

The Associated Gospel Churches exists

to glorify God by partnering together in obedience to the Great Commandment

Matthew 22:37–40

and the Great Commission

Matthew 28:19–20

The vision of the AGC

is to be a movement of healthy reproducing churches



Lois & Bill Fietje

“The branch of the vine does not worry, and toil, and rush here to seek for sunshine, and there to find rain. No; it rests in union and communion with the vine; and at the right time, and in the right way, is the right fruit found on it. Let us so abide in the Lord Jesus.”

– JAMES HUDSON TAYLOR

Connect 2018

Share in The Life

Thank you for allowing Lois and I to serve our great Association these past many years. Our prayers are with Bill and Michele Allan. Bill is being presented at AGC 2018 National Conference as the candidate for your new AGC President. agcofcanada.com/news/agc

Our theme this year is **Abide**. The parable of the vine and the injunction of the need to abide in the vine is a fitting motif for my final words to you as your President.

Jesus says, **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him he will bear much fruit, apart from Me you can do nothing”** (John 15:5).

“I am the true vine,” says Jesus. This does not mean that He is true as opposed to that which is false but, rather, that He is the one, perfect, essential and enduring vine before which all other vines are but shadows.” (J.M. Boice)

The vine in this parable has the meaning of the whole plant. The ‘vine’ includes the roots, the stem, the branches and the fruit. We are the branches in the parable, but we are never to be severed from the vine, as that would mean death for the branch. These past years, we had the privilege of living in Niagara-on-the-Lake, in the very heart of grape country. Watching the pruners cut away the branches that had become dry and useless was a common sight. The purpose of this task was to yield a better crop. Yet, to cut the main stem of the vine was death to the plant.

This is applicable to our own spiritual lives and ministries. Jesus is the true vine. Jesus is the only “perfect, essential and enduring vine.” There is no life outside of Him. In short, our life and work are all contained in Jesus, the Christ. Christ doesn’t just invigorate or give some meaning to our life and ministry, He is our life and ministry. Jesus is the heart, the soul and the life of the AGC.

If we abide in Him, we will share in the life. This is my prayer for each one as we move into God’s intended future.

Rev. Dr. Willem Fietje – AGC President

Abide in Jesus

In the AGC, it is a time of leadership transition. As with any transition, there comes a level of uncertainty. It’s only natural. For the disciples, it was doing life and ministry without Jesus physically present with them. Where is the continuance, that which gives us a sense of comfort and stability as we move forward? It’s found in Jesus who invites us to **“Abide in Me, and I in you”** (John 15:4) and **“Abide in My love”** (John 15:9).

The dictionary definition for the word abide is to remain, to have one’s abode, to dwell or reside in. This gives a picture of contentment, of resting free from the cares and anxieties that often plague us in our busy world. In John 15:1-17 (ESV) the word “abide” occurs eleven times. This is significant. To abide in Jesus is to find contentment, rest and community. The beautiful figure of the vine and the branches signifies the source of our strength, and helps us focus on the nature of our calling as disciples – to bear much fruit. This is not accomplished in our own strength, but collectively in community, drawing strength from the true vine, our life source.

Our calling as disciples is that we go and bear spiritual fruit. As an Association we find both our calling and the perseverance for that calling not in the individual,

but in the community of like-minded churches banded together to see spiritual fruit that abides. This lasting fruit goes on to reproduce yet more fruit, which is reflected in our vision **to be a movement of healthy reproducing churches.**

As we move through this season of transition, let us focus on Jesus, the vine, that we may find both our rest and our calling. May the AGC, as a community of churches, totally dependent on Jesus the true vine, live and reflect the value of interdependency with one another in this great calling, that together we will produce much fruit. **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide”** (John 15:16).

Rev. Bill Allan – AGC Presidential Candidate



Michele, Bill and granddaughters

A Healthy Way of Moving Forward



Josiah, Candice, Nathanael, Isaiah,
Zephaniah & Elias Preuter

Fellowship in the Body of Christ is an integral part of our relationship with Christ. It is Christ who said, **“If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing”** (John 15:5). Just as we cannot bear fruit apart from Christ, we will not grow or bear fruit in our Christian walk apart from His Body, the Church.

Five years ago, when I answered the call to pastor McCreary Gospel Church and moved my family, I had no idea that loneliness found its way into the many boxes we packed. As we situated ourselves in this quiet town, loneliness settled in quietly alongside us. The church was an independent church, with no other evangelical witness for miles. I was fresh out of Bible college and this was my first pastorate. Things could have quickly gone downhill.

