



REPORT TO FELLOWSHIP COUNCIL

Janet Minnix, President

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Are the ministries of Women of Grace USA making a difference in the lives of women? The following comments speak for themselves.

- Regarding an article in the Grace Touch e-newsletter: “Thank you so much for sharing this experience that I’m sure you would’ve rather kept to yourself... a heartache and devastation... but one that when shared can make a difference in the lives of those who hear it... changing other lives for God’s glory.”
- Regarding another article in the Grace Touch: “So needed these words today! God is calling me to go deep in forgiveness... My flesh wants to stay shallow. Thanks for encouraging me with this!”
- Re: the Biblical Foundations of Leadership class taught by Dr. Christy Hill: “The Biblical Foundations of Leadership class was life-changing for myself and two others from my church who participated. This was definitely one of the best classes I’ve ever attended. Our pastor asked us to do a two-month discussion group for our church family introducing the principles we had learned in the class, and it has sparked some lively discussion. The principles we learned have been tremendously influential and helpful.” (Cindy Shuler, Leesburg Grace Brethren Church, Indiana)

As a national ministry cooperating with the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, Women of Grace USA Inc. appreciates the opportunity to report to the Fellowship Council on the work of WGUSA in the past year. We see evidence that God is using this ministry in the lives of Grace Brethren women, and we give Him the glory.

Our mission is to encourage women to grow in Christ and be actively engaged in God’s mission. We want to help women understand how to become true women of grace who reflect the character of God. We believe that will happen as they are deeply and solidly grounded in God’s Word, internalizing biblical values and understanding who they are in Christ. They will then be equipped to minister with a gracious, Christ-like servant spirit, with a heart for God that overflows in a desire to reach lost people next door and around the world.

Women of Grace USA supports the Commitment to Common Ministry in ways that are appropriate for our ministry and mission. Our activities are primarily in the areas of Leadership Development and Spiritual and Ministry Development.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The **Women's Leadership Studies** classes taught by Dr. Christy Hill continue to be a key component in our emphasis on Leadership Development. Three classes were held in 2013, and two more are already scheduled for 2014.

We are grateful to be partnering with Grace Seminary to facilitate the Women's Leadership Studies program through which a woman who completes the six weekend classes can earn a certificate in Women's Leadership Studies from Grace Seminary or, with additional pre- and post-course work and a Bachelor's Degree, class credits can be applied toward a Master of Arts in Local Church Ministry with a concentration in Women's Leadership Studies. We are delighted to announce the first WLS certificate recipient. Cindy McDonald, Milford, IN, has completed six Continuing Education Units through the classes offered jointly by Women of Grace USA and The Center for Women's Leadership Studies of Grace Theological Seminary.

Because of the growing number of requests for the classes, Dr. Hill is working with us to create a program where other women can be trained to teach the courses under her supervision. We are encouraged by the positive response and excitement on the part of the women we've contacted to be a part of this program. Lord willing, a week-long intensive training class will take place on the campus of Grace Seminary this summer for these women.

The **SMM/Girls of Faith** program is another piece in our strategy for Leadership Development. The importance of the role of women in influencing the values of the next generation is enormous. We believe that the greatest contribution SMM can make to the Commitment to Common Ministry is to equip women to teach girls to know and love God and to understand how to serve Him by serving others.

SMM celebrated its 100th birthday in 2013 with a special dinner and program during Momentum. Originally named Sisterhood of Mary and Martha, the organization announced a new name in conjunction with its centennial: Sisters Mentoring with a Mission. Curriculum for the elementary grades is now available on CD.

In keeping with the new name, Nicole Miller, Girls' Ministries Coordinator for SMM, has taken advantage of an unusual opening to provide a training arena for young women desiring to disciple girls. When a local Grace Brethren Church decided to devote their energies to another ministry other than the after-school SMM they had sponsored for years, Nicole recognized the opportunity to provide experience in discipleship for students at Grace College and Seminary. The after-school program is continuing as young women work with the girls under Nicole's leadership, and has led to a request from an elementary school principal in a nearby town for a program in her school.

SPIRITUAL & MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT

Supporting and encouraging women in their spiritual growth are foundational to equipping women for service and mission. We thank God for the number of young women who are

attending the Women's Leadership Studies classes as well as women's leadership summits and transformational summits. Others are developing using their skills as writers by contributing articles to our primary tools for encouragement. The monthly e-newsletter, **Grace Touch**, always includes a devotional thought, an article for Moms, a book review and a prayer focus. The current issue of *Women's Spectrum*, our annual magazine, includes inspirational stories, devotional themes and special missionary news and projects, also contains an interactive Bible study by Lois Shirk on Relationships.

