

A Life Abruptly Ended; A Legacy That Will Endure

After FEC pastor Jeffrey Nath is killed in a car accident, his church and family help ensure that his ministry survives.

Less than 24 hours after Jeffrey Nath, pastor of Oak Bend Church in Perrysburg, Ohio, went home to be with the Lord, his wife Hope and their two daughters stood in the exact spot where the car accident occurred. There they prayed, committing Jeff's life and ministry to heaven and surrendering to the will of the Father. As they left, they saw a rainbow stretching across the sky from the church where Jeff ministered over the site of the accident to the home they had built together.

"I believe it was God saying, 'This is a promise that I am with you,'" Hope says. "God was telling me that Jeff is with the Lord, he's seeing what's happening down here, and he's blown away by it."

Jeff, 42, had been senior pastor at Oak Bend since November of 2003. The accident on August 18 cut short his physical role in the life of his family and church, but his influence continues to be felt—and will affect people for generations. "I never realized how many lives he had touched," Hope says. "You may not think your life is significant, but your effect on people if you're living for the Lord is tremendous."



Jeffrey Nath, pastor of Oak Bend Church in Perrysburg, Ohio, died in a car accident on August 18.

Preaching as a teenager

Jeff received his call to ministry early. At age 12 he believed God was directing him to be a pastor, and his youth pastors confirmed that they saw the same leading. By the time he was a teenager, Jeff was writing up services, leading worship, and preaching biblical sermons—all in his basement. "His mom made refreshments," Hope says. "He was intent on his neighbors knowing the Lord."

Later Jeff attended Bethel College and Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and after graduating he became an associate pastor at Immanuel Baptist in Kenosha, Wisconsin. It was here that he met Hope.

"My sister invited me to her church and said, 'We have this great music pastor that you need to meet,'" Hope says. "I wasn't really interested, but to humor her I went. I saw this man get up and draw the congregation into the Lord's presence—it felt like we were singing before the throne of God. It was beautiful."

Hope and Jeff met after the service that day, he called her a few weeks later for a date, "and that was it," Hope says. They were married in 1993. "Jeff sang in our wedding," Hope says. "He had a beautiful tenor voice."

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**FELLOWSHIP OF
EVANGELICAL
CHURCHES**

Jeffrey Nath *(continued from page 1)*



Jeff leaves behind his wife, Hope, and two daughters: Sarah, 2, and Rachel, 8.

In 1997 the Naths moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, where Jeff became senior pastor at First Baptist Church, later renamed Crossroads. He helped the church transition from a traditional worship style to a contemporary service attractive to young families. While living in Wisconsin, Jeff and Hope had two daughters, Rachel, now 8 years old, and Sarah, now 2 1/2. “Jeff dedicated both our daughters and sang each of them a special song,” Hope says.

Coming to Oak Bend

In 2003, Jeff felt that it was time to take the next step in ministry. He began researching churches on the Internet and discovered Oak Bend. “He was intrigued with the style of worship, the beliefs of the church, and its history,” Hope says. “The congregation was hurting and looking for a shepherd, and Jeff felt the Lord’s leading to be a bridge for healing.”

The Naths candidated at Oak Bend, and it was clear to everyone—Jeff and Hope, the FEC board, and the congregation—that this was where God wanted them to be. Jeff was confirmed as pastor with a unanimous vote.

“We were so excited to come here,” Hope says. “We started building relationships with people—not trying to change anything right away, just listening to their hurts and ministering to them.”

Jeff’s compassionate leadership and biblical preaching produced godly fruit over the next two years, and the church began to thrive. In particular,

a group of college-age students caught the vision for ministry. “They were like the disciples in the Bible,” Hope says, “ready to take the gospel and go out. But just when we were at the point where we were ready to reach out and grow, the Lord took Jeff home.”

The accident

The night of August 18, 2005, a Thursday, Hope was sitting at home reading in the Psalms. Jeff was at the church. As Hope read, she felt a voice speak to her, saying, “Be strong. Something big is coming.” Assuming someone in the congregation was about to face a crisis, Hope prayed for strength for that unknown person and went to the church. It was after 11 p.m.