One day, I received an email from Pastor Randy Fehr of Gladstone Community Fellowship, inviting me to an AGC Pastors Café. I had no idea what to expect, so I let loneliness ride shotgun, just in case. As I walked through the doors of that church, warmly welcomed by those around the table, loneliness slipped away. There, in the presence of other members of the Body of Christ, I found myself in the presence of Christ Himself. There, I continue to find encouragement, prayer, and growth in my walk with Christ.

In November 2017, McCreary Gospel Church was received into the fellowship of the AGC. Just as I had recognized my need for the Body of Christ as I attended the pastors gathering, so McCreary Gospel Church became aware of the need for the larger Body of Christ. We chose to identify ourselves with the AGC as a healthy way of moving forward – one with opportunities for growth and bearing fruit – because in the presence of the other churches in the AGC we found ourselves in the presence of Christ.

Loneliness is no respecter of persons; it settles down quietly into our lives, whether we are pastors or laypeople, Sunday school teachers or greeters. Alone, we cannot expect to find the same comfort and growth in Christ that we find in the presence of other Christians. Take advantage of the fellowship your local church or ministry leaders gathering offers, you may just find yourself in the presence of the One you need the most.

Josiah Preuter – Pastor
McCreary Gospel Church, McCreary, MB

“Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.”

1 JOHN 2:6 ESV



“If we are not united to the Vine, nothing of any lasting value will come from us.”

– JOHN PIPER

Abiding Together

As pastor of Congregational Care at our church of 1700 people, I have the amazing privilege of connecting with individuals and families as they face some of life’s highest highs and lowest lows. Weddings, baptisms and births are some of the high times. Funerals, marriage and family conflicts encompass some of the lows. You would be correct in thinking that this is an impossible job for one pastor. That is why I’m so grateful for the dozens of capable, mature Christian men and women who help shoulder the load. Of all the systems we have in place to address various needs, the secret to a successful large church is our small group ministry. It is in this setting that true and sustainable care best happens.

Recently, I received word about a family in our church who were facing some internal strife. As I contemplated how to best approach the situation, the leader of their small group met with me. He said, *“Pastor, our group is giving support to this family. We are providing meals, praying for and walking with them as they sort out their issues. We are holding them accountable, loving them toward healing and restoration. Pastor, I just want you to know that you don’t have to do anything. We will be grateful for your prayers, but our community group has them covered.”*

Once I picked my jaw up off the floor, I expressed to this leader my profound gratitude. In Acts 2:40-47 we read about the establishing of the early Church. It grew quickly to several thousand new believers but as it grew large, it grew small. The believers established small groups and met in each other’s homes. They ate together, shared their possessions, supported and encouraged each other as they praised and glorified God as one Body. This is God’s design for His Church and I’m grateful for the people in my church family who understand the beauty of abiding together in Christ.

Rev. Randy Jost – Associate Pastor, MET Care
Metropolitan Bible Church, Ottawa, ON



Abiding in Christ and His Word

According to the world's standards, we do not run a cool youth group. We play games for no more than half an hour. The remaining two hours are spent worshipping God through song and prayer and studying His Word. We break into small groups for discussion and finish the night with a short time of fellowship and snacks.

These past two years we have not only seen our youth group grow numerically, but more importantly, we are seeing young people grow spiritually. There are teens entering into relationship with Christ for the very first time. We joyfully watch as they give their testimonies in front of their peers. We are greatly encouraged as many of them choose to be baptized. We are praying for them as they get involved in ministry. We rejoice as many teens transition from living for the world, to abiding in Christ.

As youth leaders we cannot and do not take credit for this growth. We attribute it all to the Lord and the life transforming power of His Word! I've seen many different attempts to grow youth ministry as I've served these past ten years. Often, these attempts come in the form of flashy events, fun trips, etc. There is an approach that says . . . if we can get young people to our event, then maybe they will stick around, and our ministry will flourish. It's true that big events do attract kids, but they don't keep them coming back week after week. I've found that

abiding in Christ and keeping the centrality on His Word is what brings kids back. Teenagers are hungry for more than what the world is offering them. The world isn't offering them Jesus or His Word. Jesus is enough and His Word is enough. As we abide in Christ and His Word we see growth take place in the lives of those whom we are serving.

Rev. Jerred Andreas – Youth Pastor
Church of the Open Bible, Swift Current, SK



Abiding in His Presence

Fair Havens Ministries is a Conference Retreat Centre which focuses on biblically based programming in support of the Kingdom-building vision that God has given us. We believe in life-changing experiences, to the glory of God!

