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SOCIAL JUSTICE

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LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR

From a scriptural point of view, justice means loving our neighbor as we love ourselves and is rooted in the character and nature of God.

Having covered the courthouse for the local daily newspaper for few years and then working in a law school for a few more, I thought I knew about justice.

After all, aren't most lawyers working for justice on behalf of their clients? Wasn't it justice when a judge handed down a fair sentence as the result of a crime?

Yet the more I watched news accounts of justice-related activities, I wasn't so sure. I felt in order to truly understood the concept, I needed to look at what the Bible said about the topic.

"From a scriptural point of view, justice means loving our neighbor as we love ourselves and is rooted in the character and nature of God. As God is just and loving, so we are called to do justice and live in love," Adam Taylor writes at worldvision.org/blog/social-justice-really-mean.

Taylor goes on to stress that the Bible makes social justice a mandate of faith and a fundamental expression of Christian discipleship. "Social justice has its biblical roots in a triune God who time and time again shows his love and compassion for the weak, the vulnerable, the marginalized, the disenfranchised, the disinherited — you get my point."

"Christians seem to be playing catch-up with the secular world by defending biblical norms, in this case how justice applies to society, as if to show, in spite of all real evidence, that Christianity is a serious religion," John Teevan says in this issue of *GraceConnect.* "The fact that justice is a foundational biblical term indicates that Christians are not wrong, even if we may have recently been lax."

Justice ministries have been under the radar for a lot of years in the Charis Fellowship. I'm sure they were there, but more recent efforts to follow the biblical mandate to "do good" while sharing the gospel have resulted in various stand-alone ministries who have chosen to align themselves with the Charis Fellowship. At last count there were at least eight who have partnered as a cooperating ministry, recognizing a mutual obligation of encouragement and cooperation. They focus on meeting needs like providing potable water in Africa, establishing homes for orphans in Asia, or caring for senior saints in the U.S. I wish we could feature them all, but we've highlighted one – the G.R.O.W. homes in Thailand, which is celebrating their 10th anniversary this fall. (See a complete listing of Charis Fellowship ministries at charisfellowship.us.)

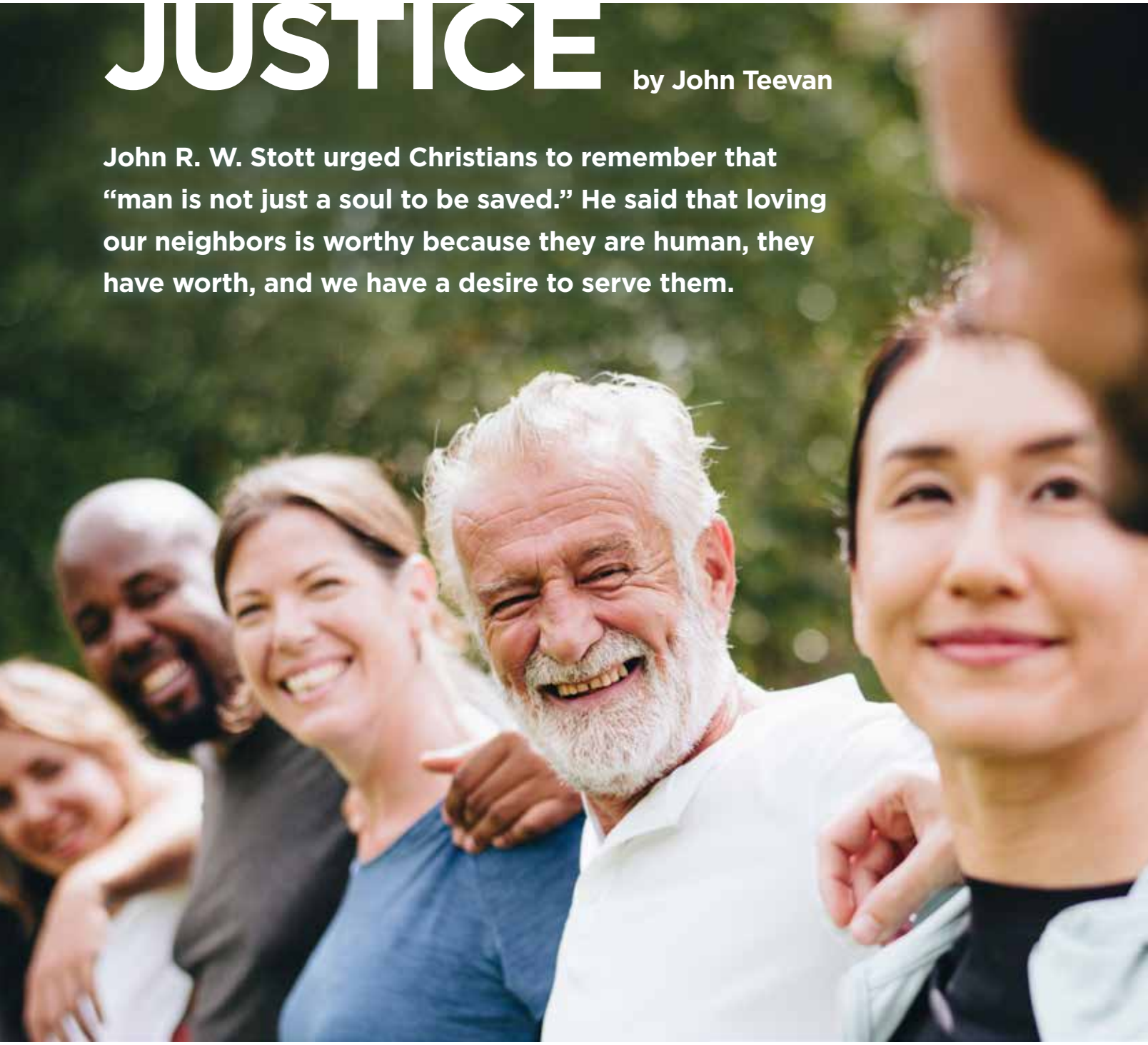
There are also many individuals in Charis Fellowship congregations who have seen a need and been moved to action in the name of Jesus. One of those is Linda Augspurger, who, with her husband, Jim, saw a need for pregnancy services in their community and leapt to help provide them. She is representative of many men and women who serve in agencies like this throughout the Charis network around North America – meeting the needs of people in their communities, while sharing the love of Jesus.

