



(from left) Wayne Kent and Rick Grace

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Disciple Heritage Fellowship (DHF) is interested in how you thrive in your relationship with Christ and how your church thrives in ministry. That's it. We want God's best blessings for you and best ministry practices for your church.

We work primarily with those from a common background of the Restoration Movement [Christian Church, Church of Christ, and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ, DOC)].

In response to troubling statements made regarding DHF, here are some clarifying truths that reflect our past and present ministry:

It is true we are evangelicals, biblically conservative, and interested in all people experiencing the grace of God found exclusively in Jesus Christ.

It is true DHF first worked exclusively in the Christian Church (DOC). We began in the 1980s hoping to bring an evangelical voice to the matters faced by the DOC. We feared the denomination's direction away from biblical authority would lead to decimation and eventual demise. The present status of the DOC bears out our concerns of 30 years ago.

It is true some people, often those with the loudest voices calling for diversity within the Body of Christ, do not appreciate our work. At times, it has appeared that diversity excludes the voices of evangelicals such as ourselves.

It is true we stopped addressing issues within the denomination many years ago. When our voice

was silenced, we sensed the Holy Spirit leading to a new ministry approach outside the DOC.

It is also true this move caused many of our supporting churches to leave the denomination, including the congregation where I have served for more than 26 years.

It is true DHF runs on a very tight budget, funded solely by gifts of supporters, with only one full-time employee. First Christian Church, Decatur, Illinois, provides office space and support personnel.

It is true congregations contact us expressing concern regarding theological positions of the DOC. We do not solicit those conversations. We offer advice, if requested, based on the collective stories of hundreds of congregations. Each church has a unique story and makes their own decision. Some continue their DOC affiliation. Others do not.

It is true we welcome conversation with any leader regarding how we can all experience more of God's grace and leadership, both personally and within the congregations where we worship.

The goal of Disciple Heritage Fellowship is to help churches thrive and plan for many more years of fruitful ministry in Jesus' name, while pursuing an orthodox, biblical truth.



Wayne Kent | wayne@firstdecalur.org

Wayne is the Executive Director of Disciple Heritage Fellowship and Lead Pastor of First Christian Church, Decatur, IL. He has theological degrees from Phillips Theological Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.



Our heart & passion is to **encourage** pastors and their spouses in ministry.

“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement) sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

ACTS 4:36-37

One of my favorite Biblical characters has been Joseph, also known as Barnabas. Every time he appears in the book of Acts, he is encouraging someone. That was his heart, his passion, his ministry. It was so much a part of Joseph’s identity that the apostles gave him a nickname that has stuck throughout the history of the church – Barnabas, the son of encouragement.



Rick Grace (right) with Dennis & Vivian Lake of First Christian Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota

When asked to consider joining the staff of DHF, I was excited, but also somewhat cautious. Since mine was to be a new position, I wanted the freedom to put “fingerprints” on it. My heart and passion — shared by my wife, Nancy — is to encourage pastors and their spouses in the challenging calling of ministry. In other words, I want to be a Barnabas.

The state of pastoral ministry in the United States is not a pretty one. According to multiple studies, only one in five pastors starting their careers will still be in ministry after five years. And of those who clear the five-year mark, only one in five will retire as a pastor. This means there is a pastoral dropout rate in excess of 85%. This is a tragedy affecting the ministry of the church.

As I have traveled across the country for the past few months in my role as DHF Church Liaison, I have found some pastors doing quite well. But I have found many more who are discouraged, weighed down by unrealistic expectations, and most of all, beset by incredible loneliness. My goal is to help reverse this alarming condition in those pastors who choose to be connected to DHF.

The opportunities to connect with DHF include weekly email encouragements (subscribe at discipleheritage.org), online group studies, personal visits, regional retreats for pastors and/or spouses, along with invitations to our national conference and other growth opportunities. My heart is to create a network among our pastors so no one feels isolated in ministry.

Please know you are valued simply because you are a child of the King! Also, there is a relational fellowship to come alongside you, to be a Barnabas to you. This may be just what you need to not only keep going, but to finish well to the glory of God.

Let me know if I can help in any way. Contact me, Rick Grace, at rgrace@discipleheritage.org or at 217.875.3350.



