

GOSPEL RENEWAL THROUGH ENGAGING IN COMMUNITY





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INSIDE MULTIPLY FALL 2018

- GOSPEL RENEWAL THROUGH ENGAGING IN COMMUNITY
TWO CHURCHES ENGAGING WITH NEIGHBORS IN THEIR DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

From the Coordinator

“Behold, I am making all things new!” -**Revelation 21:5**



Jesus will make all things new when he returns in glory, bringing heaven down to earth in a new and final way. All the things that have been sad for us will become untrue (JRR Tolkien) in our eternal future—no more loneliness or abandonment, no more pain or suffering, no more oppression or abuse, no more social injustice or ecological breakdown, no more sin and death. At the end of

things stands the renewal of all things for us as Christ’s people and for the cosmos in which we live.

But, what about now, while we wait, while we groan together with creation looking around the bend for Jesus to come back (Romans 8:18-19)? Jesus promises newness now, partial but real newness in him. Through the gospel and by his Spirit, we are his new

creation. Old things have passed away and new things have come for us (2 Corinthians 5:17). In Christ, we have the privilege and duty of putting off the old self and putting on the new self (Ephesians 4:22-24). We live and share his gospel of newness with the world.

And so, renewal must be a “way of life” (Richard Lovelace) for all Christians and for all churches. How might the Spirit blow fresh winds among us? As congregations, how do we embody God’s enduring means of grace for doing church—word, sacrament and prayer—in fresh ways for our time, so that new converts are reached and new generations of disciples raised up? In this issue of *Multiply*, we read about two churches experiencing beautiful gospel renewal, one in an urban context, another in a more rural one. May their experiences of renewal be multiplied among us. May Jesus bring powerful and fruitful renewal to all the members and churches of the PCA. Amen.

Paul Hahn
MNA Coordinator

GOSPEL RENEWAL THROUGH ENGAGING IN COMMUNITY

Along with Church Planting and Missional Partnerships, Church Renewal is a core commitment of MNA. Two PCA churches—with stories of gospel renewal—through engaging with neighbors in their diverse communities—are Chattanooga Valley Presbyterian Church in Flintstone GA, led by Pastor Dan Gilchrist; and Grace Church PCA in Dover DE, led by Pastor Jonathan Seda and Associate Pastor Kenny Foster.

All three pastors have crosscultural experience—Gilchrist as a former missionary in Japan; Seda through growing up in Cuba and Venezuela; and Foster as an African American pastor serving in the PCA. Each knows firsthand the beauty and challenge of bringing different people together as one body, worshipping and serving the Lord.



Dan Gilchrist

Gilchrist was called to serve as pastor of the Chattanooga Valley Presbyterian Church in 2003. “We are a largely white, educated, middle class congregation tucked into a valley surrounded by rural poverty,” said Gilchrist. “For us, learning what it

means to follow the King faithfully and to love our community faithfully has meant a lot of soul searching. The Lord opened up opportunities for us.”

The church works closely with Chattanooga Valley Elementary, the Title One school across the street where 75% of the students are on free and reduced lunch. Principal Heather Culberson says their partnership has made all the difference.



Principal Heather Culberson (left) and Assistant Principal Tracy Llewelyn

“Most of our partners are churches like Pastor Gilchrist’s church and they are an essential part of our school community. I cannot imagine Pastor Gilchrist’s church not being involved in our school. Our school functions because we are surrounded by good people who are willing to give their time and prayers. We are better because of that,” said Culberson. Describing the church’s ministry to students and families

both routinely and in crisis, Assistant Principle Tracey Llewelyn said, “As I stand at bus duty every morning, I look over and I watch the sun rise and it comes across the top of that church with the cross on the top of its steeple. And I have a sense of purpose and hope. We don’t really consider that a separate building. We just consider that part of our school home.”

Being a part of the public school system wasn’t always something church member Pamela Kennedy had envisioned, but once their family started at Chattanooga Valley Elementary, their connection to the community began to grow.



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—Tracy Llewelyn



IT'S NOT UNHEARD OF FOR ME TO GET [TO THE DINER] AT ABOUT 8AM AND JUST SIT AT A TABLE AND HAVE PEOPLE JUST KIND OF ROTATING THROUGH. I'LL HAVE MEETING AFTER MEETING AFTER MEETING.

—Dan Gilchrist

“We looked into Christian school, home-schooling, and then toured the school here. Since I was young and my son is my first child, I did not really think about the importance of being a part of a community. Now, looking back, I think our decision to continue to send our children here was more about the importance of being where God placed us in being a part of this community. Without having children here, there are conversations I have in passing with parents that I would have missed. While volunteering, I see the needs of the kids here that I would not know about any other way,” said Kennedy.

That’s a lot of coffee, and a lot of biscuits and sausage!” said Gilchrist, who offers a listening ear and encouraging word in a place that is comfortable and accessible to community members, while supporting a local business.

The church partners with the apartment complex across the street from the diner, connecting with seniors who live there, many of whom have disabilities. “All of

their community. “I think it was in the late 90s when I really began to be convinced as I looked at the Scriptures that the church should be a place where we demonstrate and see the reconciling power of the gospel,” said Seda.



Grace Church Congregation

that is the outflow of what happens here in the midst of worship and fellowship,” said Gilchrist. “The life of a church is rooted in Jesus Christ and him crucified. The life of the community flows from the church into the community. The local congregation’s participation in the King’s continuing work is a function of the congregation’s clear focus on the risen King and his continuing work.”