Liz Cutler Gates, lcgates@bmhbooks.com, is the editor of Grace Connect. *Since 2010, she has served as executive director of the Brethren Missionary Herald Company. She and her husband, Doug, live in Warsaw, Ind.*

UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL JUSTICE

by John Teevan

John R. W. Stott urged Christians to remember that "man is not just a soul to be saved." He said that loving our neighbors is worthy because they are human, they have worth, and we have a desire to serve them.



CHRISTIANS INSIDE THE CHURCH WHO ARE MOTIVATED BY LOVE HAVE FOUND, IN SOCIAL JUSTICE, A RATIONALE FOR SERVING BOTH GOD AND HUMANITY.

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. James 2:12-13 (NIV)

In recent years, the craving for social justice has spilled out into the streets with Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street, bringing the issue to the forefront and forcing Christians to decide if social justice is the same as biblical justice.

It is not.

John R. W. Stott urged Christians to remember that "man is not just a soul to be saved." He said that loving our neighbors is worthy because they are human, they have worth, and we have a desire to serve them. As Christians, we should be concerned about their total welfare, including their community, and this concern should be expressed practically. This is a call for integrating justice with ministry.

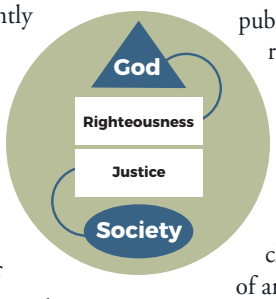
Justice, especially social justice, is a hot topic. Dr. Matt Harmon of Grace Theological Seminary has pointed out that there is such a variety of definitions that they can contradict each other. Here is some clarity: social justice is a modern term invented and likely designed to replace, in contemporary and rational terms, the biblical justice that is now ignored as obsolete.

Christians seem to be playing catch-up with the secular world by defending biblical norms, in this case how justice applies to society, as if to show, in spite of all real evidence, that Christianity is a serious religion. The fact that justice is a foundational biblical term indicates that Christians are not wrong, even if we may have been lax recently.

The topic of social justice is a reminder of the social gospel which came from a desire within the church to emphasize the "good works" aspects of the biblical mandate. By contrast, while the social justice movement has its origins entirely outside the church, social justice has become a phrase used by Christians, especially in North America, to indicate a desire to be involved in good works, including biblical justice in the social realm. Christians inside the church who are motivated by love (or charity) have found, in social justice, a rationale for serving both God and humanity.

An Important Distinction

There is an important distinction between biblical justice's voluntary acts of love and the institutional obligations of social justice; a distinction that apparently does not seem significant to many believers.



The key to understanding biblical justice is to understand that in the Bible, justice equals righteousness. Psalm 89:14 states that righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne. Amos 5:24 adds famously, "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-ending stream."

In both testaments the word for justice is often the same as the word for righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). The word is translated depending on its use. If the topic relates to God and his behavior or requirements, it is translated "righteous." If the topic relates to society and living for god in the world, it is translated "justice."

Righteousness and justice are two aspects of the same attribute of God. If something is righteous, it is also just. If something is just, it is also righteous. Both are in harmony with God's character, and it makes sense that both are aspects of life we should embrace as we live in his created world.

Not so with social justice, which is divorced entirely from God and finds its basis in society. That is why it is called social justice—not society as an arena of God's righteousness, but society as the foundational source of a definition of justice. No one would confuse 'social truth' with 'biblical truth,' but we often confuse social justice with biblical justice.

Social justice today is an expansion of John Rawls' impactful book, *Theory of Justice*, in the 1950s. Social justice is a school of thought that assigns rights and duties to the institutions of society. These are government institutions that enable people to receive the basic benefits and burdens of social cooperation. The relevant institutions often go beyond the courts to include public school education, social insurance, public health, public services, labor law, and the regulation of markets to ensure a fair distribution of wealth, income, and equal opportunity.

Looking at these institutions, Christians are impacted not only by the omission of the church but by the exclusion of any reference to God having any impact on justice. The government institutions have replaced God as the source of justice and bounty, and citizens are to depend, not on God, but on the government for justice in all areas of life.