Our passion to see people's lives changed is based on the truth of God's Word that He desires men, women, boys and girls to come into a relationship with their Saviour. He calls us to **"Abide in Him"** (John 15:4a).

What has God taught me about Abiding in Him?

1) *It is our Christian responsibility:* It is an act of obedience that results in an intimacy which cannot be experienced any other way. Abiding in Christ includes obeying His commands and maintaining fellowship with Him, even during the storms of life. We embrace and abide in God's truth, depending on Him fully with a faith and trust that does not waver.

- 2) *It is an expectation:* God will keep His promises. As we Abide in Christ, He provides us with life and strength, which is essential for spiritual fruitfulness.
- 3) *It is our assurance:* God will never leave us or forsake us. As we abide in Him, we have the confidence of answered prayer, direction, provision, and refinement. God will fill us to overflowing with His presence. He loves us with an everlasting love.

At Fair Havens our staff strive to serve our Lord by providing a place where individuals and families can come to be **'reFreshed, reFocus and reConnect'** with their God. They can abide in His presence, surrounded by the splendour of His creation. We confidently know that He has a wonderful plan for each individual and for this ministry and so, . . . we keep abiding in His presence.

We would love for you to come and visit us!
Many blessings, on behalf of the Fair Havens Team.

Liz Thompson – Executive Director
Fair Havens Ministries, Beaverton, ON

"Jesus invites us to abide in His love. That means to dwell with all that I am in Him. It is an invitation to a total belonging, to full intimacy, to an unlimited being-with. The light of the Spirit reveals to us that love conquers all fear."

– HENRI J.M. NOUWEN



"To ensure that we are abiding in Christ, it's imperative that we are reading and studying God's Word on a consistent basis – and obeying it. We have no option but to believe in Him, trust in Him and allow Him to use us to change the world. We have no option but to seek God's face and allow Him to lead us each day. We must abide in His Word as the only source of truth."

– BILLY GRAHAM



Abide in the One Who Has Overcome

Over thirty years ago, I was in such a dark place that I didn't want to live. It was through battling depression that I first learned what it meant to abide in the Vine. Throughout that dark season, I was desperate to stay connected to God, because apart from Him I could do nothing.

During this oppressive time, I cried out to God and fully surrendered my life to Him. He met me and began the process of revealing truth, mending the broken pieces of my life and filling me with the powerful hope that is found in Him. Not only did I learn to abide and live in Christ, but I also had an increasing desire to help hurting people find the hope that I had found. I have a passion for people to experience the freedom found in Christ that enables them to heal and grow through adversity.

For the past 18 years, I have been the Pastor of Care at Compass Point Bible Church. God has given me the faith to believe that no matter what hardship someone is facing, the One who is greater is always there. Depression, addiction, abuse, mental health challenges, suicide, demonic oppression, loneliness, fear, anxiety, or doubt . . . nothing is impossible for God. However, that does not always guarantee an immediate miraculous intervention. Nor does it always mean complete restoration, but the life-giving strength and grace that comes from abiding in Christ is always available.



I learned the most about remaining in Him during life's fiercest battles. Teaching others to abide in Christ during life's hardships has been foundational in caring for them. I can't possibly know what to do in every situation, but I can trust the One who does know and who will work through me as I abide. It's been astounding, the countless times in impossible situations, when I've not known what to say or do, that God's wisdom and knowledge was revealed, as I trusted and abided in Him.

The only way that we can conquer the darkness and help others to as well, is to abide in the One who has. In this life, Jesus said that we will face trouble, but we are encouraged to take heart because He has overcome this broken world!

Glenda De Vries – Pastor of Care
Compass Point Bible Church, Burlington, ON



Abiding in the Tide

As Y. Knott said, *"The Pacific is an ocean of water, the world an ocean of need."* Christ has called His followers to live and minister amongst the human tide of that latter ocean.

The change from pastoral ministry in a local church and community to pastoral ministry focused on refugees and persecuted Christians has found Susan and me up to our hearts in what is going to be a never ebbing flow of sorrow and pain. Bearers of the image of God are crying out through email and Facebook for the chance to simply live in Canada. They would be happy to have only what the poorest of us have.

Like everyone before us who has ever said "Yes" to God's call to let their hearts be broken by what breaks His heart, we know that we cannot accomplish this work without Divine empowerment and will never finish this work even with it.

Our model is Christ who abided in His Father and obediently lived a life of incredible power and miraculous acts and then left a world still broken and lost. To focus on the tremendous needs that press down upon our hearts, or to fixate on the impossibility of setting right the multitude, would be to lose ourselves and forfeit the hope of rest that remains only for those who will abide in God. **"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth"** (Psalm 46:10).

