

**HISTORY OF THE FIRST
TWENTY YEARS OF
GRACE BIBLE CHURCH
1986 - 2006**

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Compiled by Gus and Eunice Kuhn

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 . . . The Formation of Grace Bible Church

Chapter 2 . . . Early Development of the Ministry

Chapter 3 . . . The Growing and Building Years

Chapter 4 . . . The Plowing, Sowing and Harvesting Years

Addendum: Roster of Missionaries Currently Supported

Chapter 1

The Formation of Grace Bible Church

Grace Bible Church traces its beginnings to a small group of Christian believers who began meeting for Bible study Thursday evenings in September 1985 at the La Petite Academy across from the Johnson County Community College. In the early eighties, hundreds of new homes were being built as Johnson County expanded toward the south-west, but no churches were in that area to serve the people. It was to this ministry opportunity that the Lord placed a burden on the heart of D. Edward Smith, a church planting missionary pastor returned from Mexico, who was teaching at Calvary Bible College, and was also serving as Director of Mid-America Mission.

Throughout the Fall of 1985, an intensive visitation effort was made to area homes, but the response was not encouraging. In mid-December, following discussions and prayer as to what direction the Lord would have the group take, it was decided to change the meeting location to the home of Gus and Eunice Kuhn on 201st Terrace in Stilwell, Kansas, beginning in January 1986. Through door-to-door visitation and word of mouth, people of the area responded to the teaching of the Word of God. By April of that year, there were about 20 folks attending regularly, and the Spirit of the Lord seemed to knit the group together as one in purpose. It was at this point that the group unanimously decided to take a step of faith to incorporate as a church under Kansas laws and begin holding public worship services.

Pastor Smith agreed to serve as leader of the new church until such time that they could support their own pastor. Arrangements for holding services were made with officials of the Blue Valley School District No. 229 by leasing the multi-purpose commons area of the Blue Valley Middle School in Stanley, Kansas. Those who constituted the core group of attendees included Phil and Lola Harrington, Ralph and Diane McConahy, Dan and Gay Lynn Heiling, Steve and Naomi Cossey, Bob and Vickie Fish, Gus and Eunice Kuhn, Doug and Barbara Dzur, Victor Viard, Ed and Sandy Smith and their son, Dan.

With this very adequate provision of the Lord, the leadership team for the group consisting of Ed Smith, Gus Kuhn and Phil Harrington began preparations for the first services to be held on May 5, 1986.

Just prior to this date, Calvin Blom, pastor of Southwest Bible Church in Prairie Village, Kansas, held a special service, commissioning by prayer the Kuhn's, Cossey's and Dzur's to leave their church to establish the new work in Stilwell. Southwest Bible Church also committed to financially supporting the new work with \$200 per month for the first year. The weeks prior to the first services were busy ones. Invitations were sent out to local Bible churches, friends and neighbors, signs were prepared to direct the public to the new church, Sunday School teachers were recruited, teaching materials had to be selected and purchased, arrangements for a school janitor had to be completed, a name for the new church had to be agreed upon and a myriad of other details had to be finished.

Sunday, May 5, 1986, was a day of great joy for the new congregation. The Lord provided a beautiful, sunny day and 50 people in attendance, of which more than half were guests and visitors! Pastor Smith preached, Sandy Smith played the piano and a men's quartet from Calvary Bible College provided special music. At the close of the service, a group photograph was taken for the historical record!

Although the Middle School accommodated the group adequately, it left much to be desired for convenience. Each Sunday, chairs for the Sunday School and worship services had to be set up, and then taken down after the evening service; and all teaching aids, nursery toys and other equipment for the ministry had to be brought and removed each Sunday. But despite the inconvenience, the fellowship of the believers was sweet, everyone pulled together, and the Lord added steadily to the church those who love Him and His Word. One nice feature of the Middle School was the gym next to the commons area which made monthly fellow-

ships after evening services possible. During this period of the church's life, mid-week prayer services were held Wednesdays at the Kuhn or the Harrington homes.