Positive Rights and Critical Race Theory

It is the job of the government to assure that all people have equal outcomes. Two related teachings are essential. First is the concept of positive rights. We are familiar with the Bill of Rights attached to the U.S. constitution. These are negative rights. We are free from interference as we talk, gather, and exercise our freedoms, including religious freedoms, and we are free from unjust invasion of our property or false accusations.

Positive rights, by sharp contrast, are rights that society provides. We are all convinced

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WHEN CHRISTIANS RELEGATE GRACE TO A SECONDARY STATUS BEHIND JUSTICE THEY FALL INTO A TRAP THAT IS ALL TOO COMMON.

that children have a positive right to education, and the social safety network is now embraced as a social right. But the positive right to health care, college education, and a middle-class job exist only in the realm of social justice.

Another support for social justice is critical race theory, which not only acknowledges the horrors of racial slavery but states that white supremacy is the entire basis of our Constitution and history as a nation.

Positive rights and Critical Race Theory are extreme, but the nightly news has stories that normalize a view of social justice that is far from biblical justice.

Aristotle helps us consider ordinary justice as we still use his categories of justice. Aristotle taught corrective and distributive justice in order to distinguish between what everyone must have the same (corrective justice based on rights) and what everyone must have differently (distributive justice based on merit). Rawls fundamentally changed those categories so that people have social justice: an inherent right to what formerly was earned by merit.

Everyone has heard of someone who was "Teacher of the Year" in a nearby school district, but who was later laid off due to severe budget cuts. Why was one of the very best teachers suddenly without a job? Not because of merit (distributive justice), but because of seniority (corrective justice)—which treats everyone the same, based on the date of hire. Even Aristotle has situations that appear to be an injustice. So did Jesus.

A Parable

Jesus told a parable of vineyard workers who were all paid a full day's wage even though some had worked only for an hour. Those who had worked a full day complained of injustice, even though they received the full day's wage (Matthew 20:1–15). They did not want to see what looked like "rights" (corrective) justice when they thought this had become an area of "merit" (distributive) justice. Jesus' point was that generosity is good, and ultimately grace transcends any form of justice.

While it causes confusion, "justice" today must also bear the burden of being a popular and even overused word used as a substitute for other less popular words. For example, when people want to avoid the unpopular word "righteous," they substitute the word "justice." People also prefer the term "justice" as it helps avoid the personal moral and religious aspects of other words like "character." Furthermore, the idea of justice helps us to escape personal responsibility as we retreat into the public arena where good works no longer need to be seen as "righteous" or religious.

When wanting to emphasize the importance of "fairness" or "equity," some people think it best to rename them as "justice" to lend moral authority to other less compelling ("fair") or even rejected ("righteous") concepts.

There are many arenas where love and compassion motivated justice can be applied. There are realms including education, health, social needs, relief, and local development. Even the realms of corrective and distributive justice can be pursued in love, especially where there is injustice in convicting and sentencing in our penal system.

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share (1 Timothy 6:18 NIV).

Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (Hebrews 13:16 NIV).

In the context of seeking justice in the social realm, James wrote, "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). This is the equivalent of saying that grace (like mercy, but dramatically better) triumphs over justice (which, when violated, results in judgment).

High Value

Justice has high value, and the ideals of social justice are appealing. But when Christians relegate grace to a secondary status behind justice they fall into a trap that is all too common. They are tempted to wrongly conclude that social justice for "the kingdom" is better than doing good works in the contexts of the gospel of grace and the church, even the local church.

Phil Yancey wrote movingly of the gripping and difficult Truth and Reconciliation days in Nelson Mandela's and Desmond Tutu's South Africa. Yancy concludes, by focusing not on justice and not even on mercy, but, as we should, on God's grace: "Grace means that no mistake we make in life disqualifies us from God's love…. We live in a world that judges people by their behavior and requires criminals, debtors, and moral failures to live with the consequences…. Grace is irrational, unfair, unjust, and only makes sense if I believe in another world governed by a merciful God who always offers another chance." [1]

This is where the grace of God not only intersects biblical justice but provides the motivation and direction for such justice. We must not settle for less. We must not settle for a shrunken social justice. Social needs, especially of the oppressed, find relief through the active compassion of those who cannot separate justice from righteousness as a faith response to God's grace.

A long-time Charis Fellowship pastor, John Teevan is an adjunct professor in the School of Ministry Studies at Grace College, Winona Lake, Ind., where he previously was the executive director of Regional Initiatives.

1 *Rumors of Another World: What on Earth are We Missing?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003, 222-24.

JUSTICE FOR THE UNBORN

"From the beginning, we knew we were sharing a precious commodity," Linda recalled. She expressed how blessed they were that the children's birth families had decided to make an adoption plan. "We had adopted our kids, and then realized that a lot of their peers weren't around," she added. "They had been aborted."

THEY BRING A DIFFERENT FAITH TRADITION. WE BRING OUR FAITH TRADITION. WE'RE NOT ALWAYS ALL RIGHT, SO WE GIVE EACH OTHER GRACE TO WORK ON OUR MISSION TOGETHER.

Not long after Jim and Linda Augspurger adopted their daughter and son in the early 1980s they realized that the number of their children's peers had declined compared with previous generations.