When will that day of global reckoning and worship come? Maybe before I finish writing this sentence, or maybe in 1,200 years, but it will surely come. Until then, like Jesus, we seek to abide humbly in God, striving to have compassion for all and bring justice to some.

Rev. Tim & Susan Davis – Co-Chairs
AGC Refugee Sponsorship Initiative
agcrsi.org



The secret of the fruitful vine, as Jesus revealed in John 15, is in the pruning. Some of you are being pruned right now. God is cutting away everything that keeps you from growth. It's painful, isn't it? But an unkempt vine can never produce good fruit, so your branch must be kept clean. That means dealing with those areas where we fail, those parts of our personalities that are not pleasing to God and, in some cases, tend toward sin.

How might God be pruning you for growth today? If you see an area that needs cleaning, acknowledge it. Got any sin that needs to be confessed? Any area of your life from which you're excluding Him? If so, repent of it and claim His forgiveness. While you probably don't see the fruit right now, it will come. In fact, the fruit comes only through God's careful pruning. But growing fruit means more than just pruning. It also has to do with depending daily – moment by moment, day by day, month by month – on the Lord Himself. Make it your determined purpose to stay close to the Vine this year, and get ready for Him to grow the fruit of His life in you.

– CHUCK SWINDOLL

Let's Connect

"Ministering in the AGC is a wonderful thing, . . . but often we serve in isolation." AGC President Bill Fietje and Pastor Craig Danielson mentioned this in a recent AGC video. One natural reaction to this isolation is to connect with a friend. Whether it is writing a note, making a call, texting or meeting in person, my first reaction is . . . "Let's connect!" This is my reality.

However, there is a deeper, or should we say higher, reality as Jesus invites us to abide in Him. We must live and serve in a way that recognizes our dependence on Him as we focus on our responsibilities at work, in ministry and with our family. Warren Wiersbe wrote, **"The sooner we as believers discover that we are but branches, the better we will relate to the Lord; for we will know our own weakness and confess our need for His strength."** (Be Transformed)

I have found that we can serve in many ways, fulfilling a great deal of responsibilities, feeling a sense of satisfaction and reaping the fruit of people's appreciation. However, if we do it in our own energy . . . in isolation, the fruit, if there is any, will be limited.

Being connected in Christ and recognizing the Holy Spirit's work in us means that we will see His influence.



Loubert Louissaint and Del Gibbons

- Like the phone conversation I had where a young man had "writer's block" for his next sermon and an idea "happened" to come to me. We were both encouraged as we talked, and his enthusiasm was contagious!
- Or when a stranger called the church asking for help and explaining that she had 4-6 months to live. It was an emotionally draining call. I had no idea of how to help, but I was aware of God's presence. His Spirit gave me the idea of referring her to a church near her home.

So, let's be connecting . . . wherever God has placed us. Let us abide in Christ, knowing our own weakness and confessing our need for His strength. Yes! Let's connect!

Rev. Del Gibbons – AGC Quebec Director & Associate Pastor
Église Évangélique Associée de Verdun, Verdun, QC



Simply Abiding

I am the pastor of Simply Church. We worship Sunday mornings on the campus of the University of Waterloo and our office is several blocks down the street from both Laurier & UW and across the street from Conestoga College. You can guess from our location that our ministry is primarily focused on students, but we also have young couples, families, and retired people in our fellowship. You may have come across my name in several AGC communiques asking for prayer due to my recent health issues. I had cancer, but after surgery and chemotherapy, I was declared cancer free on January 15th. Thank you for your prayers, cards, gifts, and support. I was asked to write a few words regarding my recent bout with cancer in relationship to our theme - "Abide."

Rev. Tim Wai – Pastor
Simply Church, Waterloo, ON

A **Aboding at Grand River Hospital 6th floor for 3 weeks transformed me.** I became, as Red commented in *The Shawshank Redemption*, "institutionalized." As I faced possible death, the hospital became a place of real care, comfort, hope, and compassion. I was fed, clothed, bathed and watched over. I simply pressed a button, and someone would come to address my needs. It was as if I had a glimmer of what aboding with our Father would be like. At the end of 3 weeks, I didn't want to be discharged.

B **Bearing patiently was the most difficult part of my hospital stay.** I endured 10 days of pain, poking, and prodding as test after test was ordered before the doctors came to a conclusive decision about my diagnosis and course of treatment.