For some months after it started, the church operated, for legal purposes, as a mission church under Mid-America Mission. This allowed the giving of the believers to fall under the tax exemption umbrella of the Mission. In the Spring of 1987, Chris Iliff, a Christian attorney and a new attendee, filed formal papers of incorporation with the State of Kansas, and on July 30, 1987, official notice was received from the Secretary of State that Grace Bible Church of Stanley was recognized as a church incorporated under the laws of Kansas.

It was not until June 1989 that the church leadership made application to the IRS for Federal tax exemption status. Notification of our Federal tax exempt status and Tax Exemption No. were received September 14, 1989. For this filing, the first legal officers of the church were declared to be D. Edward Smith, president; Philip Harrington, Secretary, and Gustav Kuhn, Treasurer. With these details now completed, the church was positioned to stand alone as an independent church.

The rental of the Middle School facilities for the meetings was by annual lease, and cost the church \$30 per Sunday for the 5 hours it was rented (3 hours, A.M. and 2 hours, P.M.). Custodial service cost the church an additional \$50 per week. Because the school is a public building, school board policy permitted a lease to be renewed only once, and then the facilities must be yielded to another group, if there was a group that wanted to use the facilities. If no one wanted to use the facilities, a group could continue to use the building for another year.

Due to the fact that our occupancy period for the school facilities was limited, the church leadership team encouraged development of a building fund from the very beginning. To fulfill this objective in the early years, a special emphasis was made for the Building Fund at Thanksgiving, and on each anniversary date. Thus, at the close of 1986 after only 8 months of meetings, \$5,300 had been received into the Building Fund. One year later, the amount had grown to \$18,252.

In addition to a vision for obtaining a permanent meeting place, the church leadership felt strongly that even though the new church was a missionary endeavor, it should foster a vision for missions within the congregation. Soon after beginning, therefore, the church set aside each month an amount of \$100 from the offerings to give to Mid-America Mission. In the following year, the church took on the support of a second missionary (Roger Hubbard), and sponsored David Smith for a summer ministry. Total giving to missions in 1987 was approximately \$2,800, and this amount has grown steadily over the years. In April 1988, the church had its first missionary conference with Frank and Marie Drown of GMU as guest missionaries.

Chapter 2

Early Development of the Ministry

As the expiration date of the lease in the second year at the school hung over the group as a threat, the leadership team initiated an aggressive search in May 1988 for land sites, or available buildings suitable for holding church meetings. To say the least, these inquiries were most discouraging, as land costs were escalating rapidly in the area and no affordable building of sufficient size could be found. The reality was the church was too small to afford a significant mortgage and was now totally dependent on some provision of the Lord.

Through a local realtor, it was learned that the First Baptist Church of Stilwell had just completed a new building, and had vacated their old building on Easter Sunday of 1988. They were offering their old buildings, in considerable disrepair, for \$55,000.

An objective analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of this opportunity was prepared and submitted to the congregation. The reaction of some, initially, was negative due to the physical condition of the buildings, but most saw a facility which, with some investment and a lot of hard work, could very adequately accommodate the church for some years ahead until a new facility could be built.

At this time, the treasurer prepared a zero-base budget and determined that the maximum mortgage the church could support was \$20,000 with the current interest rate at 11.0%. This meant that the church would have to raise \$35,000, plus an additional \$5,000 to cover repairs and essential equipment, such as Sunday School chairs, tables, pianos, etc. Fortunately, the church building came equipped with reasonably comfortable pews, and another group donated a pulpit to the congregation. As of April 1988, there was \$19,589 in the Building Fund.

After much prayer, May 15 was designated as the Sunday when a special offering would be taken to see how the Lord would provide for the purchase of the property. On that Sunday, with a total of 52 men, women and children present, an offering of \$9,080.25 was received. With that encouraging response, the congregation approved signing a contract to purchase the buildings from the Baptists, and set a closing date for June 15th. Additional gifts received into the Building Fund along with special one-time gifts of \$2,500 from Southwest Bible Church, and \$850 from Northwest Bible Church, brought the total in the Building Fund to \$33,660 by June 10th.

Two days before the contract signing date, and still lacking about \$1,200, a providential intervention occurred. The realtor for the Baptists notified Pastor Smith that the Title Co. had found a problem in the abstract which had not been updated in 75 years, and they would not be able to close as planned. The realtor surmised that they may have to go to court to clear the issue, and this may take several months.