"From the beginning, we knew we were sharing a precious commodity," Linda recalled. She expressed how blessed they were that the children's birth families had decided to make an adoption plan.

"We had adopted our kids, and then realized that a lot of their peers weren't around," she added. "They had been aborted."

She shared this concern with a friend during an exercise class, and their discussion turned to the topic of abortion and how it could be avoided. The two women, with their husbands, sprang into action.

Armed with a crisis pregnancy services resource kit from Focus on the Family, they hosted a meeting at a community center in Columbus.

"We invited [people from] the evangelical churches in the north half of the county," she recalls. But the core group and many of those involved were from the Grace Brethren Church (now Grace Polaris Church, Mike Yoder, lead pastor) on the north side of the Columbus metropolitan area (and Franklin County).

They realized that those of the Catholic faith were further ahead on this journey and were already providing some crisis pregnancy services in the region. "We'd never thought about Catholics and evangelicals working together," she laughed.

"This group of people had the same vision and heart that we had," she said. They joined forces to provide services for young women with unplanned pregnancies.

"They bring a different faith tradition," admitted Linda. "We bring our faith tradition. We're not always all right, so we give each other grace to work on our mission together and respect that they were on the ball before we ever woke up," she added.

"The influx of all of those evangelicals changed the flavor of what became Pregnancy Decision Health Centers," she said. "Then we added the medical services and changed the name to include the broader scope."

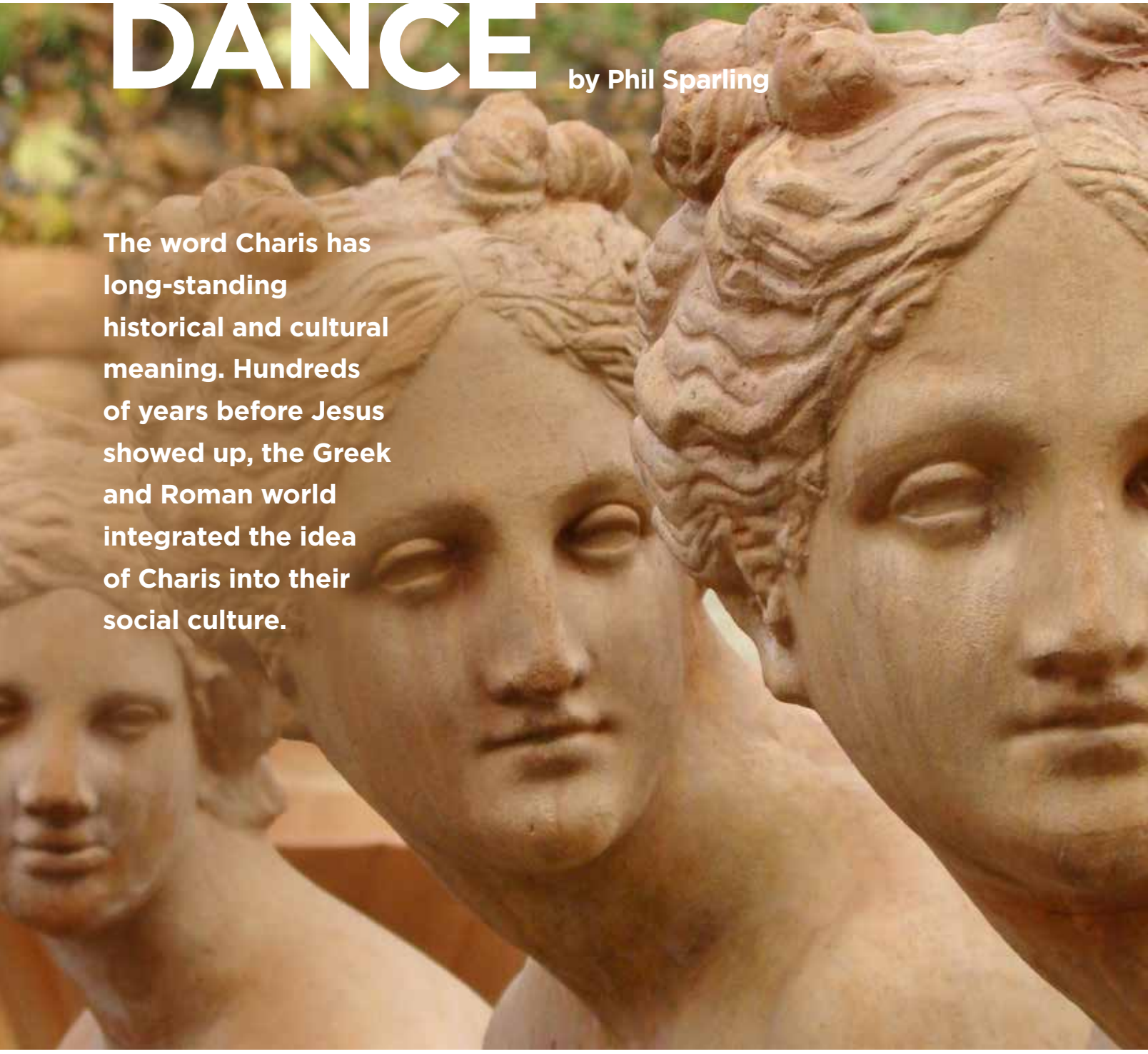
More than 35 years later, the Pregnancy Decision Health Center, on the north side of Columbus, sees more than 5,000 visits a year with services ranging from pregnancy testing, ultrasounds, and prenatal care to treating sexually transmitted diseases, abortion pill reversal, and post-abortion counseling for both women and men. From a single location in the beginning, they now operate in multiple neighborhoods, working to offer alternatives to abortion and to empower women and families.