Seven hundred miles to the north, at Grace Church PCA in Dover DE, pastors Jonathan Seda and Kenny Foster are living out the same mission among the people of

The church’s demographic study of the immediate area revealed that their community was 3% Latino, 6% Asian, 38% African American, and 53% Caucasian. “Our church didn’t look like that at all. We had no African Americans in our church,” said Seda. The church leadership made a commitment to open their doors as a multiethnic church, becoming intentional in welcoming the entire community.

“This was such an important issue, we decided we needed to be unanimous on this as a session. We ended up adopting a vision that we require all of our elders and now all of our church staff to embrace,” said Seda. Grace called African American pastor Kenny Foster to join their staff.

Gilchrist also regularly meets community people at Susan’s Diner. “I rarely meet people in my office. One of my go-to places is Susan’s Diner because it is right down the street and is a gathering place for the people of our community. It’s not unheard of for me to get there at about 8 o’clock in the morning and just sit at a table and have people just kind of rotating through. I’ll have meeting after meeting after meeting.



“What drew me in is the passion for the vision of reaching people across lines of race and class and gathering them to worship, demonstrating the power of the gospel in that way,” said Foster.

Foster and Seda pastor together, supporting each other and illustrating multiethnic collaboration. “We share the preaching just about equally. If I’m preaching, Kenny leads worship and administers the sacraments; and if he is preaching, I lead worship and administer the sacraments. Our church today is very different than it was 10 or 11 years ago when Kenny came,” said Seda.

When a local family, the Henrys, were looking for a church, Grace’s vision specifically spoke to them. “What we were looking for was a Bible-believing, Bible-preaching church, and that’s what Grace gave us,”



Rich and Laura Henry

said Rich Henry. In addition, the multiethnic focus was a blessing to their multiethnic family. “I saw Kenny Foster’s family and I thought ‘Wow! This family looks a lot like ours, so let’s try this church!’ So we did.

That was in 2005 and we’ve never turned back,” said Laura Henry.

In addition to their pastoral staff, those who gather at Grace on Sunday for worship reflect the diversity of their community. Pastor David Kim was called to focus on the church’s Korean ministry, and Grace now offers simultaneous Korean translation during a Sunday worship service, a Bible study led in the Korean language, and a fellowship lunch each Sunday.

“The demographics have really changed. We see different cultures, whether it



Sunday worship at Grace Church

be Eastern cultures, Asians, Hispanics, Blacks, Whites—everybody is worshipping God together and that is one of the core principles of the church. One of the visions of the church is to preach God’s Word, and to show Christ’s love, regardless of race, class, or culture. I think we are on the right track to destroying those lines that tend to separate us,” said Rich Henry.



Nelson Constanza

Additionally, church members Clara and Nelson Constanza felt immediately welcomed into the Grace community as Latinos. “I was driving to my house and I saw

this church and walked in on a Saturday, wearing a hoodie, and my hair was really long. The choir was practicing and I told the worship pastor I was looking for a church. He said, ‘You found one!’ and took me to this guy in the office who said, ‘Hola! Como estas! I am Pastor Seda, the lead pastor of this church.’ And that sold me. The lead pastor of a church knew how to speak Español; and that was it, and since 2004 I’ve been here,” said Constanza.

Constanza, and his wife, Clara, seek to welcome people in the same way. “Being multiethnic, including everyone, is not organic,” said Constanza. “It is something you have to be intentional about. It is not comfortable to hang out with people that you don’t usually hang out with.”

Grace seeks to be a welcoming place to people of all economic backgrounds, and to serve the community through restoration in jobs and finances. Angela Peacock came to Grace when she found herself between jobs. “I saw a flier about Jobs for Life and came to Grace to see what it was all about.

(continued on reverse)

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—Nelson Constanza

GOSPEL RENEWAL (CONTINUED)



I was skeptical at first, because I had been through classes like this before, but this class was different. It was more biblical and I appreciated that because it

helped me stay grounded, stay encouraged, and not to give up," said Peacock. While Peacock came for job courses, once she got to know the people of Grace, she stayed. "Grace is a place for my kids to be safe, and also I was able to grow spiritually, hear God's Word, and be among God's people. It met my needs in every way."



Church member Nick Alexander serves the community through Grace's Faith and Finance ministry. "One of the nice things Faith and Finances pro-

vides is that it's not just oriented with this church. Something as simple as offering classes at the library can mean we are able to reach out to people who are underserved

and share God's love in a way that they might not otherwise experience."

All of the programs at Grace have one goal: to glorify God and draw others to him. "I want Christ's glory. That's what I want to see. That's got to be the reason you pursue the Great Commission. God was in Christ,



reconciling the world to himself, according to 2 Corinthians 5:19. He's given to us this ministry of reconciliation," said Foster. Seda and Foster can now look back on the past decade at Grace and see where that initial vision of intentionally welcoming and serving the entire spectrum of their community has brought them—to a racially and culturally diverse church body that seeks restoration through the gospel together, every week.

"I think the most important reason to pursue this vision is because it is God's vision for his church," said Seda. "There is nothing more satisfying than to have this confidence that what you're leaning into is what God wants. When we pray 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,' what we are praying for and pursuing is the reality of the kingdom here on earth. There is just tremendous satisfaction and great joy that we are doing the Lord's will."

WANT TO KNOW MORE?



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[PCAMNA.org/Church-Renewal](https://www.pcamna.org/Church-Renewal) to see the video that inspired this issue and extended interviews with the people featured, which can give you greater insight into what it means to renew the church through loving your neighbors. We encourage you to view, ponder, and share these videos as God leads you, and



to prayerfully consider how you can be part of church renewal in the PCA.

SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS OFFERING CLASSES AT THE LIBRARY CAN MEAN WE ARE ABLE TO REACH OUT TO PEOPLE WHO ARE UNDERSERVED.

—Nick Alexander

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