The first permanent home of Grace Bible Church, located at 400 Park Street in Stilwell, Kansas. Worship services were first held there on August 7, 1988.

While this news was quite a disappointment to the congregation, it nevertheless was a blessing, as the delay allowed the church to gather the additional funds needed. Quite unexpectedly, after the Baptists had filed their papers with the court, the Title Co. notified the Baptists that their investigations revealed no risk, and that they would proceed to issue a title policy to our church and the lender. A new closing date of July 15 was immediately agreed upon. In the providence of the Lord, during that one month delay, a \$500 gift from Shawnee Bible Church and over \$3,000 from other individuals was received, enabling the congregation to proceed with urgent repairs and acquire needed equipment. God's people rejoiced greatly in His faithfulness and the answer of their prayers.

Prior to the final closing, a team of 12 persons from the congregation, led by Tom Montag, systematically went over the property, listing items for repair. The 5-page report was staggering. After arranging the tasks by priority, the folks got to work with cleaning, repairing, painting, replacing broken windows (over \$200 worth), etc. to prepare the facilities for services scheduled to begin August 7.

August 7, 1988, was a day of praise and thanksgiving for the congregation as the young church worshipped in their new quarters. Several Sundays later, a constitution was adopted, which prepared the way for establishing a charter membership. Having a defined membership was necessary to fulfill certain legal requirements that permitted the congregation to file for exemption from real estate taxes on the church property.

Each regular attendee of the church was given the opportunity to become a charter member upon their written confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and their expression to commit themselves to the work and support of this ministry. After reviewing the applications, 38 individuals were approved as charter members, and two were approved as associate members because they were soon to leave to take a pastorate out of state. On November 7, 1988, a special service was held to dedicate the charter members to the ministry, and then a photograph of the group was taken outside the church.

During the winter and into the Spring of 1989, growth of the congregation was slow, but steady, with the morning worship service attendance ranging between 45 and 50. Pastor Smith had nurtured the church to a point where it was able to stand on its own, and he felt the church should seek a permanent pastor for the ministry. Candidates were interviewed, and in God's own unique way, He provided a very capable young man who had been pastoring a church in Brazil, Indiana.

Pastor Terry Glidden, with his wife Judy and children, Joshua, Matthew and Elizabeth, began their ministry on June 25, 1989, and were heartily welcomed by the congregation. Pastor Glidden had received his training at Appalachian Bible College and Grace Theological Seminary. Under Pastor Glidden's leadership, the strong emphasis on the teaching of the Word of God and the importance of a missionary vision were continued and amplified. This emphasis has resulted in the spiritual growth of the members as well as in an increase in giving and ministry outreach.

The breadth of the ministry was enlarged to include youth ministry, family camps, Bible Conferences with outstanding speakers, leadership retreats, parenting classes, marriage counseling and Family Care groups. Pastor Glidden also initiated an internship program to mentor senior pastoral majors from Calvary Bible College who were regular attendees, and encouraged the church to set up a scholarship plan to financially help students going on to seminary. As the ministry grew, the church was also able to support additional missionaries.

A generous gift to the church of over \$15,000 in 1992 enabled them to pay off their mortgage and begin a Building Fund with about \$3,500 in it. The early nineties also saw significant membership changes. One of those years – 1992 - seemed particularly devastating with over 20 attendees leaving. Most of these were because of job changes, and several families left to become missionaries, or pastors. They were given to us for awhile to teach and train, then our Lord moved them out to serve Him. If one looks only at the numbers, it seems little progress is being made, but God often has a different plan.

As the nineties moved on, church attendance recovered, peaking at 118 in May 1996. It was becoming increasingly evident at that time that our present facilities situated on a one-third acre lot restricted expansion to accommodate a growing ministry. Therefore, early in 1995, plans were set in motion to search for a suitable building site, and a committee was appointed to begin developing plans for a new building.

Chapter 3

The Growing and Building Years

It would be hard to miss the providential leading of the Lord upon the development of this young church. Late in the Fall of 1996, through the help of a local Christian business man, a lovely six-acre tract of land was made available at the corner of 199th Street and Antioch Road in Stilwell for a building site. Cost of the land was \$105,000. After prayer and discussions, the congregation voted on Dec. 8, 1996, to approve the purchase of the tract. On January 10, 1997, a purchase contract was signed under the condition that the church could obtain a Conditional Use Permit from Johnson County to rezone the land to permit a church building on the site.