During that time Linda, who worked as a case worker before finding faith in Christ, has done it all – almost. "Everything but the financial part," she said with a smile. A board member for most of those years, she has stepped in to fill wherever she was needed, serving as executive director, teaching the abstinence program in local schools, and even creating a software program that she says is now used in hundreds of similar agencies around the world.

Members and attendees of Grace Polaris Church continue to be involved in the outreach. "It's not a para-church organization," she noted. "It's *the* church."

ENGAGING IN THE CHARIS DANCE

by Phil Sparling



The word Charis has long-standing historical and cultural meaning. Hundreds of years before Jesus showed up, the Greek and Roman world integrated the idea of Charis into their social culture.

ONE OF GOD'S GREATEST ACTS OF PREPARING THE WAY FOR JESUS CHRIST WAS TO IMPLANT THE CULTURAL IDEA OF CHARIS.

The Charis Fellowship has been hard-wired with the core values of Biblical Truth, Biblical Relationship, and Biblical Mission. We have chosen words, truths, and values, and have linked ourselves to them. When you reinforce specific things, they become your identity. We have selected the word Charis as our identity.

The word Charis has long-standing historical and cultural meaning. Hundreds of years before Jesus, the Greek and Roman world integrated the idea of Charis into their social culture.

In God's providence, there was a common language through the Greek Empire. When the New Testament authors wrote, everyone could readily understand the gospel, and it spread quickly. In the Roman Empire, travel throughout the Empire was possible because of the paved roads. The gospel could go quickly throughout the known world.

Perhaps the most important theological truth we cling to, the idea of Charis, God also providentially instilled within the culture before Jesus arrived.

One of God's greatest acts of preparing the way for Jesus Christ was to implant the cultural idea of Charis.

In the ancient world, on a social level, Charis included three people: the Patron, the Mediator, and the Client. Although the exact description of Charis morphed over the centuries, the core ideas mostly remained, always including three people.

The Patron, also called benefactor, was the giver of Charis and played an important role in society.

There were three requirements to be the Patron:

First, the Patron had to have pure motives, whether giving part of your wealth, wisdom, or an introduction. A true benefactor in the Greek culture, and later the Roman culture, was someone who gave in only the Client's best interest.

Secondly, the Patron had to give with no strings attached and not to expect the Client, whoever received the act of Charis, to pay him back. Charis was not a lending action. It was an act of charity with no expectation of payback.

The third requirement for the Patron was to understand that the Client was of noble character. If a patron gave wisdom, wealth, or social introductions to someone of low character, he or she was endorsing that character and therefore, lowering their own integrity. For a patron to give Charis, there had to be an investigation of the person receiving Charis, ensuring that they were of noble character.

The second person in the dance of Charis was the Mediator. The Mediator was known personally by the Patron and was to look for people in need. His or her role was to understand who the Patron was and how the Patron could help. Whether it was sharing wealth, wisdom, or a critical introduction, the Mediator spoke on behalf of the Patron to the Client and on behalf of the Client to the Patron. Sometimes the Patron and the Client never met. The Mediator linked these two people. Again, not looking for anything for himself, the Mediator saw themselves as solely the transferor of Charis.

The third person in the dance of Charis was called the Client.

The Client was the person in need, who didn't have as much as the Patron, was trying to move up or improve his or her life in the social structure. He or she may have needed a patron to provide an introduction to somebody in business or the political world or to receive some of the Patron's wealth for a personal benefit.

The Client's responsibility in responding to the Charis was threefold.

First, he or she responded with humility and gratitude. That was the social expectation if a Patron did you a Charis.

The second responsibility was to use the benefit of the Charis to make his or her life more noble. This gift was expected to improve one's life in some way, whether a rise in character, quality, or nobility. Because the Patron had done this Charis with no expectation of direct repayment, it was expected that the act of Charis would not be wasted.

The third requirement of the Client was that he or she would go into the marketplace and praise the Patron. He or she would speak of the Patron's goodness and kindness and of the Patron's act of Charis.

In art depicting Charis, three young maidens were often used, because Charis was considered a beautiful thing within the ancient culture. They were young women because Charis should never grow old.

The maidens are often facing outward, or away from each other, so they don't see what the other person is doing. The Patron didn't always know who the Client was. The Mediator knew the Patron and the Client, but the Patron may not know the Client. The Client may not know the Patron. This was entirely acceptable.



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IN ART DEPICTING CHARIS, THREE YOUNG MAIDENS WERE OFTEN USED, BECAUSE CHARIS WAS CONSIDERED A BEAUTIFUL THING WITHIN THE ANCIENT SOCIAL CULTURE.

They are holding hands because it's a dance. Charis is a dance where anyone could play any role. They might be the Patron. They have something to give someone in need. In a different situation, they may be the Mediator, helping link a Patron with a Client. And yet in another case, they may be the Client, the one receiving the act of Charis. In artwork depicting Charis, there's no clear distinction of who's the Patron, the Mediator, or the Client. Anyone can fulfill the role of any of these positions, depending upon the circumstance.