I **Impulses to resist, avoid, or resent something injurious or distasteful often came to mind during that time.** The time of waiting caused much anxiety as I speculated on all possible outcomes. The finality of the words, "You have cancer," triggered a tidal wave of emotion – why me? Why now? How can it be? I have so much to do! I am not ready to die!

D **Delaying the inevitable has been mankind's mantra.** We seek to escape death, to find that fountain of youth and drink from the spring of water welling up to eternal life. But death is inevitable for us all.

E **Enduring the consequences of cancer was before me – whether it be imminent death, daily long-suffering with cancer, or the possibility of being cancer-free . . . all had consequences.** Many decisions had to be made and there were changes to confront. In God's infinite wisdom, He gave me a second chance at life. Now it's up to me to not squander His grace and mercy. How will I manage to do that? By simply abiding in Christ.

Abiding in Christ's Love for the Most Vulnerable

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love"
(John 15:9-10, NKJV).

When I was a child, growing up in a small city in Ontario, the only homeless man I'd seen walking around town was a former high school teacher who left his career due to a nervous breakdown. I didn't understand why someone would ever live on the street and eat out of garbage cans.

Today, I have the amazing privilege of pastoring an inner-city church that has a huge heart for the homeless. Our congregation obeys Jesus' commands to **"abide in His love"** and **"do unto others,"** allowing Christ's love to overflow to the most vulnerable in our city. As I've joined our volunteers and followed their example, God has taught me, their pastor, what it means to abide in His love!

Every Tuesday night, from November 1st – March 31st for the past 20 years, the church has opened its gym to the most vulnerable in our inner city. We enjoy a large home-cooked meal, lovingly prepared by church volunteers. The people are greeted like family when they arrive. During Christmas week over 85 guests showed up for Turkey dinner.

I've met amazing people who have become my friends. Many share stories of severe abuse as children. Some struggle with mental illness or addiction. They have a hard time trusting anyone, but praise God, they've opened their hearts to our team of over 30 volunteers. Our guests tell me, "This is our favorite place to come, because we feel loved when we walk in." Our Member of Parliament served with us recently, and said, "This feels friendlier than any other 'Out of the Cold' programs I've visited."



God has taught me what real community should look like by being a part of this large "street family." When we share a message from God's Word, they all get quiet and listen. When one dies, they all pull together and attend the funeral, comforting each other in their loss. When an intruder comes in and tries to cause a disturbance, they band together and back us up when we escort that person out. Many of them write down their prayer requests on pieces of paper we leave at the table. One man, to whom I gave his first Bible, was so excited and went home to read it. Later, a friend called him telling him that he was going to end his life. Our friend told him to stop and listen as he read from his new Bible. He came back the next week excited, "That Bible you gave me saved someone's life!"

Praise God for an inner-city church who is known on the street, not only for their excellent food and free clothing, but for abiding in Christ's love!

Rev. Daniel J. Winter – Senior Pastor
Calvary Church, Toronto, ON

While working on Connect 2018, the message of abiding in Jesus resonated deep within my spirit. The theme rarely left my thoughts as I read and edited the submitted stories.

I kept humming the song, "If You Abide In Me," a Maranatha Kids tune that my children had repeatedly listened to when they were young. Another tune that kept running through my mind is the much-loved English hymn, "Abide with Me". The author of the hymn, Henry Francis Lyte, was an Anglican priest and vicar of All Saints Church in Brixham, England. For most of his life he suffered from poor health, including tuberculosis. In 1847, though very ill, he insisted on preaching once more to his congregation. He passed on the lyrics to Abide with Me to a dear relative before going home to be with Jesus.

Each verse of this beloved hymn ends with the plea "Abide with me."

Help of the helpless, O abide with me . . .

Come, Friend of sinners, and thus abide with me . . .

Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me . . .

In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

If we fully comprehend Jesus' words, **"Apart from Me you can do nothing,"** we gain incredible freedom. The fruit we bear is His fruit. Jesus is the Vine. He is the One and only source of our fruit bearing. He said that **if we abide, we WILL bear much fruit.** That sounds like a promise to me! Think of the wonderful story found in Scripture about Jesus' dear friends, Mary and Martha. What was Jesus' answer to Martha's anxious "performing?" **"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her"** (Luke 10:41,42). Mary knew how to abide at the feet of Jesus.

Thank you to each contributor for sharing your story on the theme of abiding in Jesus. These wonderful illustrations help encourage, inspire and strengthen our relationships with each other and with our Saviour. As we abide in Him, may we be filled with joy as the fruit of our labours builds God's Kingdom here.

Susan Page – AGC Church Relations Coordinator



Visit our website @
agcofcanada.com

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