

**GATEWAY FELLOWSHIP...**  
***The Beginning of a New Chapter***

Well, the word is out. The announcement has been made, the vote has been taken and the path has been cleared for the writing of a new chapter for Lighthouse Christian Fellowship.

As we entered into 2009 our focus was on a season of closure and readiness for new things...on closing doors and opening gates. It seems the Lord has been readying us for a new season. It would seem that the Lord has opened a door for us to walk through and continue the journey of our appointed purpose. We are about to acquire a new name. We are about to begin a new era for this church and this people. To be honest, I cannot convey to you the entirety of what this all means. I am confident, though, that the Lord has spoken. I am confident that we have responded rightly and in the right timing. I am confident that the Lord who has so graciously led us to this place will continue to lead us on this new path. I am confident in Him! I am also confident in the power of agreement. *"If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them."* (Matthew 18:19-20) I am so very thankful for a wife who is able to hear the Lord. She is my partner in ministry and my confidant in faith. There is a calm and strong assurance in having such wisdom and faith beside me. I also have great confidence in those I am surrounded with. The elders of this church, Edgar Raber, Joe Waitkunas, Steve Frank, Mahlon Troyer and, of course, Pastor Duane, are serious about living in God's presence and following the Lord's will. These are men of prayer and faithfulness to the Lord. Their delight is in Him and doing what He desires. You can be assured that these leaders are determined to see His Kingdom come and His will done here in our church, in this region and in the world. And then there are all of you, the people of this wonderful church. You are what this church is all about. You are the church...no matter what name we are under. You have been faithful to hear from the Lord. You have been faithful to give your time and your tithes. You have been faithful to honor your Lord by honoring your pastor and one another. You have blessed, encouraged, strengthened, supported, ministered, sacrificed, honored, trusted, obeyed, challenged, stirred, praised and prayed. You are serious about worship and determined to experience the Lord's presence. Billi and I are sincere when we give thanks to the Lord for you. You have graced our lives with your friendship and blessed us both with your partnership and support.

**Turning the Page**

Now we are about to turn a page. Lighthouse has been a great home to us all. We have seen much and accomplished much as Lighthouse Christian Fellowship. Changing our name will never change any of that. So then, why change our name? Well, we have to begin at the beginning. It was about three years ago (I'm not sure just how long) that the Lord began to stir my heart in this direction. As I read from Genesis 28:17 about Jacob's encounter with the Lord's presence, it was his statement that opened my eyes to a new revelation. *"How awesome*

*is this place! This is none other than the house of God; THIS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN."* [emphasis mine] I had read this passage many times, but this time the Lord ignited my spirit with a new revelation that would not dissipate. He showed me how He has called us to be a place of access. The Lord has placed a ladder (if you will) between us and heaven. I began to see our property with a different vision. I saw this place as a place with an open heaven where blessing flowed and where God's grace is released to our region and then to the world. The Lord began to give me vision for ministries that were to be established on our grounds as a gate of heaven. It was in May of 2006 that we broke ground for the Friends-for-Friends Community Resource Center. The headline of the local news paper that covered the event read, "A GATE TO HEAVEN." I was ready and excited to reveal what the Lord had put in my heart. The time was not right, however. I did share with the elders and we began our journey of prayer. In September of 2006 Higher Ground, our friends from Nashville Tennessee were here to minister. Eddie Combs broke out in a prophetic song of the Lord over this church. *"This church is a Gateway to the world."* I just about came undone as the Lord put a prophetic confirmation of what He was about to do in my heart. I wanted to jump up and shout the announcement that we were changing our name to Gateway Fellowship. The Lord had other plans. We had not prayed enough and this was only one of many confirmations. And so, we continued to pray and wait. Believe me, this has been an exciting and reluctant adventure at the same time. It has been exciting because of the possibilities of a new season for us. It has been reluctant because it felt like we were saying good-bye to a trusted friend who brought us this far. Well, time passed and the Lord continued to confirm to us, especially in our times of intercession on Sunday mornings. The leading of the Lord began to intensify in those anointed times of prayer. Throughout 2007 and 2008 a stream of prophetic words kept us on course and gave us confidence to continue our journey of change. I can't tell you how often the Lord would show me signs that we were being led to make this change. I have known in my heart for some time that I would not be the pastor of Lighthouse Christian Fellowship for very much longer. I have never once felt that my days here were coming to an end, but that the Lord was about to give us a new name. I would soon pastor Gateway Fellowship. Along with my concern to rightly hear and follow the Lord's direction has been a fear that this will be misinterpreted as just trying to be trendy or attempting to give ourselves a make-over. Believe me; we are not attempting some church growth gimmick here. I cannot say that I have been more prayerful about anything we have ever done here at Lighthouse. My desire to not miss God has tempered my every thought in this process. I am thankful for those who patiently allowed me to move slowly and deliberately toward the decision we have made. Billi summed it well when she shared what the Lord put in her heart, *"You named the church the first time. Now I am going to name it."*

So why am I sharing all of this with you now? Why didn't I share these things before we had our vote to amend our by-laws and change the name of our church? Perhaps other leaders in other places would have crafted lengthy campaigns to lead their congregations into change. I have never felt the need to do so, nor do I feel the need to solicit your support or convince you to trust in me. I felt that what I had already shared was sufficient. My main reason was that I did not want to create a campaigning atmosphere about what I felt the Lord had said. I did not want to over preach this or attempt to sell the idea to you or give any opportunity for

accusations of coercion or trickery. I wanted to trust the Lord and to trust that you were also hearing from him. I wanted to open myself up to your confidence as well. Your immediate response to this announcement at our congregational meeting on February 22 was overwhelmingly encouraging. The vote to amend our by-laws on March 22 was equally affirming with a 98% confirmation. With this power of agreement we can transition into this change with a fresh anointing and strong conviction that the Lord is leading us and that we are willing to follow.

And so here we are. We are beginning the process of making this historic change. Everything will go on as usual. We will still operate as Lighthouse for a few more months. We have new signs to make, a new website to develop, letterheads, checks, publication changes, an advertising blitz to inform the community, banks, businesses, churches and ministries to get the word to, registration with the state of Ohio and so much more...WHEW! Hopefully we'll have everything ready for our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration and rededication which is scheduled for August 23, 2009 with our dear and faithful friends, Higher Ground.

Until then, we are going to continue to ask Jesus to be Lord of this house and allow the Holy Spirit to have His way in this fellowship. The gates are open, the Lord is present and we are poised for a new and exciting chapter of His story to be written for this church...GATEWAY FELLOWSHIP!

*"This is none other than a gate of heaven."*