Paul walks onto the scene, after Jesus has ascended, and begins to proclaim God's Charis. "As Jews and Gentiles came to hear Paul or other missionaries celebrate the marvels of God's grace made available through Jesus, the sole Mediator between God and humanity, they would have heard it in the context of so many inscriptions and other public declarations of the beneficence of great figures. For such converts God's grace (Charis) would not have been of a different kind than the grace with which they were already familiar; it would have been understood as different only in quality and degree" (De Silva, 122-123). Paul takes Charis from the horizontal relationships within culture and shifts it to the vertical relationship with God.

In Romans 5, we see the vertical process or dance of Charis.

"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we also have attained our introduction by faith in this grace [Charis], in which we stand" (Romans 5:1, NASB). Do you see the three positions? We have the introduction to God, who is going to be the ultimate Patron, the ultimate benefactor, the spiritual giver of life. God is going to bestow Charis upon us, the Client; you and I are the ones in need. He's going to give us Charis. And he's going to do it through the Mediator, Jesus Christ.

Paul takes the idea of Charis that is popular in the culture and moves it to a vertical application. He tells people, 'Did you know that there is a God who is filled to the brim with Charis, and he wants to give it away? And he's going to give it to you through the Mediator, Jesus Christ.' That's why Romans 5:2 says, "Into this grace in which we stand."

Our feet are firmly planted in Charis because we have a God who is overflowing with Charis. He has seen and heard of our need, and He has sent the Mediator who speaks to Him on our behalf, and who speaks to us on His behalf. He's given us this grace, this Charis, in which to stand.

God significantly improved the role of the Patron. Remember, the Patron or the benefactor had to extend Charis with no expectation of repayment. He or she had to do it with pure motives and only toward people of high nobility. Remember, if a Patron benefited someone of low character, it reflected on their own character. But God, who is so abundant in Charis, looked down upon the Client, us. He knew that we were not people of noble character. The Bible tells us when we were helpless, He died for us; when we were sinners. He still died for us; when we were His enemies, He died for us. God improved the social idea of Patron by violating one of the principles and giving us Charis even when we were not people of noble character or honorable spiritual faith.

Jesus, our Mediator, significantly improved the role of the Mediator. Not only did He speak to the Father on our behalf, and to us on behalf of the Father, Jesus became the Charis. The Mediator is supposed to be the person that transfers the Charis from the Patron to the Client. But Jesus became the sacrifice so we could benefit from the Father's Charis. When Jesus came, and He started talking about Charis, and when the New Testament writers used those words, the culture understood this improved idea of the Charis dance.

Look at 2 Corinthians 1:12: "For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace (Charis) of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you."

Notice the wording: "We have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you." What is Paul doing here? Paul is taking this idea of Charis out of the vertical, and putting it again into horizontal relationships within the family of God. He's saying that I walk in the Charis that was given to me by God, but I also walk in the world in the Charis of God, especially for who? Toward You!

Charis is not only a vertical truth, Charis, once again, is a horizontal truth.

As followers of Jesus, we do the dance of Charis, sometimes as the Patron, sometimes as Mediator, and sometimes as the Client. As we interact as leaders, churches, districts, organizations, we learn to dance together.

THE CHARIS DANCE IS TO RAISE MY HAND AND SAY I NEED A MEDIATOR. I NEED A PATRON, SO I CAN KEEP THE DANCE GOING.

All of us, at times, have the ability to be the Patron, to help someone in need because God has given us something to share. It may be wisdom, it may be wealth, or it may be an introduction. But there is a danger of stopping the dance. This happens when God has given me something, but I am unwilling to share. Remember, within the context of New Testament Charis, God has given me something to share. So sometimes you're the Patron.

Sometimes you're the Mediator. You hear of a need, and God will use you as the middle person. For example, Barb Wooler heard of the devasting Camp Fire last year near the Grace Brethren Church in Chico, Calif. She had the ability, through Encompass World Partners, to communicate a need through the Charis network. She assessed the need, sent a plea for help, and hundreds of gift cards arrived in northern California, blessing people in the name of Jesus. Encompass is the Patron; Barb is the Mediator; the Chico church is the Client.

In the dance, sometimes you're the Client. Being the Client, remember, requires humility because I have to admit that I have a need. I have to seek a Mediator who can introduce me to a Patron. I can stay in my need and figure it out myself. I can remain stuck; I can stay in my hurt, I can stay in my sorrow, I can stay in my difficulty. But God has told us that's not the Charis dance.

The Charis dance is to raise my hand and say I need a Mediator. I need a Patron, so I can keep the dance going.

There was a time when the Lancaster, Pa., Grace Church, saw nearby Lititz, Pa., as a community in need of Jesus. They tied into a Mediator in the form of then-Grace Brethren Home Missions to plant the Lititz Grace Church. They did the dance. A few decades later, a declining Lancaster church became the Client in need. And the Lititz congregation moved into the Patron chair and helped to revive the congregation at Lancaster. Their dance reversed.

The Patron could be one of our national organizations that says, "God has blessed us, and we have something to share."

