

SOUTHEASTERN

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DR. BOB GRIFFITH
RESTORING HOPE

ALSO FEATURING
Eliza Babarczy
Johnny Berry
Aaron Burke
Jason Burns
Victoria Garcia



Bob Griffith **RESTORING HOPE**



What started with **DR. BOB GRIFFITH's '19 (D.Min.)** dissertation has now surmounted into a nonprofit organization that is transforming his community through foster care ministry.

Bob is the founder and acting president of 1HOPE, a non-profit organization that focuses neighborhood, professional and faith based energy to restore hope and transform lives. Their initiatives involve capacity building for the foster care system, youth mentoring and neighborhood transformation programs.

Bob serves as the executive pastor for Journey Church in Kenosha, Wis., one of the largest Assemblies of God (AG) churches in the region. It is also the location for one of Southeastern's partner sites, where he has fulfilled the role of an adjunct professor for six years.

In 2016, Bob discovered the opportunity to earn his doctor of ministry degree (D.Min.) through Southeastern's new doctoral program and decided to enroll. Although Bob did not see it yet, this was his first step toward taking up the torch for foster care ministry.

He began the process by seeking answers from his city's leaders. He strived to understand the community's most substantial need. "I asked them, 'If there was any one thing our church could do to help the county, what would that one thing be?'" Bob said. "They told me anything to do with foster care, recruiting more foster parents or garnering support for pre-existing foster families."

It wasn't long after this that Bob witnessed a family attending his church decide to embark on their own foster care journey. "This inspired so much confidence within me. If they could do it, I thought I could do it too," Bob said.

After faithful and consistent prayer, Bob got the confirmation he needed from his academic mentor and dissertation chair, Dr. Robby Waddell; the program director, Dr. Jim Vigil; and fellow students, that God was calling him to a deeper understanding of foster care ministry. They recognized how God was directing him in this way through his personal, professional and community experiences.

Bob dove deep into his studies using practical theology to determine what the church's intended role would be within foster care and adoption. He researched methods of church efforts starting with modern-day application and dating all the way back to the beginning of the New Testament.

"Studying the theological framework of foster care and adoption helped me to understand how the local church is called to intervene," Bob said. "I remember going home and telling my wife, 'If we're going to help with this, not only should we do it as a church, but as a family.'"

Bob and his wife, Wendy, welcomed one foster child, and soon, other pastors in their church followed suit.

"At one point, six out of nine of our pastors were all fostering or adopting kids," said Bob.

Members of the congregation started noticing this shift and watched as a wave of momentum built. As they began to follow the pastors' example, it wasn't long before the total amount of families fostering children from Journey Church made up 20 percent of the total amount in Kenosha County.

"I've learned that in order to create real, lasting change for foster care in a city, you need at least 10 percent of churches to get on board," Bob said. "At this point, we've succeeded in getting 20 percent of churches partnered with us."



Not only did Bob's studies start to transform the lifestyles of his churchgoers, but it also inspired Waddell to foster and eventually adopt children of his own. Waddell welcomed two biological sisters of the ages five and six into his family in August of 2019.

"Fostering and adoption is at the heart of the gospel," said Waddell. "It's a primary metaphor used by the Apostle Paul to describe the work of Christ in the lives of believers. By extension, Christians are actualizing their call to be the body of Christ or family of God when they care for orphans and adopt them into their families."

Bob knew the massive efforts for foster care couldn't stop with his dissertation or the completion of his degree. As a result, he created 1HOPE with a heart for continuing what had been started.

"1HOPE was able to launch effectively within the community because everyone already trusted our church. They had seen what we contributed to the foster care system and knew our intentions," Bob said.

With the help of Compact Family Services, an AG foster care agency, Bob helped develop CompaCare, a program designed to create an effective support system for foster parents. CompaCare provides Journey Church and 1HOPE with a comprehensive curriculum in training foster families and establishing the proper methods for building support networks.

"Bob's research has contributed to promoting our premise that the local church has the power to change the way we will do foster care in the future," said Dr. Johan Mostert, the director of CompaCare. "His continued

application of the CompaCare model in his community will provide further data to promote the critical role of the faith community in what is often a very neglected field of ministry."

The national dropout rate for foster families resides around 40 to 60 percent after the first year.

"We implemented the CompaCare program to bring the dropout rate down for foster parents," Bob said.

The most challenging aspect of fostering can be the feeling of isolation. At Journey Church specifically, Bob discovered that 14 percent of families were positive they were going to stop fostering in the next year. However, after receiving support and care from volunteers in the church, all 14 percent changed their mind and decided to continue fostering.



“Having an active support network for the foster families keeps them energized and encouraged to keep fostering for longer periods of time,” Bob said.

Journey Church even hosts an annual foster care awareness day, where they hold open and honest discussions, share people’s stories and rally volunteer support.

“What a lot of people don’t realize is that child welfare is connected to every other aspect of a community,” Bob said. “It’s integrated so deeply that making an impact in this area will send a ripple effect felt by all.”

The foster care system can feed heavily into other prominent societal issues, the most significant being human trafficking. Specifically, when children age out of the system they are often left with no support system at all. This makes them the most vulnerable target for human trafficking. As a result of the corridor between

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Milwaukee and Chicago, Wisconsin is ranked as the fourth highest state for human trafficking. These children are also at an even higher risk to end up in prison.

“Every child that is reunited with a parent or family is one less victim of human trafficking, incarceration or generational cycles,” Bob said. “You can change the trajectory of their life.”

Bob and Wendy have adopted four children, Kelsey, Brooks, Mark and Sarah,

as a result of fostering. They were all under the age of five when they were adopted. They also have two biological children who are older, Lindsay and Madison, who are 12 and 17 years old.

“The older siblings really have a heart for the younger ones. They’ll help them with homework or hold their hands in the supermarket,” Bob said. “Our family has changed. We’ve been disciplined in a way that has brought us closer to God, different from anything we’ve ever experienced before.”

Bob believes that foster care ministry is so different from any other volunteer-based activity one can do. What sets it apart is the level of commitment.

“Everything else you may do with your church is maybe weekly or bi-weekly, but with foster care ministry, that is something you are participating in 24/7,” Bob said. “You are literally opening up your home and welcoming the community inside.”