

# FELLOWSHIP NEWS



## LOOKING FORWARD AND LOOKING BACKWARD IN WEST AFRICA

In late 1978, Americans were buying gas at \$0.63 per gallon, listening to the BeeGee's hit "Stay in Alive," and watching Little House on the Prairie. By 1979, most Americans had seen the movie *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* and *Grease*. Pop culture loomed large in American lives while a group of mission-minded denominations was quietly considering how to take the gospel to unreached people groups in Burkina Faso, West Africa. In November, 2018, 40 years later, FEC staff celebrated that small beginning and the continuing work in West Africa with church leaders in Burkina Faso.

In the late 1970's, several missionaries invested in Burkina Faso, moving there and learning the languages. Now, 40 years later, churches have been established among five different language groups. Fifteen years ago, the local churches in Burkina Faso established their own structure and leaders. The leaders in that country are committed to planting reproducing churches, starting three new churches last year. When they gathered to celebrate in November, over 700 people attended to

commemorate their small beginning and continued growth.

During the celebration, FEC representatives, Hal Lehman and Steve Nelson, discussed a new partnership for the gospel among the Yalunka people with the Burkina Faso leadership. In 2011, FEC missionaries reached out to Yalunka chiefs. The Yalunka are predominantly Muslim and populate several West African mountainous regions. Because of this outreach, many of the Yalunka have begun to follow Jesus in the four main target villages and beyond. Soon, the Yalunka Christians will transition to leading their own people with support from leaders in Burkina Faso.

In February and March, Steve and Pat Nelson will return to West Africa to facilitate a conversation between the leadership in Burkina Faso and Yalunka Christians. Missionary Steve Nelson remarked, "God is establishing a church (among the Yalunka) in ways that we could never have dreamed of." What began 40 years ago continues to reverberate in West Africa.



"... And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."  
Acts 1:8 NIV

At the beginning of a new year, most of us resolve to change our lifestyles by deciding to eat healthier, lose weight, exercise more, learn a new language, or start a new hobby. Here at FEC, we're making a resolution of our own. We resolve to engage more in 2019. Engage is our 2019 annual conference theme and our focus as we start the new year. As we think about engaging our culture here at FEC, we are focused on four key places/areas:

**Our Jerusalem.** Our Jerusalem represents people both near us and generally like us, including our neighbors, our coworkers, the parents of our kids' friends, and more. Engaging our Jerusalem means taking time to interact with the people around us. Spending time with, talking to, and just being with them in our daily interactions.

**Our Judea.** Engaging our Judea means drawing a larger circle that includes not only our geographical area but also nearby cities or states. It could mean sending people out to start a ministry or church in an area that we don't currently impact.

**Our Samaria.** Engaging our Samaria means connecting with people or populations who are different from us. This initiative could mean providing recovery groups for people affected by the opioid epidemic in our country; teaching English as a second language to immigrants struggling to learn a new culture; or learning to love and listen to people who have differing beliefs.

**The Very Ends of the Earth.** Estimates say that well over 5,000 people groups in the world are completely unreached by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Full engagement means that we need to look for ways to impact people in different countries and cultures.

By early February, 80% of New Year's resolutions will be abandoned. But, we pray that 2019 will remain as a year that we learn to engage with more people, in more places.

## True North Recreates a Night in Bethlehem for the Community

Most people who have been to church or Sunday School can tell the Christmas story down to the details with wise men, shepherds, and angels. For the past two years, the residents of Cannon Falls, Minnesota, have had the opportunity to see and experience a night in Bethlehem at True North Church. For three hours on a December, Sunday afternoon, True North transforms their worship center into Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus, complete with theatrical scenery, costumes, and a live nativity.

Before December arrived, over half of the church members begin preparing costumes and scenery. Then, on the day of the event, visitors entering "Bethlehem" are greeted by Roman guards who conduct them to the makeshift marketplace. In the marketplace, vendors teach visitors about making candles, painting ornaments, baking pretzels, writing Hebrew, and creating a natural-healing balm. As visitors engage in crafts, they the vendors talk to them about Jesus. During their journey through Bethlehem, visitors also encounter wise men who are searching for the newborn and shepherds who are asking, "Have you heard the good news?" Finally, visitors encounter the family of Mary and Joseph with their baby.

"A Night in Bethlehem" brings the people of True North together and gives them an opportunity to share their faith. Pastor Scott Wildenberg describes his church family by saying, "We as a church are looking beyond ourselves."



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