckley Historical Society by Dr. Jeanette Wampach



*Building lives
of faith in Christ*

This document purposes to present a brief overview of the history and ministry of Grace Fellowship Church (incorporated as Grace Fellowship of Kaneville) since its inception in 2000.

Beginnings

For years, two area couples became independently burdened for an outreach to the unchurched in the Kaneville/Kaneland area. In the early spring of 2000, these couples, Dave and Kathy Haidle and Roger and Jeanette Wampach, began praying together to that end. They were soon joined by two more couples, Dr. Don and Shari Preussler and Dave and Grace Haas. These couples continued to meet, grow in numbers, and soon became a Bible study/prayer time that met weekly in the Wampach home. By May, 2000 the group felt God's leading and desired to begin regular worship meetings in the Kaneville area. As many of these individuals were former members of Village Bible Church in Sugar Grove, they sought and obtained the formal blessing of Village's leadership in this endeavor.

In June 2000, after much prayer, active discussion, and healthy disagreement, the group, then known as the Kaneville Bible Study Fellowship, felt led to step forth in faith. In addition to the ongoing Bible study, they held three Sunday worship services in the Kaneville Community Center Board Room and three evenings of fellowship over the summer. These events were attended by thirty to forty persons.

In August and September, open meetings of those attending were held to explore the potential of and desire to form a church. These meeting led to the decision to pursue formal incorporation as a church. However, choosing a name presented a challenge. While many were considered, ultimately Grace Fellowship of Kaneville was chosen. This was inspired by the group's summer study of Ephesians, which consistently spoke to God's grace in our lives. The process of incorporation was completed in December, 2000.

In the fall of 2000, weekly Sunday evening services began. By January, 2001 the Sunday services were moved to mornings. Word of mouth, rather than formal advertising, served the group well. Attendance grew to 35-40 persons. Therefore, the fellowship relocated first, to the larger Kaneville Community Center Township Room and eventually to the gymnasium.

Establishing a Government

The process of writing a constitution and establishing the church government was begun in June, 2001 by Dave Haidle and Dr. Don Preussler, who served as co-pastors. Dr. Jeanette Wampach acted as the scribe and editor. Several drafts were developed.

By January of 2002, a review copy of Constitution and Bylaws of Grace Fellowship of Kaneville (GFK) was made available for congregational consideration. Now, the Charter Council was established. Council members were men nominated and approved by those attending. They were committed with the pastoral care of the flock, to serve under the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Thus, these men were termed "Undershepherds." The Charter Council, along with their wives, consisted of the following: Pastor Dave and Kathy Haidle, Pastor Dr. Don and Shari Preussler, Roger and Dr. Jeanette Wampach, and Dave and Grace Haas. Within the year, the council grew with the addition of Joe and Jane DeCort and Clifford and Margaret Larson.

Additionally, in January of 2002, a roster of Charter Membership was created. Those desiring to be a Charter Member indicated so by submitting a signed *Agreement of Fellowship*. This was done by thirty-nine members.

After a year and a couple revisions, the constitution of GFK was adopted February of 2003. This document was minimally revised in 2005 and 2015.

Church Purpose and Mission

Although much has changed over these twenty years, the main purpose of Grace Fellowship, as set forth in our constitution, remains the same. The chief objective is to glorify God. The consequent purpose is to edify one another, to build one another up to Christ-like maturity. A parallel purpose is to involve ourselves in evangelism by proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ through all that we do, say, and teach.

Our mission statement is "Building lives of faith in Christ."

Present Church Government

Our constitution sets forth a church leadership style, sometimes known as plurality of elders which has served us well. Plurality focuses on the shared decision-making responsibility of *each* Undershepherd, with the board spending time together in prayer and mutual exhortation in order that their unity might be preserved. Although worthy of double-honor (1 Tim. 5:17), pastors serve as fellow members, rather than the head, of the council. This differs from a pastor-led model practiced in many churches. Thus, all major decision making is done through focused, designated times of prayer and consensus of the Undershepherds, reflecting the hearts and desires of the congregation. This is discerned, not by vote, but by becoming a family, knowing the membership and congregational meetings. Thus, serving in the role of Undershepherd confers a heavy and sobering responsibility.

Per our understanding of scripture, and therefore our constitution, Undershepherds are to be men of the church; however, their spouses actively participate with them in meetings and many areas of leadership.