Nancy Grace (left) with Scott & Debbie Woddell of The Park Christian Church in Mesquite, Texas



Rick Grace | rgrace@discipleheritage.org

Rick is the DHF Church Liaison. He and his wife, Nancy, have served in pastoral ministry for more than 45 years. Rick earned his doctorate from the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary.

Why did the church cross the road?



To reach the neighboring public school on the other side!

Partnering With a Public School

This describes what took place nearly two decades ago in Decatur, Illinois, when First Christian Church came alongside Parsons Elementary School. What began as a handful of church members going into a local public school — volunteering to serve as needed — has grown into a thriving ministry: Club 305.

As of January 2020, this ministry of approximately three dozen volunteers serves five grades in a near 1-to-1 ratio twice a week during the school year. Students are transported from school to First Christian Church, greeted by volunteers, and encouraged to participate in well-planned activities for two hours.

The Schedule

As soon as the students arrive at the church, they have time to let loose, have fun, and be kids while being engaged with adults — allowing students to expend bundled-up energy. Next, students huddle up to go over rules and expectations before being led through a brief, but impactful, bible lesson. The large circle is then divided into smaller circles by grade, and all are given a snack as they fellowship with the volunteers. Each student is given a 1-on-1 connection time to share and pray with an assigned volunteer. Students then engage in reading and math academic lessons at grade levels before heading back to the large circle for a closing challenge.

Making a Difference

Volunteering two hours, two days a week can impact the lives of students. Club 305 is making a positive impression on them. It is common for family members and teachers of the students to come and participate in Club 305 Family Night dinners as well as various church activities.

During the Christmas season, the entire church provides Christmas gifts, in shoeboxes, to every student in the entire school. It is a favorite Christmas project for the congregation. While most public schools have forced out prayer, this relationship has welcomed prayer among the church members and staff of the school every week.

Try It Out!

We encourage you to explore creative ways to get involved in community missions. It may be through a school, a hospital, or a rehab center. **Be the hands of Jesus in your community.** Be willing to cross the road for the glory of God!



Datrice Weathers | dweathers@firstdecat.org

Datrice is the Community Missions Liaison at First Christian Church in Decatur, IL. She enjoys taking her faith outside the walls of the church by sharing God's Word in authentic community.



Disciple Heritage Fellowship

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discipleheritage.org

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DHF'20

**DISCIPLE HERITAGE FELLOWSHIP
NATIONAL CONFERENCE
APRIL 24-25, 2020 IN DECATUR, IL**



BOB RUSSELL



MARK & JILL SAVAGE

About

The DHF National Conference is a two-day conference designed for pastors, staff, and lay leaders of churches who desire to be encouraged, equipped, and challenged as leaders of the 21st century church. Experience the presence of God through worship and inspiring messages. Acquire practical tools for ministry in your local setting. Make connections with other church leaders across the country. Gather with new and old friends and leave renewed for ministry ahead.

Details & registration can be found at:

discipleheritage.org/events

Speakers

- ▶ Dr. Rick Grace | DHF Church Liaison
- ▶ Dr. Tom Harris | Executive Director of Interim Pastor Ministries
- ▶ Dr. Wayne Kent | Lead Pastor of First Christian Church (Decatur, IL) & DHF Executive Director
- ▶ Ethan Magness | Senior Minister of First Christian Church (Johnson City, TN)
- ▶ Lori Putnam | Ministry Development Director of First Christian Church (Decatur, IL)
- ▶ Bob Russell | Former Lead Pastor of Southeast Christian Church (Louisville, KY)
- ▶ Mark and Jill Savage | Bloomington, IL
- ▶ Brian Talty | Associate Pastor of First Christian Church (Decatur, IL)
- ▶ Michael Ten Eyck | Lead Pastor of First Christian Church (Pittsfield, IL) & DHF Board Chair

Breakout Sessions

- First Impressions
- Room for Doubt: Defending Your Faith
- Marriage
- Mentally Healthy Church Staff
- Digital Communications
- Interim Pastor Ministries
- Leadership Development
- Adoption/Foster Care in Your Church
- ... and much more to come!