Jeff wasn’t there, and he didn’t answer his cell phone. So Hope headed back home. As she was driving she saw the flashing lights of police cars on a street near her home. “I thought, ‘Oh, those poor people’ and said a prayer for them,” Hope says. When she got home, she discovered that it was Jeff who had been in an accident.

The paramedics had airlifted Jeff to the hospital, where he was in critical but stable condition. Hope felt a surge of strength and made her way to where her husband was. At the hospital she learned that Jeff was in surgery, so she prayed with friends down in the waiting room. Not long after, a doctor came out with a somber face. “I’m sorry; we lost him,” he said.

Hope collapsed. She immediately heard a voice say in her spirit that Jeff was in the presence of the Lord, and she received an assurance that he had gone straight from the car to heaven, “like Elijah caught up in the chariot,” she says. “I said, ‘Thank you, God, that you are merciful.’ But my next thought was, ‘Who’s going to walk the girls down the aisle?’”

Carrying on

As the shock and grief set in over the next few weeks, Hope says her girls began to cope with the loss of their father in separate ways. Sarah, the 2-year-old, doesn’t really understand. She asks, “Where’s Daddy?” When Hope tells her, “In heaven,” she goes back to playing. “But she kisses her Daddy’s picture a lot,” Hope says.

Rachel, on the other hand, is experiencing something unique to her 8-year-old heart. “Rachel has been having beautiful dreams,” Hope says. “In the dream we’re all walking with Daddy, who’s wearing all white. He has a T-shirt that says, ‘I love Jesus.’ He shows us rainbows, and we walk and talk together while Rachel tells him about her day. Then he says goodbye, and we come back down while he stays in heaven. She knows that her daddy is happy, and it’s a comfort to me to know that she’s being comforted in this way.”

“Jeff’s legacy was to do everything to honor Christ. To walk the talk, to love your family, and to leave behind no unfinished business.”

Hope Nath

Despite his passion for ministry, Jeff always made it clear that his family came first. He spent many Saturday afternoons with the girls watching *I Love Lucy*, Hope says, sometimes laughing until he cried. He danced with Rachel in her princess costume until he was dizzy and snuggled with Sarah at night until she went to sleep. Jeff often cleaned the house to give Hope a break and a chance to spend time with her daughters. And he had a fondness for gadgets, especially his digital video camera. As a result, the Naths have a wealth of home videos with Jeff’s voice in the background narrating throughout family activities. “Jeff was God’s gift to us,” Hope says.

Courage for the future

As Hope has faced an uncertain path, Oak Bend Church has reached out with compassion and practical help. “They have been God’s hands and feet to me,” she says. “Jeff always said that it’s a beautiful sight when God’s people work for his kingdom. They’ve been

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FEC Says Goodbye

For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

(Ephesians 2:10)

All of us who knew Jeff miss him, yet we can rejoice in knowing that he was God’s creation in Christ Jesus and that he was faithful in completing the work prepared for him. For us the work seems unfinished, but only God sees now what we will come to see—the fruit of Jeff’s labor of love in Christ. Good-bye, Jeff, and thank you for demonstrating to all of us what it means to be faithful in service to Christ, Hope, Rachel, Sarah, and Oak Bend Church.

*Ron Habegger,
FEC President*

Hope’s Next Steps

In his grace and provision, God has found Hope Nath a job teaching second grade in a Christian school in Corona, California—no small feat since, when she applied, there were no openings for new teachers. Hope’s two sisters and their families live nearby and will provide much of the support she will need in the coming weeks, months, and years. Hope has rented a house and found a church to attend, but she still needs to sell her house in Ohio. She plans to move sometime in October. Please continue to lift up Hope, Rachel, and Sarah in your prayers.



Hope and the girls, shown here in an early October photo, will move to California to be near Hope’s family.

Convention &

2005 Convention Quiz-Off Results

Young people go head to head, putting their knowledge of Acts to the test during the FEC Convention in August.

