



Preach the Gospel · Experience Jesus · Make Disciples

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History of Grace Bible Church

Grace Bible Church, originally known as Bible Baptist Church, was organized in November, 1955 with 26 charter members under the leadership of the first pastor, Rev. Melvin Keeler. They met in a number of locations during their early days, including the Marlette School's Kindergarten Cottage and the American Legion Hall. A building fund was initiated in January of 1957 to construct their own place of worship and in 1958-59, land was purchased at the current location and a church-parsonage combination was built under the leadership of Rev. Arthur Cunningham. The first service was held on February 3, 1959 and the last mortgage was paid in full in May of 1969.

In 1988, the church voted to change its name to Grace Bible Church, hoping to reduce possible negative response of having two Baptist churches within a half-mile of each other. While retaining the original constitution and doctrinal statement, Grace Bible functioned for the next 10 years as an independent, Bible believing church with no official ties to any denomination. However, there was a growing effort to develop an interdependent spirit with all the area churches, regardless of denomination, who shared the essentials of our Statement of Faith.

After several years of prayer and consideration, Grace Bible applied and was officially accepted into membership of the Great Lakes District of the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA), October 22, 1999. This was not an effort to isolate the body from other Christ-honoring, Bible-believing churches from other denominations, but for practical reasons, including:

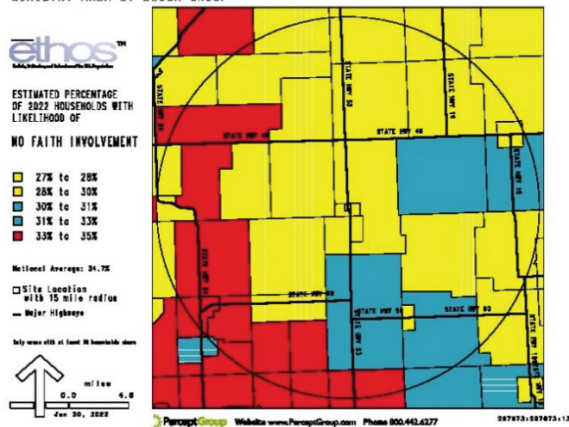
- Greater accountability
- Strength of fellowship
- Accessibility of resources to help strengthen the church ministries
- Identification and definition of who they are
- Healthy challenge through interaction with sister churches.

While the congregation has had a handful of pastors since its start in 1955, our most recent pastor, Rev. Mike Hollenbeck, served the congregation for 32 years, from 1988-2020. Pastor Mike was born and raised in Marlette and his parents, Don and Arlene Hollenbeck, were charter members of Bible Baptist Church. Community ministry was a hallmark of his tenure at Grace. His ministry focused on the lost and the least, just as the Lord Himself modeled. Pastor Mike invested his time as a volunteer hospice chaplain with United Hospice Service and partnered with other like-minded churches and organizations to spread the Gospel in the Marlette area.

One such partnership in 2010 led to the establishment of Hope Community Christian Church in Marlette. Pastor Mike felt the burden to reach out to the marginalized of the community and desired to develop a storefront youth center in the former CC Cyber Café facility. Grace partnered with four other Marlette churches and began the process to launch the ministry. While this partnership was not as successful as desired, it did set the stage for connecting with a church planting couple – Paul & Erin Rohling who rented a portion of the youth center on Sundays. Pastor Mike, along with Dan Krueger and Matt and DeeDee Corlew from Grace assisted the Rohlings on Sunday mornings for the first few months to help establish the fledgling church plant. That ministry, now 12 years old, has two Sunday morning services with 250 people in attendance.

Context For Grace Bible Church Ministry

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH - MARLETTE, MI 48453
MINISTRY AREA BY BLOCK GROUP

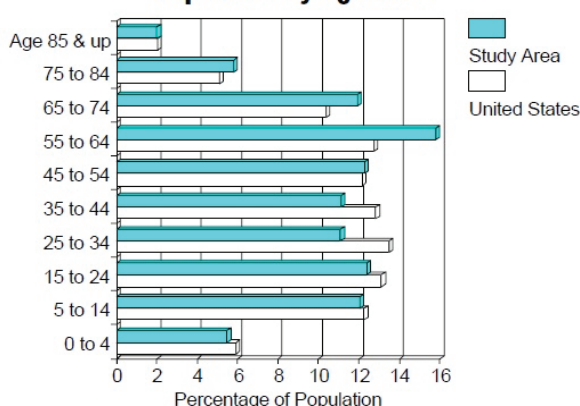


A demographic study of the community from the Percept Group provides specific information within a 15 mile radius of the church's address. Currently, as of June, 2022, there are 36,239 persons residing in the defined study area. This represents a decrease of 1,956 or 5.1% since 2000. During this same time period, the U.S. as a whole grew by 18.8%. The population count is expected to be stable over the next 5 years. Of special interest, as noted in the chart to the left, is the large number of estimated households with no faith involvement.

From a generational standpoint, our community skews older than the U.S. average as noted in the graph to the right. The largest generational group are Survivors

(Gen X – age 41-61) comprised of 10,024 or 27.7% of the total population in the area. Boomers (age 62-79) make up 20.4% of the population which compared to the national average of 17.3% makes them the most over-represented group in the area.

Population by Age-2022



Of particular interest from a ministry perspective is the large number of households by "Phase of Life" which falls into the Retirement Opportunities (age 65+). In 2010 there were 5,413 households in this category. A consistent upward trend has taken place since then with 7,172 households (19.8%) currently in this age group. This same group is projected to be at 22.2% of all households by 2027.