God is opening doors to opportunities to serve Hispanic women. Last year I reported that board member Viki Rife was to be the speaker at a conference for Hispanic women, *Belleza que dura*, in Syracuse, IN this April. From that conference came requests for another gathering. A Hispanic Transformation Summit will be held in the Atlanta area in April, coordinated by board member Rosa Munoz.

Several Women of Grace leaders have been invited to participate in the South Focus Retreat in March and the Ethnic Gathering in Tampa, with the goal of providing encouragement to pastors' wives and discussing their importance in the work of ministry.

Short-term ministry opportunities are a part of the global focus of Women of Grace. A team of five women spent ten days in September ministering with Alice Peacock and Kevin and Holly High in Corrientes, Argentina. While the original intent of these ministry teams has been to assist the missionaries in contact-making, work projects and special outreach events, this team came home with a new perspective and burden: the missionaries themselves desperately need personal encouragement, listening ears, and a stronger of connection to the greater FGBC. Holly High has written about the team's impact for the January issue of *Grace Touch*:

"The team was designed by God specifically for our family and Alice Peacock, the other member of our team. Their ministry actually moved my heart with the reality of knowing that women's ministries are beyond a Bible study—they are about loving and caring and meeting somebody right where they are. No matter whether they're struggling in their faith or spiritually mature believers, each individual is important to God, and to Women of Grace... We were relieved that they did not expect us to fill the time with cultural experiences for them—instead, they took time to get to know us as people. Even when plans went awry, they used the "wasted" time to build relationships with us and with each other."

The next Women's GO Team will be November 11-24, 2014 to Cambodia. This team will help with English classes, spend a day with the Cambodian Ministry Partner wives and guests, visit the local church in Battambang, and encourage the missionary team.

An area where Women of Grace is being challenged in how to encourage spiritual and ministry development relates to where women fit and can use their giftedness in the Body of Christ. Women of Grace USA affirms our belief that while both women and men are gifted for service in the church, the office of an elder is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. We applaud the churches in our Fellowship that have recognized and are using highly gifted women in leadership roles. However, we hear from a growing number of young women who question why they are

limited to a few areas of service or why they are ignored, overlooked or their opinions viewed as unimportant to the growth of the Body. These are women who hold positions of leadership and responsibility in the work place where their training, skills and expertise are highly valued. They do not want to be elders; they simply wish to be affirmed for their abilities and allowed to be all that God created them to be. What do we tell them? How do we encourage our SMM girls to develop their gifts so they can use them to build up the Body of Christ? Where do women fit into the identity (DNA) of the FGBC?

GIVE THANKS TO GOD

Women of Grace USA is grateful to God for His guidance and blessing during the past year. In addition, please join us in thanking Him for preparing the next national leader for Women of Grace USA. Viki Rife, our present Communications Coordinator and Director of Girls' Ministries, will take over as Executive Director on August 1, 2014. I am deeply grateful to God for Viki's work during the past 10 years, and am confident of God's hand upon her as she will assume her new responsibilities this summer.

I would also like to acknowledge a group of women who are vitally important to this ministry. Every month 64 women, the WGUSA Prayer Force, receive and pray for requests for the various aspects of Women of Grace. We praise God for their faithful intercession on our behalf. In addition, we thank him for the individuals who give to support the work of WGUSA.

We are deeply grateful to the Grace Brethren Investment Foundation for their contributions that provide most of the funding to compensate our Communications Coordinator. The other officers and board members volunteer their time and frequently give sacrificially from their personal finances to support and maintain this ministry. We thank God for them.

And finally, we thank Executive Director Bartley Sawatsky, Fellowship Coordinator Tom Avey, and the members of Fellowship Council, for your commitment to God's Word and His mission, your vision for what God can do through the FGBC, and for your wise and prayerful direction. We are grateful for your prayer support and encouragement as we seek God's will and provision. It is our joy and privilege to partner with you and your ministries in "...the marvelous work to which we've been called—encouraging [women] to walk in the fullness of all God has called and created them to be through Jesus Christ" (paraphrasing Margaret Feinberg).