Current Undershepherds and wives and dates served are as follows:

Board Chair - Jim and Dr. Marjie Schoolfield: 2014.6 - present
Past board chair - Roger and Dr. Jeanette Wampach: Charter - present
Peter and Kristen Barthel: 2011.1 -present
Cliff and Margaret Larsen: 2002 - present
The present treasurer of Grace Fellowship (GF) is Jim Long.

Former Undershepherds and wives:

Pastor Dave and Kathy Haidle: Charter - 2005.12
Pastor Dr. Don and Shari Preussler: Charter - 2008.3
Dave and Grace Haas: Charter - 2011.4
Joe and Jane DeCort: 2002 - 2007
Judd and Katie Spencer: 2005.7 - 2007.11
Pastor Jim and Judy Harper: 2008.1 - 2013.6
Pastor Ray and Nicole Byrne: 2014.4 - 2020.7

Pastors of Grace Fellowship

Over our twenty years, we have been blessed with Godly men serving both part and full-time in the role of pastor-teacher. These are as follows:

2000.6 - 2004.12	Part-time Co-founding Pastor Dave Haidle. Dave was a carpentry foreman at Wheaton College and ordained minister. After serving us well for 4 ½ years, he stepped down from pastor to focus on his primary passion, that of prison ministry. He annually led a group of students on a mission's trip to Angola Louisiana State Penitentiary. Dave, along with his wife Kathy, continued to serve as emeritus undershepherd and pulpit supply.
2000.6 - 2003.8	Part-time Co-founding Pastor Dr. Don Preussler served us while a psychology professor at Wheaton College and founder of the <i>Center for Rural Psychology</i> . After the death of their son-in-law, Don and wife Shari moved to Minnesota to help their daughter.
2005.7 - 2007.11	Judd Spencer, a recent Wheaton College graduate, along with wife Katie, served as part-time interim pastor and prospective undershepherd for almost 2 ½ years, before leaving to attend seminary. Judd filled pulpit once per month and carried out some administrative duties. During their ministry, Judd and Katie lived in the parsonage.
2008.1 - 12	Dr. Jim Harper, along with wife Judy Harper, served as part-time pastor dividing his time with his teaching responsibilities at the Native American Bible College in Ringgold, OK.
2009.1 - 2013.6	Pastor Jim Harper became our first full-time pastor, serving in that role until he felt called to Oregon to be the campus pastor at his grandchildren's Mennonite school.
2014.4 - 2020.7	Pastor Ray Byrne, along with wife Nicole and five children, served as full-time pastor. Pastor Ray left to pursue a church planting ministry with Christ Community Chapel in Hudson, OH.
2020.7 - Present	We are currently awaiting God's leading regarding the calling of our next pastor.

Pulpit Supply

As is evident in the above pastoral timeline, during five of our twenty years, we have had either no pastor or a part-time pastor. During these seasons, we have been richly blessed by Godly men willing to share their gifts with us in the role of pulpit supply. These men include, but are not limited to:

- Rev. Michael Cobb former pastor of *A Place Called Hope, A Church for All Nations*, St. Charles, IL and former director of Hesed House, Aurora, IL. GF enjoyed a sweet relationship with Pastor Michael Cobb's church, with many of his members regularly worshipping with us. He is presently executive director of the Elderday Center.
- Casey Beckley formerly of Intervarsity Fellowship, NIU, currently senior pastor at Mooseheart, IL
- Pastor Dave Garda Cadre Ministry founder and missionary
- Dr. Huntley Brown Christian concert pianist, founder Huntley Brown Ministries
- Travis Fleming former pastor, Village Bible Church, Aurora Campus
- Kevin O'Brien author, publisher

Launching Young Leaders

A special blessing resulted from our practice of encouraging college students and new graduates to gain experience in both the pulpit and youth ministry. These young people have gone on to serve Christ mightily in varied ministries world-wide.

Noted here are those individuals, along with their current positions:

- Judd Spencer senior pastor at Liberty Community Church, Manassas, VA
- Joe Hermerding priest in the Episcopal Church
- Ken Lippold missionary to Christ Church Liverpool, England
- Andrew DeCort author, director of the *Neighbor-Love Movement* and founder of *The Institute for Faith and Flourishing*, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Luke Preussler Director of Missions at St. Joseph's Health, Park Rapids, MN
- Mark O'Brien missionary with Cadre Ministries
- Laura (Wampach) Slezak director of *Launch Residency*, helping the next generation of leaders into local church ministry, as well as the Professional Development Coordinator of Crown College, MN.

Missions/Missionaries

Grace Fellowship is highly committed to Acts 1:8, to tell people about Jesus "both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth."