More information is available upon request from the Ministry Area Profile prepared by the Percept Group for Grace Bible Church. Please email that request to gbmarlette@yahoo.com.

Grace Bible Church Today

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March, 2020 has forever changed the landscape for ministry not only in Marlette but certainly across the world. Churches were compelled to approach ministry in a different mode than the familiar in-person gathering for worship, instruction, and fellowship than they had grown accustomed to. Grace began holding outdoor services on the lawn behind the church building during the summer of 2020 and then moved back to the sanctuary that Fall. Attendance was estimated to be about half of pre-pandemic numbers. Adding to the ministry struggles, Pastor Mike also announced his pending retirement that Summer, effective October 4, 2020.

Sunday morning attendance, pre-pandemic was estimated by leadership to be 45-50. Average attendance since mid-August of 2022, when tracking began again, was 29.8 for 2022 and 33.6 in 2023. Many of the Sundays this year have seen visitors, some of which have returned and become regular attenders. Giving has been consistent over the past 2 years and has covered the ongoing expenses.

In the Spring of 2022, Grace Bible Church reached out to Interim Pastor Ministries (interimpastors.com) to provide an intentional, interim pastor who could come along side and help prepare the congregation for our new pastor. Rev. Bob Norris and his wife Sandy joined the team in June and has led us in a comprehensive ministry assessment and laid the groundwork with the help of a Transition Team to begin a new life cycle of fruitful, ministry effectiveness in the days to come. That ministry assessment, which also includes an extensive survey of the congregation, is available upon request to gbmarlette@yahoo.com.

Focus of Ministry

While most evangelical churches in the U.S. desire to create a ministry that would be inviting to young adults with families, we believe that given the demographics of our community and the large number of homes without any faith involvement that our focus should be on the fastest growing segment of our population – those 65+ in age. While that seems to be counter-intuitive, we believe that a healthy, growing older congregation can provide the stability and strength to begin to attract a younger demographic in order to sustain a new life cycle for the church.

We believe, at least in the short run of the next 3-5 years, that Grace should be looking for a pastor who is burdened for, and can communicate well with the older adults of our community in order to start an upswing in the church's life cycle. Grace's next pastor must also be committed to discipling and equipping the saints to do the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12). A team approach will be mission critical to growing the ministry here at Grace. The current financial condition of the church will most likely require a pastor who is willing to take a bi-vocational approach at Grace or has other means to supplement his income.



A Little Bit About Marlette and the Thumb of Michigan

City of Marlette



Grace Bible Church is located in Marlette, Michigan, a rural community at the center of Southeast Michigan's "Thumb". Marlette is primarily an agricultural community with K-12 public schools, a variety of small businesses, moderate industry, a hospital providing medical care, and a broad selection of affordable housing, to lease or own, in and around the City of Marlette. Our surrounding community defines country living and embraces Christianity with open arms. For more information, visit cityofmarlette.com.

Local Industry

Marlette's quaint downtown storefront area is modestly active with a variety of privately-owned storefront operations. Local retailers include a grocery store, restaurants and fast food outlets, hair-dressing salons, barber shops, boutiques, ice cream parlors, florists, gift shops, thrift stores, hardware and lumber supply, sporting goods, pharmacies, four major auto and diesel fueling stations, a liquid propane filling station, and a host of automotive, home building, and repair services. Several major chain store retailers are located within a short driving distance. Although a number of large manufac-

turing corporations have established operations within the community, Oetiker Inc., Grupo Antolin, Marlette Regional Hospital, and the community schools are currently Marlette's largest employers. For more information, visit cityofmarlette.com.



Country Living – Close to the City, but Not Too Close

Marlette is centrally located within 60 miles of Port Huron, Mt. Clemens, Flint, Saginaw, and Bay City, MI. Marlette Township owns the area's Pilot-operated General Aviation airport located adjacent to the City of

Marlette. Public transportation to all points throughout Sanilac County is available through the Sanilac County Transportation Authority. The County Seat, located in the neighboring City of Sandusky, is approximately 19 miles from Marlette.

Marlette Schools



Marlette's public schools offer a full curriculum, remedial learning programs, pre-school, B-4K (before Kindergarten), full breakfast and lunch facilities, and free busing throughout the rural school district. As one of six school districts within Sanilac County, Marlette supports and enjoys the use of the Sanilac County Intermediate School District (ISD) facilities. Sanilac's ISD provides training in various skilled trades, specialized programs for the handicapped, and accelerated curriculum for gifted and talented students within the County. Busing and transportation to and from the facilities

for students attending classes at the ISD is provided by each of the local school districts. For more information, visit marletteschools.org.

Recreation – Fun on Land and Waves



Whether you like shopping, camping, hunting, gardening, swimming, or looking for "sea glass", you can find it in or near Marlette. A short drive in any direction can take you to neighboring towns or cities for a change of pace, or a great meeting place for family and friends. Michigan has the best freshwater beaches, and the peninsula's "thumb" has miles and miles of coast line rich with history and photo ops.

Marlette Regional Hospital – Full Care Facilities

Marlette Regional Hospital includes an extended care facility, a physical therapy center, a cancer treatment center, well-established Hospice care services, and a fully-staffed emergency response facility with fully equipped ambulances and crews of registered and trained Paramedics. The hospital opened their brand-new, senior living community called The Heartlands (theheartlandsmarlette.org), a completely contained and accessible retirement village located within the city limits. For more information, visit marletteregionalhospital.org.

For more information about Grace Bible Church, please visit our website – gbcmarlette.com/.



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