After many submissions and revisions, the County issued a Conditional Use Permit to the church on June 19, 1997, and the purchase of the land was concluded on July 10, 1997. Prior to the closing date, the church Building Fund had grown to \$77,500. Various ways of raising the \$28,000 shortfall were considered, but it finally was agreed to offer members of the congregation the option to purchase promissory notes in amounts of \$1,000 each bearing an interest rate of 6% with staggered maturities over a 22-month period. Happily, the response to this plan was excellent, and the entire \$28,000 loan was paid off in May of 1998, 10 months after it was created.

Although the purchase of the land emptied the treasury, it did not slow the planning process. While building funds were being accumulated again, the Board began working with a Christian contractor and architect in early 2001 to begin firming up building designs and costs. A most encouraging gift of \$55,000 to the building fund in the Fall of 2001 made it possible to accelerate our building plans so construction could begin in 2002. At year end 2001, there was nearly \$120,000 in the Building Fund.

Because the church had made a major revision of their earlier building design due to cost, Johnson County required them to re-apply for a new Conditional Use Permit for the revised design which was more affordable. The new permit was issued to the church on July 14, 2002, and the following Sunday the congregation voted 42 to 0 to authorize our Board to put the old church building up for sale. Plans were then set to have a formal Ground Breaking service at the building site on September 15, with local police, fire and County officials invited. The Lord gave us a beautiful, sunny afternoon for the event. The footprint of the building was staked out on the site to help our imagination, and several church leaders spoke before the traditional shovel ceremony. Refreshments were served to all following the service.

The County Building Dept. issued our Building Permit on October 24, 2002. Shortly thereafter, the church voted their approval (57 to 1) to sign a contract with My Father's House Construction, Inc. to build the building for \$617,941, and approved obtaining financing for \$325,000 with First National Bank of Louisburg, Kansas. Within a week, earth moving equipment was grading the property for site preparation. What a delight to see construction actually begin after years of waiting! The mild winter made it possible to pour the footings by early February; however, engineering tests revealed that the dirt within the foundation was expansive clay and had to be replaced with packed gravel before the floor could be poured. This unexpected event caused a \$12,000 extra charge to the building cost.

Later that month, the 7,800 square feet floor of the building was poured and allowed to cure for several weeks. Early in March, rough-in of the walls began and was completed by early of April. The roof trusses were placed in May, and the roof and other exterior finishing carpentry were completed in June. It was at this point in the project that the church experienced several huge challenges that were a test of their faith. Up to that time, the church had been paying for construction expenses using their own cash in the Building Fund. The sale of the old church building was timed to provide cash for continuing construction after their funds were spent, with bank loan funds being used for final expenses to completion.

On July 12, three days before we were to close on the sale, the buyer backed out of the deal and told us to keep the earnest money. Our treasurer had over \$90,000 in bills coming due in July. As if that were not enough, our foreman on the construction project resigned. These developments cast the task of finishing the building directly on the congregation to see the project through to its completion.

A bridge loan was arranged with the bank until another buyer for the old church could be found, but this event added a considerable amount to our final mortgage. Thankfully, the men and women of the congregation pulled together to get the job done and hold costs down by devoting long hours doing nearly all of the interior finishing work, from staining, varnishing and installing all the trim lumber, to finishing and hanging the doors, tiling bathrooms and classrooms, doing all the interior and exterior painting, planting all the trees and shrubs and much, much more! One party donated over 1000 yards of sod for landscaping around the building, and another individual donated labor, seed and straw for seeding the remainder of the acreage. Many more gifts were received for which we were very thankful. Our Lord being our Helper provided for His church, and to Him we give the Glory.



Grace Bible Church began meeting in their new 7800 square foot facility on November 30, 2003.

Johnson County officials issued the church an Occupancy Permit on November 25, 2003, immediately after the fire inspection was completed. The first service was then held on November 30, 2003. Carpet for the facility was not yet installed due to a trucking problem, but this did not take away from the joy of the occasion. Carpet was all installed by mid-December, and to our great joy and surprise, the church was gifted with a new Yamaha baby grand piano and a companion electric piano. Our Lord knew our pianos from the old building were much worn.

