

Kansas church offers a glimpse of what happens after death

Grace Community Church presents Judgement House in October.

By Kristi Reimer, FEConnections Editor

For the third year in a row, Grace Community Church in Newton, Kansas, is preparing to welcome members of the community into heaven—and hell.

During the last two weeks of October, the church puts on an outreach ministry called Judgement House, a walk-through drama that presents a picture of what takes place after death for both Christ-followers and unbelievers. Up to 300 people from the church are involved either as organizers, in dramatic roles, or working behind the scenes, and last year approximately 3,000 people walked through the production. This year organizers are expecting attendance to top that.

“As a church we are doing this as a response to the Great Commission mandate of taking the message of the gospel to the people around us,” says senior pastor David Reimer. “This type of effort fulfills the Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria aspect of that call. We have a specific opportunity to present the gospel to people who, by virtue of their coming, have some openness to spiritual matters, which we see as the sovereign hand of God bringing people to hear the gospel.”

Nine rooms, nine scenes

Here’s how Judgement House works. Participants walk through a series of nine rooms in the church, each room containing a scene in the unfolding story. In the first three rooms, attendees are introduced to the characters in the story, and they learn which ones are Christians and which ones aren’t. In the fourth room, there’s an accident, fire, or crime in which the main characters die.

The next scene is judgment, where both the characters and attendees stand before the throne of heaven, and they learn whether they’re going to heaven or hell. In the next room observers see a depiction of hell and what happens to the characters there, and finally they enter a room representing heaven, where Jesus welcomes people into his kingdom. A guide accompanies each group from scene to scene, explaining what participants will encounter once they enter the room.

Janelle Paden, assistant director of Judgement House and Grace’s office manager, explains that anything can happen in these rooms. “Last year, one of the final groups that went through included a woman who, when Jesus came up to her in heaven, just fell into his arms and sobbed,” she says.

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If we honestly believe that heaven and hell are real places, and that our decision about Christ determines which of these real places we go to, it's worth taking some risks to help people grasp that reality.

*Dave Reimer, Pastor,
Grace Community Church*

"Obviously she knew it wasn't really Him, but she was overcome by Christ's love."

After participants have made their way through all the scenes, they enter a room where the gospel is presented. There they are invited to make a decision, whether it's to accept Christ for salvation, rededicate their lives to Him, or request prayer. Anyone who raises their hand to make a decision meets with a spiritual advisor one on one for prayer, and they are then invited to write their name and any comments commemorating their decision on a large sheet of paper hanging in the hallway.

"I love to read those names every night and learn about the things people are praying for," Janelle says. "That's when I realize what an impact this has had on people."

Behind the scenes

Grace Community Church was introduced to Judgement House, a national nonprofit ministry, when former youth pastor Jim Horning took his youth group through the

drama at a church in nearby Wichita, Kansas. When he saw how it affected his youth and others who walked through, he became convinced that Grace needed to get involved and spearheaded the effort to bring the church leadership on board.

"We had some hesitations at first because of other productions—things like Hell House and Heaven's Gates, Hell's Flames—that have more of a manipulative feel," Pastor Dave says. "But this ministry is different. These are clear biblical realities that we're presenting in story format."

So Judgement House isn't manipulative? In answer to that question, Pastor Dave replies, "Certainly people have become emotional when they've gone through the heaven and hell scenes. But if we honestly believe that heaven and hell are real places, and that our decision about Christ determines which of these real places we go to, it's worth taking some risks to help people grasp that reality. But I honestly don't believe most people would describe it as a manipulative approach. And we haven't gotten that kind of feedback from people who've experienced it."

Still, parents are urged to use discernment with their children. "Judgement House is not intended to be scary, but hell and judgment are very real, and the situations the characters face—cancer, abuse, violent crime—are things that can hit close to home," Janelle says. "We recommend it for kids 10 and up."

Once they launched the ministry, organizers and church leaders discovered that it allowed them to connect with people in a way nothing else could. "We see a broad cross-section of the community—people of all ethnic, economic, and racial groups," says Pastor Dave. "Often people come because somebody invites them, or they hear about it and sense that they'll hear something unique and meaningful and perhaps have some of their spiritual questions answered."

One of the most crucial aspects of the ministry is the prayer and follow-up with people who make a spiritual commitment after the gospel presentation. The spiritual advisors who pray with these people encourage them to get involved in Grace or another church, and later a team will send a letter reinforcing that recommendation. "We have a number of people who are now coming to Grace because of Judgement House," Janelle says. "These people will start attending church, and then next year they're helping with Judgement House."

The planning for Judgement House starts as early as January, when the director and assistant director start to form their executive team, which includes a spiritual director, prayer director, drama director, and finance director. These leaders in turn form teams who



coordinate everything from the scenes in each room to childcare for the volunteers, snacks, concessions, security, registration, and so on.