Or maybe it's just person to person. As a leader in my church, I may find myself in need. I shouldn't try to solve the problems on my own. That's not the Charis dance. The Charis dance is when a leader in need finds another leader, maybe through a mediator, to help. If someone approaches you and asks for help because you have been granted something they need, dance with them.

We have to be generous, giving with pure motives and with no strings attached because that's why God gave it to you. There's no limit to the Charis dance.

What's my vision for our Fellowship? My vision is simply that we will better learn the Charis dance.

Jesus said when the world sees us dance like that, they will want to know about the vertical Charis. "Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good deeds, and they will glorify who your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

We want all people groups of the world to hear about the Charis of our Father. One of the ways we can be the most effective is if we will dance the Charis dance. My vision, my hope, is that over the next years, we will just dance better.

I know we've never danced in Charis churches before, but I think we're starting to get the rhythm.

God has used this last decade of Common Commitment, the Charis document, and our new Charis identity to hardwire ourselves to a powerful word. But let's clearly understand the cultural context in which God brought that word to the earth. It was in the context of a dance. Let's learn to keep dancing together.

Phil Sparling began as the executive director of the Charis Fellowship at the close of national conference in 2019. He is also the senior pastor of Grace Community Church, a Charis Fellowship congregation in Auburn, Calif. This article is an edited version of his executive director's address at Access2019.

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CONFERENCE REPORT


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1 *The auditorium of Grace Community Church, Auburn, Calif., was filled for each session. On Tuesday, Jason Brown, pastor of Suntree Grace Church, Melbourne, Fla., spoke about the importance of working together.*

2 *On Thursday morning, Phil Sparling, pastor of the host church and incoming executive director of the Charis Fellowship, shared his vision for Charis churches in North America.*

3 *Dr. Tiberius Rata, faculty member at Grace Theological Seminary, taught a workshop on how to teach the Old Testament in a New Testament church.*

4 *Cohorts and workshops provided and opportunity to get acquainted with others in ministry. Carolyn Johansen, Goldendale, Wash., shares with a colleague.*

5 *In lieu of the scheduled speaker, who was ill and couldn't attend, Inspire hosted a panel of veteran pastors and their wives, who shared from their personal experiences. Left to right are Tim and Jan Waggoner, Columbus, Ohio; Dan and Holly Allan, Ashland, Ohio; and Adam and Susie Copenhaver, Mabton, Wash.*

6 *Friends and supporters of Grace College listen to Dr. Bill Katip report on the ministry of Grace College and Seminary during the Grace corporation meeting.*

7 *Sweet treats were available in the courtyard after the final session of the day.*

8 *Rex Rodgers, pastor of Grace Brethren Church, Ripon, Calif., leads discussion on local outreach.*


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FOUR CONGREGATIONS JOIN FELLOWSHIP

Four new congregations joined the Charis Fellowship during national conference in August. They include: Grace Church, Lancaster, Pa. (Scott Becker, senior pastor); Grace Church, Bellefontaine, Ohio (Daniel O'Kane, senior pastor); Imagio Dei Communities, Telford, Pa. (Daryl Swartley, pastor); and Gospel Community Church, Troy, Ohio (Jason Bradshaw, pastor).

The conference was held at Grace Community Church, Auburn, Calif. (Phil Sparling, senior pastor), beginning Tuesday, July 24, and concluding with lunch and a business session on Thursday, July 26.

The Auburn church rolled out the red carpet to host the meetings in their recently-renovated worship center. Fellowship spilled onto the outdoor courtyard, where breakfast meetings were held, after-session treats were available, and national and cooperating ministries in the Fellowship hosted displays. Offsite meals were held at the nearby Ridge Golf Club. Many families in the church housed conference attendees, while others stayed in area hotels.

Speakers from various Charis Fellowship congregations around North America encouraged the conference to work together to further the gospel.

"The objective as a pastor or ministry leader is to equip everyone to get out [and share the gospel]," said Jason Brown, senior pastor at Suntree Grace Church in Melbourne, Fla. "We have to change our measure of success. We have to make it about His Word."

Jeff Bogue, senior pastor at Grace Church, Bath Campus, in Akron, Ohio, called participants to take a stand for strong doctrine and doing what is right.

"We are people of faith, and the people of faith that God gave us to teach us with skin on did ridiculously hard things," he said. "They did things that nobody wanted to do."

Others touted the importance of developing relationships within the Fellowship, mentoring future leaders, and standing for truth, even when facing opposition. Speakers included Jeremy Wike, senior pastor of Community of Hope Church, Columbia City, Ind.; Isaac Whiting, pastor of Community of Hope Church, Surrey, British Columbia; Daniel O'Kane, pastor of Bellefontaine Grace Church, Bellefontaine, Ohio; Mike Sciarra, pastor of Grace Church, Orange, Calif.; Bob Wriedt, pastor of Grace Community Church, Seal Beach, Calif.; Timothy Clothier, pastor of Boro Grace Church, Waynesboro, Pa.; and Jordan Bakker, pastor of Grace Church, Simi Valley, Calif.

Phil Sparling, incoming executive director of the Charis Fellowship and pastor of the host church, closed the final celebration on Thursday morning with a challenge to learn a new dance.

He told the story of the three charises, or graces, in Greek culture that pictured three ladies, holding hands, connected, but not looking at each other.