On March 6, 2004, our leaders finalized the mortgage of approximately \$420,000 on the building, and we were now on our way to grow ministries again. For the record, the total cost of the structure was \$703,651, not counting the \$105,000 cost of the land.

Chapter 4

The Plowing, Sowing and Harvesting Years

There is no question that building a new church building diverts an enormous amount of energy and resources from a congregation's normal activities. It should be noted, however, that at Grace Bible Church, despite the diversion, there were many things that did not change. Solid teaching and preaching of Pastor Glidden and our Sunday School staff went on undiminished, as did a strong emphasis and regular meetings for prayer. The commitment to a serious vision for missions embraced from the very beginning of the work also continued during these years in a wide variety of ways.

The annual Missions Conference, plus weekly reminders from the pulpit and by e-mail communication of happenings in the lives of the nine missionaries our church presently supports (see Addendum) provides vitality to the vision. Involvement with individual ministries of our supported missionaries is another important activity. Some highlights of these activities include purchasing chairs in 1998 for a new church plant by one of our missionaries (Colin McClure) in Norwood, NY, and giving a cash grant to another of our missionaries (Richard Peralez) to help his congregation in South Sioux City, NE, to buy a church building. Two years ago, men from our church built a 75-foot-long wheel chair ramp on to their building to eliminate a hazardous stairs access for elderly persons, and to make it handicap accessible.

Mike and Jana McCurdy and children, moved by the Spirit of the Lord after a Missions Conference in 1998, left their secular employment and went to Papua New Guinea to serve with New Tribes Mission for three years.

Pastor Glidden felt for a long time that a significant impact is made when people go to a foreign mission field to see, and participate in the work going on. In the years between 1993 and 2006, he organized five such trips involving members of the congregation going to Ireland, Israel, Brazil, Ecuador and Bolivia. In Ireland, he taught discipleship classes. The team that traveled to Brazil helped build an addition to a new church started by missionary, Dan Anderson. In Bolivia, Pastor taught a modular course at Hebron Theological Seminary while other members of our church who traveled with him did repairs on seminary buildings.

The scope of GBC ministries to our congregation and beyond ranges from sponsoring Evangelistic Dinners, July 4th ministry to the community, Bible-In-Me children's ministries, CEF 5-Day Bible Clubs, fellowship meals, youth and young adult ministries, tape ministry, and chaplain ministry with our local fire department personnel. This is but a partial overview of outreach activities as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission.

One of the unique opportunities our church has had over the years is to be a church home and training ground for local and out-of-town Calvary Bible College students. Since its beginning, our church has seen over thirteen families go into various Christian ministries (missionaries, pastors, military chaplain, etc.).

Several years ago, our leadership developed a Purpose Statement to express clearly the vision we are seeking to fulfill so that we stay on target as we look to the future. It reads as follows:

To Glorify Our God
through our worship of Jesus Christ.

To Evangelize Our World
with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To Equip Each Believer
for life and service.

To Develop Future Leaders
for local church ministries
here and around the world.

We surely give God the Glory for His past blessing upon Grace Bible Church, and we seek to serve Him faithfully until He returns.

Psalm 115:1
Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your lovingkindness,
Because of Your truth.

ADDENDUM

Grace Bible Church currently supports the nine missionary families listed below:

Dan and Linda Anderson
Brazil Gospel Fellowship Mission
Church Planting in Brazil

Howard and Marcia Davidson
Biblical Ministries Worldwide
Serving in Scotland

Kevin and Pam Dunn
Biblical Ministries Worldwide
Church Planting in Honduras

John and Christine French
CrossWorld
Church Planting/Leadership Training in
South Africa

Ron and Shirley Hudson
New Tribes Mission
Representative Emeritus

Brian and Jennifer Masters
CAM International
Serving through Technology

Paul and Brenda Mattson
CrossWorld
Church Planting in France

Colin and Susan McClure
American Mission for Opening Churches
Church Plant in Norwood, NY

Rich and Joan Peralez
American Mission for Opening Churches
Church Plant in S. Sioux City, NE