“The church has gotten so big that people feel like they don’t see one another very often,” Janelle says. “This is a huge outreach, and it’s a way for the body to work together as a whole. It’s been wonderful to see how it’s brought us all together as a church.”

Challenges and rewards

Such an enormous undertaking isn’t without its challenges, and director Joe Freud says each year presents its own set. “The first year it was just the enormity of the project: Could we really do this?” Joe says. “Fortunately, NewSpring Church in Wichita mentored us. I don’t think we recognized just how much it would turn the church inside out. Everything has to slow down or stop while Judgement House is going on. It’s a church-wide commitment—the whole body has to be with this endeavor or there’s confusion.”

The second year presented the same challenges—could the church really pull this off again?—plus the script included some potentially controversial political issues, but once again everyone pulled together.

“This year is different,” Joe says. “Our church is approaching that size where a lot of people think someone else will take care of things. So getting enough volunteers was a challenge. Also, there’s been a temptation to lose the simplicity of the ministry and say, ‘Let’s make it better.’ So we’ve had to reel some opinions back in. But then the Lord puts his hand in the middle of it, and everyone settles in. The key is to be flexible and have a lot of grace in every moment.”

And the rewards far outnumber the challenges. “When you realize that people are being saved—you can see the hands raised, the names and comments written on the walls—you see that the purpose is real,” Joe says. “I always tell people that God could have picked anybody to do this work, but he picked us. It doesn’t get any better than that.”

While the leaders of the ministry don’t focus on attendance numbers, they do keep track. This year

the church is prepared for up to 4,000 people to come through over the seven nights the drama is presented, and the three-year attendance total should top 10,000.

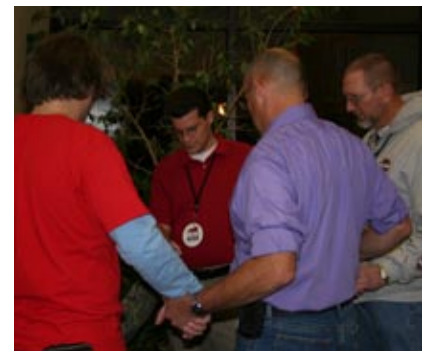
Plus, the people of Grace grow in their own faith and witness through their involvement. “A legacy is being built,” Joe says. “These people continue to tell the story even after Judgement House is over. They’ve learned how to communicate about Christ to others in a way that’s different. My heart goes to the church body, watching them meld together and share together.”

Joe remembers a particular night the first year Grace produced Judgement House. “It was the last evening, it was midnight, and everyone was gone. I walked out to the parking lot and turned around to look at the church, and the presence of the Holy Spirit was just overwhelming. It was like a nod from above saying, ‘This is good. This is very good.’ Then I walked out to grassy area where my car was stashed, and the volunteers were there with flashlights to help me find my way. I said, ‘Why are you guys still here? Everyone’s gone!’ And they said, ‘We knew you were still here.’ That put me on my knees.”

A church of any size can put on Judgement House, whether it’s a congregation of 200 or several thousand. “If a church body is looking for something to unite it, if a pastor is saying that the church isn’t on the same page and needs a catalyst to bring it together—oh my. This will create a totally new group of people from the same folks,” Joe says. “The richness of the work is really something. And we are available to help any church that is interested in taking this on.”

Although there is a financial investment the first year when the church is building the set, collecting props, and establishing the production for the first time, eventually the ministry becomes self-sustaining. “By the second year we were operating in the black,” Joe says. “It’s now a cost-neutral experience.”

All in all, Joe says, Judgement House unifies the church, takes people out of their sense of normal, and puts them in the work of the Lord. “Everyone is focused on the stories being told, the people being saved,” he says. “We don’t live our normal lives while this is going on.” ■



Quizzing &

2009 Convention quiz-off results

Top 10 junior high quizzers

10. Hannah Zobrist, Grace
10. Amanda Hughes, Pine Hills
10. Tim Williamson, Brookside
6. Alexandra Perala, Pine Hills
6. Grace Lawler, Grace
6. Lindsey Rupp, Archbold
6. Jonathon Keller, Brookside
5. Trisha Cousino, Archbold
3. Gabby Trudeau, Upland
3. Erick Holder, Upland
2. Kendall King, Crossroads
1. Lydia Klassen, Grace

Top junior high quizzier from each church

Archbold: Trisha Cousino
Eureka: Ty Maurer
Crossroads: Kendall King
Brookside: Jonathon Keller
Berne: Drew Litwiller
Upland: Gabby Trudeau
Pine Hills: Alexandra Perala
Grace: Lydia Klassen