"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ of whom we have obtained the introduction faith in this charis (grace) which we stand," he said. "He's going to give us charis and do it through the mediator, Jesus Christ."

He stressed that as believers, we do the dance of charis. "In the context of New Testament charis, God has given me something to share with someone else," he added. (See related story, page 10.)

Worship throughout the week was led by Jeremy Bury, who serves on staff at Marysville Grace Church, Marysville, Ohio.

Various national ministries sponsored subsidized meals where they shared updates on their ministries and conducted corporation meetings.

Inspire, Charis Pastors Network, recognized three pastors: Mike Jentes, Faithful Encourager; Nathan Bryant, Faithful Servant; and Jason Brown, Faithful Equipper. Kevin Stoll, Sebring, Fla., and Zach Pinkerton, Fremont, Ohio, are each the recipients of a $1,000 continuing education scholarship.

A ministry for pastors' wives, Thrive, was introduced by Jen Avey and Lois Shirk, at the Inspire dinner.

Access2020 will be on the campus of Grace College and Seminary, Winona Lake, Ind., July 21-23, 2020.

GROW: RESCUING AT-RISK CHILDREN

by Hannah Hubbard

Faa Sumitra was already performing the mission of GROW (Grace Refuge Outreach Worldwide) by taking in at-risk children in Thailand when she ended up in Wooster, Ohio.

"Her love for God and at-risk and abused children in Thailand was infectious," said Jeana Harley, executive director for GROW.

But the nonprofit organization that had sponsored her trip to the Midwest so that she could receive training in children's ministries had closed, and she was stranded.

Ivanildo Trindade, then a staff pastor at Grace Church in Wooster, arranged for her to stay with Jeana, who learned Faa's story and how she already housed two girls and two boys in her own home.

The organization now known as GROW was born in October 2009, with the help of Trindade, Jeana, and other dedicated people from Wooster.

The youngest of 12 children, Faa came from a tribe in the mountains of Thailand, the Akha. Five of her siblings died before she was born. Her mother was sick as a result of inadequate health care and unclean water, so Faa was given to another woman in the village. One day, the woman abandoned Faa near a watering hole. Faa's father looked for her, and though he was encouraged by the other villagers to give up, he found her. Faa knows she was saved for a purpose.

Faa's mother died when she was ten. Her father would drink alcohol and deal drugs, even forcing Faa and her sister sell the drugs. He beat the children and, as the youngest, she received the most abuse. At one point he beat her so severely that she spent three days in the hospital. When her oldest brother told her it was not safe to return home, she ended up in a Christian orphanage. There she was able to go to school and eventually to college. While in the orphanage, a volunteer told her about the significance of the Bible, and she came to know Christ as savior.

"It was easy to see that her knowledge of the language, cultural experiences, passion for the children, and unshakable faith in God makes her a natural missionary to her own people," Harley said.

"GROW is unique in that we are able to rescue children who don't qualify for orphanages," stressed Harley. "Children who live at GROW have parents, but because of situations like abuse, severe neglect or abandonment or incarceration, it is not safe to live with them."

GROW works to rescue these children and, by extension, their parents. At the GROW home, children learn to love and forgive those who mistreated them. These children are high-risk for being taken into the slave trade or sex trafficking and GROW works with lawyers and the police to right the wrongs done to them.

"GROW IS UNIQUE IN THAT WE ARE ABLE TO RESCUE CHILDREN WHO DON'T QUALIFY FOR ORPHANAGES."

The two GROW homes have 25 children, including two who are studying at the collegiate level. (GROW support continues through college.) Both homes are full, but there are plans to rescue 25 more young people in the next three to five years. It is a family where children learn God's love and life skills.

The hope is to expand to other countries. Jeana added, "Together, we can rewrite the futures of these precious children and families."

The GROW display, with items for sale from Thailand, is often a popular stop at ACCESS and Momentum conferences, and other Charis Fellowship events. The table, with brightly colored Thai goods, crafts, and clothing, supports the ministry while providing an opportunity for GROW staff and board members to share the progress they are making.

"When you purchase something from GROW, you are a double blessing as all of the proceeds go back to GROW to help with projects like funding our college scholarships, buying a rice field to grow our own healthy rice or providing budgetary items like school uniforms or health check-ups," Jeana said. "But these sales only scratch the surface of the funds needed to support the ministry. We continue to need churches and individual donors to faithfully be a part of the GROW family with prayer and financial support."

As part of their 10th anniversary celebration this year, GROW is bringing children to the U.S. in the spring to visit current and new supporting churches. They will share their own stories of rescue and redemption through Thai music and dance. To find out if they will be in your area, contact Jeana Harley at *jharley@grow-worldwide.com.*

10th Anniversary

GROW

Grace Refuge Outreach Worldwide

พันธกิจพระคุณไทสากล

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

Join us for our ***10 Year Celebration***

Starting October 12th, 2019 with our Fundraising Gala at Wooster Grace Brethren church. Festivities will continue through Spring 2020 !

For opportunities to meet our children, hear their testimonies, and partner with us in rescuing 25 more children, visit our website at grow-worldwide.com or contact Jeana Harley for more information jharley@grow-worldwide.com (330) 465-9617

A DECADE OF WORK

10

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