Top three junior high teams

1. Archbold 1: David Rupp, Chase Sauder, Jordan Fruchey
2. Upland 2: Ben Lee, Sarah Nace, Edward Meadors, Kelbe Cocking
3. Berne: Calvin Hirshy, Kara Lehman, Heath Moser, Ashley Biberstine, Jake Amstutz

Top three senior high teams

1. Grace 2: Ben Getz, Jason Knowles, Jonathan Knowles, Kenneth Sinn, Rachel Zobrist
2. Grace 1: Ben Butterfield, Derek Henricks, Theresa Lindell, Alexis Walz, Nathan Springer
3. Grace 4: Erik Bertsche, Jonathan Goodyear, Kim Larson, Aimee Meehan, Jeff Witzig

Top junior high quizzer from each church

- Archbold: Chase Sauder
Brookside: Derek Fritz
Eureka: Liesel Pflederer
Grace: Dave Getz
Oak Bend: Alexi Haas
Pine Hills: Danielle Sistrunk
Salem: Elisha Hildenbrand
Upland: Libby Trudeau

Top senior high quizzer from each church

- Berne: Clark Moser
Brookside: Jana Vastbinder
Eureka: Tricia Leman
Grabill: Jessica Pinardi
Grace: Theresa Lindell
Groveland: Mary Rocke
Oak Bend: Graham Haas
Oak Grove: Brandon Ricca
Pine Hills: Megan Powers
Salem: Courtney Schwerin
Upland: Seth Bird

Top ten junior high quizzers

1. Chase Sauder, Archbold
2. Dave Getz, Grace
3. Alexi Haas, Oak Bend
4. Hannah Roberts, Grace
5. Elisha Heldenbrand, Salem
6. Eric Rupp, Archbold
7. Calvin Hirschy, Berne
7. Libby Trudeau, Upland
9. Danielle Sistrunk, Pine Hills
10. Anna Klassen, Grace
10. Stephen Mortland, Upland

Top ten senior high quizzers

1. Theresa Lindell, Grace
2. David Petersen, Grace
3. Jonathan Goodyear, Grace
3. Tricia Leman, Eureka
3. Megan Powers, Pine Hills
6. Seth Bird, Upland
7. Daniel Moore, Upland
7. Jana Vastbinder, Brookside
7. Jeff Witzig, Grace
10. Courtney Schwerin, Salem



Stats for the 2004-05 Quizzing Year

Top five junior high quizzers

1. Chase Sauder, Archbold
2. Hannah Roberts, Grace
3. Alexi Haas, Oak Bend
4. Eric Rupp, Archbold
5. Calvin Hirschy, Berne

Top five senior high quizzers

1. Theresa Lindell, Grace
2. Jonathan Goodyear, Grace
3. Seth Bird, Upland
4. Courtney Schwerin, Salem
5. Tricia Leman, Eureka

Top junior high quizzer from each church

- Archbold: Chase Sauder
Berne: Calvin Hirschy
Brookside: Neil Klodzen
Eureka: Liesel Pflederer
Grabill: Joshua Pinardi
Grace: Hannah Roberts
Oak Bend: Alexi Haas
Pine Hills: Adam Hughes
Salem: Elisha Hildenbrand
Solid Rock: Tonya Keefer
Upland: Sarah Nace

Top senior high quizzer from each church

- Archbold: Andy Wilhelm
Berne: Clark Moser
Brookside: Cori Stemen
Eureka: Tricia Leman
Grabill: Jessica Pinardi
Grace: Theresa Lindell
Groveland: Mary Rocke
Oak Bend: Graham Haas
Oak Grove: Brandon Ricca
Our Redeemer: Courtney Yacks
Pine Hills: Megan Powers
Salem: Courtney Schwerin
Solid Rock: Isaiah Keefer
Upland: Seth Bird

Quizzing

Save the Date

August 3-6, 2006
FEC Convention
Peoria, Illinois



Worship director Steve Wilmert leads the congregation in a hymn during Friday night's praise service during the 2005 FEC Convention at Northwoods Community Church in Peoria, Illinois. Convention took place August 4-7.



Wes and Lynn Hoffmire of Crossroads Evangelical Church in Wauseon, Ohio, listen attentively during the ministers and wives' dinner Thursday evening.