Top 3 junior high teams

1. Grace 1: Lydia Klassen, Grace Lawler, Sarah Roberts, Sarah Lorentz, Catrina Klassen
2. Pine Hills: Noah Powers, Alexandra Perala, Amanda Hughes, Carissa Pescatello, Stephen Moser, Emily Secheverell
3. Berne: Drew Litwiller, Rob Fahl, Ben Lehman, Luke Nussbaum, Sarah Biberstine, Chloe Zucher

Top 10 senior high quizzers

10. Rachel King, Crossroads
8. Adam Winner, Lawton
8. Ben Mock, Salem
7. Lexi Haas, Oak Bend
6. Caleb Andrews, Oak Bend
5. Sara Lindenfelser, Grace
4. Grace Diller, Archbold
3. Bekah Steiner, Highland Bethel
2. Melissa Felker, Grace
1. Anna Klassen, Grace

Top senior high quizzier from each church

Archbold: Grace Diller
Berne: Calvin Hirschy, Kelly Hirschy
Brookside: Anna Blisk
Calvary: Judah Sistrunk
Crossroads: Rachel King
Eureka: Liesel Pflederer
Grace: Anna Klassen
Highland Bethel: Bekah Steiner
Lawton: Adam Winner
Oak Bend: Caleb Andrews
Pine Hills: Adam Hughes
Salem: Ben Mock
Upland: Maddy Trudeau



Overall results for the 2008-2009 quiz year

Top 5 junior high quizzers

5. Grace Lawler, Grace
4. Tim Williamson, Brookside
3. Lyndsey Rupp, Archbold
2. Hannah Zobrist, Grace
1. Lydia Klassen, Grace

Top junior high quizzier from each church

Archbold: Lyndsey Rupp
Berne: Drew Litwiller
Brookside: Tim Williamson
Crossroads: Kendall King
Eureka: Ty Maurer
Grace: Lydia Klassen
Pine Hills: Alexandra Perala
Upland: Erick Holder

Top 5 senior high quizzers

5. Anna Klassen, Grace
4. Kelly Hirschy, Berne
3. Lexi Haas, Oak Bend
2. Caleb Andrews, Oak Bend
1. Melissa Felker, Grace

Top senior high quizzier from each church

Archbold: Grace Diller
Berne: Kelly Hirschy
Brookside: Ethen Demschoder
Calvary: Judah Sistrunk
Crossroads: Kara Heiniger
Eureka: Liesel Pflederer
Grace: Melissa Felker
Highland Bethel: Bekah Steiner
Lawton: Adam Winner
Oak Bend: Caleb Andrews
Pine Hills: Adam Hughes
Salem: Ben Mock
Upland: Maddy Trudeau

Top 3 senior high teams

1. Grace 1: Anna Klassen, Melissa Felker, Ann Riddle, Philip Albrecht, Jared Sauder, Becca Butterfield
2. Berne 1: Calvin Hirschy, Kara Lehman, Rachel Fahl, Kelly Hirschy
3. Brookside 1: Tony Franklin, Ethan Damschroder, Abigail Madison, Isaac Madison



Mark your calendars!

Convention 2010 will be held July 29–31 at Northwoods Community Church in Peoria, Illinois.

Convention



Page family to join team in Guinea

Pine Hills couple will manage finances and guest house for West Africa mission team.

FEC's International Ministries (IM) team has been searching for the right people to fill an urgent ministry need in Guinea, West Africa. We praise God for Kevin and Becky Page, FEC's newest missionary candidates, who have answered this call. The Pages will handle business and financial matters for the ministry in Guinea and will also serve as guest house managers and hosts.

Kevin and Becky have four children: Mikala, 14; Lauren, 13; Mason, 11; and Jordan, 9.

Kevin is a career firefighter and treasurer for the Fort Wayne Firefighters Union. Before joining the fire department, he worked as an accountant for Weaver Popcorn, Franklin Electric, and Price Waterhouse. Becky has a degree in elementary education with a minor in music. She's an accomplished pianist and has taught school as well as private piano lessons. Kevin and Becky are both graduates of Taylor University and members of Pine Hills Church in Fort Wayne.



Kevin and Becky Page, with their children Lauren, Jordan, Mikala, and Mason, will leave for Africa next August.

While Kevin will manage legal and financial matters for the mission team in Guinea, Becky will oversee the guest house and hostess operations. Kevin and Becky are raising their prayer and financial support as well as serving in a ministry and missions internship at Pine Hills Church from Oct. 1, 2009, through May 31, 2010. In June and July of next year they'll study culture and language acquisition at Missionary International Training in Colorado

Springs, Colorado, then they'll return to Fort Wayne to pack and leave for Africa in early August 2010.

Before the Pages travel to Guinea, they'll spend a year in Dakar, Senegal, to study French and learn the West African culture. The IM team's hope is to have the Pages on the job in Conakry, Guinea, by summer 2011. Please pray for these preparations to come together, and lift up the current Guinea team—Marci Gonzales and the Tice, Cluckie, and Anderson families—as they bring the gospel to the Yalunka people.