To that end, missions and missionaries *presently* supported include the following:

- Sonalia Ramirez missionary with Intervarsity Fellowship, NIU
- Dave and Renee Garda founders of and missionaries with Cadre Missionaries, Sycamore
- Lisa O'Brien missionary with Commission to Every Nation, Uganda
- Wayside Cross Ministries Aurora, IL

Past missions/missionaries supported include the following:

- Laura Wampach Slezak missionary with Cadre Ministries, Altamonte Springs, FL
- Hope International Ministry Paul Minakov's work with children in Latvia

- Koininea Ministry local churches assisting prisoners to transition back into society
- Jason and Rachel Vance King's Outpost Camp of *Let the Children Come Ministries*, OK
- Andrew DeCort independent short-term missionary to Ethiopia

Missions Trips/Community Outreach

Our small church has a big heart for meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of people. We have, therefore, engaged in varied forms of outreach activities described below.

Hurricane Relief

Grace Fellowship actively assisted in various forms hurricane relief. This included helping finance a team of Wheaton College students led by Pastor Dave Haidle to help rebuild damaged churches. Lee Newston raised funds and independently traveled to provide direct relief to families. Pastor Jim Harper and Rich O'Brien, gathered and delivered to Louisiana a truck full of relief supplies following Hurricane Katrina.

Mission Trips

Deeply burdened for Native Americans, Pastor Jim Harper also led at least four teams of volunteer to work at the King's Outpost Camp, a ministry of *Let the Children Come* in Oklahoma. These work trips provided life-changing experience for those who went. One trip included eight residents of the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago. According to Judy Harper, "some of them had never seen a cow or seen stars in the sky."



Red Wagon Ministry

In response to the nation's economic recession of 2008-2009, GF found a way help those in need. A little red wagon was repurposed, placed near the pulpit, and served as a receptacle, and visual reminder, for groceries and gift cards donated by the congregation. After it received enough to fill about five boxes, it was delivered to a local family in need, approximately three times monthly. By 2011, news of our churches' helping-hand ministry went national when an article in the DeKalb Daily Chronicle was syndicated nationwide. In recent years, the focus of the Red Wagon changed and was eventually retired.



However, our nation currently faces a new season of hardships, resulting from the covid pandemic. Therefore, our red wagon has recently been rolled back out, to once again reach out to those in need.

Other community outreach activities have included community Christmas Caroling, Angel Tree participation, support of the Pregnancy Information Center of Aurora, hosting an open house/reunion for former Pierce church attendees and neighbors, and participation in Maple Park Days, including the Toilet Bowl Races!



Other Ministries

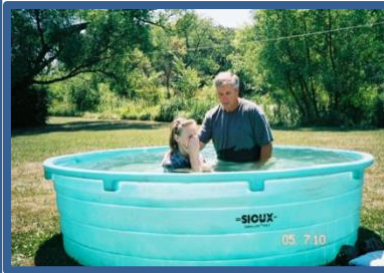
During his time as Pastor, Dr. Jim Harper also lead the chapel service monthly at Pacific Garden Mission (PGM) in Chicago. He made a regular practice of discipling a various church members by taking them along. Pastor Jim’s service to the mission led to many reciprocal blessings for our church. We hosted several PGM speakers and choral groups who shared their talent, testimonies, and meals with us.

Upon learning that there are 316 postal boxes in the rural route surrounding the church, Pastor Jim initiated his own 3:16 Ministry (John 3:16). He purposed to personally visit each home within that geographic area, an ambitious project which he ultimately completed.

In addition, Pastor Harper conducted a Chaplain Training program in 2012. Under his leadership, eight individuals engaged in approximately six months of coursework, followed by three to six months of internship at Delnor Hospital and Shabbona Nursing Home. Upon completion, six attendees were given certificates of completion and granted the title of Chaplain.

Ceremonies, Celebrations, and Activities

Over the years, we have enjoyed participating in many special ceremonies. The beautiful sanctuary has hosted over six weddings and numerous baby dedications. Well over 30 baptisms were performed in various locations, including in the sanctuary, First Baptist Church of Sycamore, Needham’s Woods, Nickel’s pond, and swimming pools.



Programming of services and activities has varied to meet the current needs of the congregation and community. These have included, but not limited to, children’s church, youth group, Vacation Bible School, women’s Bible study, men’s prayer group, home Bible study/community groups, MOPs (Mothers of Preschoolers) program, retreats and weekly fellowship times. In addition, numerous social activities have been held, such as hayrides, bonfires, shared meals and picnics.