A Brookside quiz team listens to a question during a quiz-off match. From left to right are Gramm Wilson, Cori Stemen, Hillary House, and Susan Pearsall.



Lonnie Whisker of LifeBridge Community Church, a new FEC church plant in Peoria, discusses the church's progress during Friday night's praise service.

BAM: A New Idea That's Been Around Awhile

FEC prayer team visits the Witzigs to learn more about business as mission.

As part of an ongoing effort to support FEC missions endeavors, a prayer walk team traveled in August to East Asia to pray and gain a better understanding of how God is using “business as mission” (BAM) opportunities to reach people with the gospel.

FEC international workers Doug and Jen Witzig, who are from Grace Church in Morton, Illinois, are engaged in the process of reaching, discipling, and enfoldng new believers into local fellowships in East Asia. They are also investigating the possibility of helping develop a BAM company in their region.

The prayer team, which included Corrie Ackerman, Krys Malin, and Rich Strietmatter of Morton, Illinois; Mike and Jandra Beasley of West Unity, Ohio; and Earl Cecil of Fort Wayne, Indiana, had a basic idea of what BAM was all about, but they left with a greater appreciation of how it can be used to introduce people to Christ and advance the kingdom of God.

Doug Witzig showed the team how BAM principles are already in action in some factories. The owners of these businesses strategically place Christians in management or on the production floor. The Christians demonstrate their faith, hope, and love in Christ, which helps initiate discussion and the formation of Bible studies. Some factories appoint a specific person to shepherd these efforts and offer discipling and training.

The FEC team met one factory owner who shared about a BAM network that matches Christian workers with factory jobs. The network operates in two ways: The local church in the East Asian interior requests jobs in which they can intentionally

place Christians, and the network requests potential workers from the church. These workers have been trained and discipled specifically for work in a BAM environment. By sending Christian workers out in this way, the interior church helps spread the gospel into the factories, and other workers who accept the Christian faith continue to further the kingdom when they return to their home villages.

In some ways, BAM is a 21st-century strategy. But it's also an idea that's been around since about 70 A.D. The apostle Paul was a tentmaker who used his business to advance the kingdom of God. BAM also uses businesses intentionally and strategically for the gospel. The Witzigs, like Paul, have a heart to advance the kingdom and to reach the souls of their adopted country. ■



Members of an FEC prayer team bow their heads during their trip to East Asia this summer. The team went to support Doug and Jen Witzig and learn about business as mission (BAM).

Ministry in Guinea, West Africa

Guinea is a small, beautiful, tropical country on the west coast of Africa that is among the poorest countries in the world. The Yalunka people, an ethnic group who occupy southern Guinea, are subsistence farmers. Most Yalunka are illiterate, although some attend school and go on to learn a trade.

The Yalunka are 99 percent Muslim. Of the 160,000 Yalunka people in southern Guinea, only about 45 are believers. The people are welcoming to Christian missionaries but slow to receive the gospel.

They have portions of the Bible in their language, but their devotion to Islam and fear of persecution have prevented all but a few from converting to Christianity.

FEC International Ministries is investigating opportunities for possible ministry in Guinea among the Yalunka people. To learn more, contact Earl Cecil at (260) 423-3649, ext. 310, or e-mail FECMissions@aol.com. For more information on the Yalunka people, visit www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php. Enter the country as “Guinea” and the people as “Yalunka.” ■

sions Update

Updates from FEC Missionaries

Drydens to England

James and Angela Dryden left their home in Morton, Illinois, in mid-September to serve at the Oakes Holiday Centre in Sheffield, England. James will serve as assistant manager of the Oakes, a camp for British youth, helping with programming and speaker and staff development. The Drydens and their children—Anna, 13; Andrew, 10; Adam, 7; and Abigail, 4—are fully supported and planning on a three-year commitment. They have been members of Grace Evangelical Church in Morton since 1993. Check out www.oakes.org.uk to learn more about the Oakes ministry.