Please consider supporting the Pages' ministry both in prayer and finances. Invite them to share with your church, Bible study, small group, or other venue. Contact Becky for scheduling at (260) 494-5180 or e-mail them at kbpge29@yahoo.com. ■

Please pray for the Guinea team as they bring the gospel to the Yalunka people.

FEC team provides support during Albania missions conference

On Oct. 1, an FEC team left for Albania to provide programming for missionary children during a conference for missionaries who serve in Albania. The team served the missions community in Albania by spiritually nourishing the children and youth of these families during the conference. They also gained insight into FEC's ministry in Albania. Members of the team were:

- Jonathan Hyde, Business Manager for the FEC Resource Center and a member of Pine Hills Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana
- Sara Rupp of Brookside Church in Fort Wayne
- Ed and Margaret Messal of Brookside Church in Fort Wayne
- Deb Neuenschwander of Archbold Evangelical Church in Archbold, Ohio. ■

Happenings

Call for volunteers to work at The Oakes

For a trip to The Oakes youth camp in Sheffield, England, next year, organizers are guaranteeing a blessed time—but they're not promising anything when it comes to the weather! Here are the details:

What: Work team at The Oakes, a year-round residential Christian camp for ages 8 to 18 years, in Sheffield, England.

When: February 1-15, 2010, and/or March 16-31, 2010

Why: The Oakes will be closed from January through mid-April 2010 to build an eight-room extension and do other building and grounds work.

Cost: \$1,770 (based on current airline ticket prices)

Projects include (tentatively): Rebuilding the Slesor dormroom's floor; taking up flooring to check for wormwood rot and treating if necessary; varnishing and repairing wood floors; providing window maintenance; painting second- and third-floor rooms; rebuilding the zip line on the ropes course; landscaping, including earthmoving, leveling ground, reseeding, and general tidying up; internal work on the new extension (most likely in March)—drywalling, plumbing, painting, and so on.

For more information, e-mail Hal Lehman at h.lehman@fecministries.org or call (260) 423-3649. ■



Christian Service Foundation highlights

By Al Rupp, CSF President

CSF has had a busy year. In the last 12 months some significant things have been accomplished, most of which have been included in previous issues of *FEConnections*. Here's an update on additional happenings since the last report:

- The securities registration process has been completed in Ohio.
- The registration process is nearing completion in Kansas.
- The registration process has begun in Missouri.
- The annual audit has been completed.
- New computer software is being adopted.
- Fiscal year-end data has been entered in the software and reconciled with the audit.
- Daily computer processing is in the test stage.
- A 60th Anniversary Celebration Dinner was held September 12 at Grace Church in Morton, Illinois.
- The next Celebration Dinner is scheduled for October 24 at Archbold. Please attend if you can!

To inquire about investing with CSF or for more information about any of these items or about the Christian Service Foundation in general, call Sara Smead, Bookkeeper, or Al Rupp, President, at (260) 423-3649 or e-mail csf@fecministries.org



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Fort Wayne, IN 46805

President's Corner

Keeping in step



Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:25

When I was a freshman in high school, I was asked to be a flag bearer in the high school band. Hartford High School was small, with only 50 students in the entire school and 11 students in my class. This meant that everyone

participated in school activities, otherwise I would never have been asked to join the band. Since I had no musical talent, I was assigned the role of flag bearer. However, I soon learned that my lack of musical talent was surpassed by my inability to keep in step with the rest of the band. I was marching to the beat of my own drum—and was soon drummed right out of the band!

A good marching band is an awesome thing to watch. Anywhere from a few hundred to thousands of feet are moving in unison. Every step is taken at precisely the right time and in the right direction. Imagine the confusion and chaos that would ensue if each person in a marching band chose his own cadence and direction. Members would be colliding with each other and the team would become a mob. Instead, the drum major

works with the band: teaching them, training them and practicing with them until each member understands his or her individual role and how the whole band moves as a single unit. The evidence of these efforts is apparent in the precise movements of the band during a performance.

When I read Galatians 5:25, I see an impeccably trained marching band moving across a field with each member in step with the other. They move as a single unit, all following the drum major's direction. They have trained under the drum major and he has taught them and practiced with them until they know his cadence and movements even before he gives the signal. The Holy Spirit is our drum major. He desires to set the cadence and direction of our lives to produce fruit.

Like members of a marching band, we keep in step with the Spirit by yielding to His teaching, submitting to His training and practicing on a daily basis. At first it seems difficult—even impossible. But as we spend time in the Word and pray every day, our walk becomes more like His. Eventually His cadence and direction seem right to us, our steps match His more naturally, and love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control become more evident in our lives.