Church Property Acquisition

In 2002, while meeting in the Kaneville Community Center gymnasium, Dale Cutsinger came into a service, desiring to speak to our church about the Pierce Church property. He indicated to Roger Wampach that the congregation of Pierce Methodist Church was now merged with the Cortland Methodist Church. They,



therefore, desired to sell their property at the intersection of Owens and Pritchard Roads. Although we had not actively considered securing a permanent facility, several members of GF visited the property. Ultimately it was concluded that we were not interested in purchasing.

In 2004, we were again contacted and informed that the property was to come up for auction in September. This event was attended by a representative of GF, with a check in hand. However, he did not have a peace about bidding for purchase. Ultimately, the auction did not result in a buyer. The building continued to sit unoccupied.

Then in mid-November, 2004, Roger Wampach was contacted by a Mr. James Cerny, a pilot and Moody Bible Institute graduate, and member of First Baptist Church in Geneva. He stated that he had acquired the property as an investment; but, upon reflection, believed that it should be used as a church. He was, therefore, seeking an evangelical church to utilize it. He offered to rent the facility to us, if we so desired. He and his wife, Robin and family attended our Thanksgiving banquet that week.

By November 21, 2004, Mr. Cerny relayed that he had canvassed the Pierce neighborhood and that eleven homes/families stated they would visit a church in the Pierce building. Two days later, the GF undershepherd council met at the Pierce building for prayer. On Sunday, November 28th, the congregation was made aware of this consideration. Those who were able and willing went to visit the building immediately after the service. The congregation was invited to give feedback the following Sunday, December 5th. Overall, the response to the facility was positive. The biggest concern voiced mirrored that of the council, being the remote location and the road conditions. After much prayer and open discussion, the decision was made that Grace Fellowship of Kaneville would begin renting and meeting in the Pierce church building.

On February 1, 2005, Mr. Cerny notified us that, due to the tax burden, he had decided to sell the property, but was in no rush to do so. The congregation was presented with these developments on February 9, 2005. Positive feedback regarding the purchase was again expressed. The contract for purchase with Mr. Cerny was signed February 10, 2006. Per our agreement, the mortgage was refinanced with a bank on 1.2010. In February, 2017, we were informed that an anonymous individual had paid off the remaining mortgage! We are very grateful and praise God that we are debt free!

Additional Land Acquisition

In the Summer of 2017, we were offered the opportunity to purchase 1.1 acre of land north of the church from the Pierce Township Cemetery. When this opportunity was presented to the congregation, we received nothing but positive responses. We recognized that we were land-locked and God was opening a door to allow us some flexibility for future expansion, such as parking. We resolved that we would not enter indebtedness for this acquisition. We agreed to the cemetery board's proposal, and purchased the land over three years, which was completed 2019.

Bell Returns Home

In the year 1891, three families (A.G. Smith, S.D. Carlach and W.A. Buerer) purchased and installed a large bell in the United Evangelical Brethren Church, located on the present site of Grace Fellowship Church. Then in the 1960's, the church building burned down. But the bell, although tarnished by the fire, remained intact. When the United Methodist Church of Pierce Township rebuilt, the bell was placed on a concrete stand next to the building. When this church closed its doors, the bell became the property of Dale Cutsinger of Kaneville, and remained silent in storage for years.

In October, 2011, 120 years following its arrival via horse and wagon, this old bell once again made its way to its church home, this time via truck. However, once on site, volunteers were faced with the dilemma of how to transfer the heavy bell to the bell stand. Within minutes of pondering and prayer, Judy Harper flagged down a crane truck that just "happened" to be travelling at this moment down this remote gravel road. Graciously agreeing to help, owner Tony Thompson, made quick work of safely setting the bell back on its stand, where once again it rings out across the fields, calling all to worship.



Church Life Amidst a Pandemic

In the spring of 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in-person services were curtailed. Instead, like most churches across America, GF created and broadcasted a Sunday service via YouTube. In July, live Sunday worship services resumed for those desiring to attend, with the stipulation that mask wearing and distancing be practiced. At that time, for the comfort of those choosing to remain at home, live streaming and posting of services on Facebook also began. When possible, church activities have transitioned to the use of electronic formats, such as weekly board meetings, Bible study groups and some children's programming that are meeting via Zoom.

This summary provides a snapshot of the birth and life of Grace Fellowship Church. There are simply too many special times, events, relationships and memories to completely capture here. Although we are amid very challenging times, the many evidences of God's goodness and faithfulness we have experienced over these twenty years give us hope for the future. We are excited to see how God will use this fellowship of believers in years to come!