Tamara Hoffmann marries Attila Szogedi

Congratulations to Tamara and Attila Szogedi, who were married in Hungary on August 19. Tamara writes:

*Dear friends,
After a beautiful, relaxing two-week honeymoon in Turkey, Attila and I are back in Hungary. God blessed our wedding in many wonderful ways. We had almost 20 friends and family who came from America, Germany, England, and Albania to share in our joy.... The Lord blessed us with a wedding that was a unique mix of Hungarian and American culture. (For those of you who are wondering, our ceremony took place mostly in Hungarian with translation into English and German.) We thought it was very beautiful and a wonderful start to our marriage. If you are interested in seeing some pictures from the wedding, go to homepage.mac.com/mercercafe/Menu8.html.*

Andy and Kathy Pflederer back in Illinois

The Pflederers returned to the U.S. in July after 10 years of ministry in Albania. Andy and Kathy are exploring employment opportunities and will be helping their kids transition from the mission field to U.S. schools. They are seeking ways to continue their involvement in missions while living in Eureka, Illinois. Contact them at 710 S. Main, Eureka, IL 61530 or at apfled@mtco.com.

Jerans on leave of absence

Jonathan and Jill Jeran are on a leave of absence from their work with Muslims in the Middle East as Jonathan pursues training for possible future ministry. The Jerans may be contacted at 520 Badiac Road, Fort Wayne, IN 46845, at j_jeran@hotmail.com, or by calling (260) 637-4562.

Jim and Bonnie Gehman in North America

The Gehmans are presently on North American assignment from their ministry in Caracas, Venezuela. They may be contacted at 7236 Lamont, Fort Wayne, IN 46835, at jbghehman@cantv.net, or by calling (260) 492-6086.

Brent and Nicole Preston in new home

The Prestons are praising the Lord for his goodness in providing a 15th-floor apartment in the location in Ukraine where they are looking to plant a church. The new address for the Prestons is Akademika Glushko St. 21; Ent. 1, Apt. 85; Odessa, Ukraine.

Upcoming Workteam Projects

Dominican Republic. An FEC workteam will travel to Padre Las Casas January 28 to February 5 to continue a 2005 summer team's work on a church building project. Wayne Baker, a former FEC missionary to the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, will lead the team. Cost is \$1,800 per person.

Sheffield, England. Another team will go to the Oakes Holiday Centre June 14-28 to work on a variety of maintenance and remodeling projects. Cost is \$1,650 per person. Contact Hal Lehman for application forms and details about either trip at (260) 423-3649, ext. 303, or FECHal@aol.com.



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Jeffrey Nath *(continued from page 3)*

bringing meals, helping care for the children, and they've been there with me through dark hours."

As heartbroken as the congregation is to lose their shepherd, they are not letting Jeff's ministry die. They've begun the search for an interim pastor, and that core group of biblical-era disciples is determined to carry on Jeff's vision for going out into the community with the gospel. In addition, Hope has had the opportunity to share the gospel through speaking to the media about Jeff's death.

"Jeff's legacy was to do everything to honor Christ," Hope says. "To walk the talk, to love your family, and to leave behind no unfinished business. I pray that many would find salvation through seeing what Jeff's life was about."

Two goodbyes

The evening of August 18, before the accident claimed Jeff's life, he and Hope attended a prayer meeting at church. Although during many of these functions the Naths were happy if they had a chance to wave at each other across the room, this evening they actually sat next to each other.

"I heard him singing in my ear, he held my hand, and we came before God in prayer," Hope says. "Before we went our separate ways after the meeting, Jeff reached

*The Lord is close to the
brokenhearted and saves those
who are crushed in spirit.*

Psalm 34:18

over and squeezed my hand. He locked his eyes on mine and said, 'See you later.' I didn't realize it at the time, but that 'see you later' was my goodbye. I will see Jeff later, in heaven, and in the meantime, that glance, that squeeze, held all the love I need to carry on."

Not long after the accident, Hope found a card Jeff had sent her before leaving for a trip earlier in the year—a card she'd read already but which suddenly took on new meaning. It was another goodbye, almost a message from heaven—with a rainbow on the front. It read:

*Honey,
Thank you for making it possible for me to
attend this conference. You will do a great job
with the girls. I will pray for a smooth transition
and I will call you at least once a day. I love you
and will miss you.*

Me