



Drought Recovery Efforts in Malawi and Zimbabwe

by Heidi Braun
and Lewis VanAusdle

For over a year, Malawi, Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa have been experiencing severe drought. At the beginning of 2024, the drought became more noticeable. People began to feel the impact of delayed rains, and the brethren were no exception.

Though drought in this region is caused by a delay in the rainy season, other factors likely contributed to this difficult situation. Hyperinflation, as far back as 2020, which still hasn't drained in that part of the world, has made it more difficult to buy supplies needed for agriculture. Additionally, Cyclone Freddy, which caused widespread flooding in Malawi, ruined many crops. It has taken farmers time to catch up on production, so when the drought followed, they were already at a disadvantage. Many meteorologists have attributed the drought to El Nino.

Due to a very late rain onset, brethren in Malawi began planting in late December, which is a month later than the normal planting season. Farmers typically wait until the first good rain to plant seeds. Several times in the year 2024, brethren have seen some rain, gone out to plant, but faced disappointment when the rain didn't continue. The crops then dried up or were destroyed by pests, such as mice or insects, before they had a chance to mature.

Hunger is no stranger to this part of Africa. Many people live as subsistence farmers. They expect a hunger period as they reach the end of their food supply from the last harvest, and ration food



Recipients of maize in Malawi



A group of brethren celebrating the delivery of farming supplies



Members receiving welcome deliveries of maize and farm inputs



The drought is especially severe in Zimbabwe.

accordingly, even during normal conditions. Unexpected circumstances like these can quickly become dire, as there exists no sufficient surplus to carry people through a season of drought.

The relief effort in Malawi

In Malawi, 80 percent of the population depends on rain-fed subsistence farming for survival. The inconsistent weather patterns have impacted the people negatively, leaving 5.6 million acutely food insecure and an additional 5.4 million facing moderate to severe chronic food insecurity as of October 2024.

UCG has several congregations in Malawi that have been greatly affected by this drought. There are two congregations in the central region, Lilongwe (pastored by Haiton Thungula) and Nkhwazi (pastored by Cephas Chapamba). In the southern region Blantyre and Mayaka (a Bible study group of about 30 brethren) are both pastored by Gracious Mpilangwe.

In addition to some support from Good Works and other charities, LifeNets has provided much assistance to relieve the effects of drought in Malawi. LifeNets has a long history of working with brethren in Malawi, who currently number close to 250.

In previous years, LifeNets has provided maize for the brethren. In the year 2024, a more sustainable approach was planned in the hope of boosting the harvest yield. LifeNets approved funding for maize seeds, nitrogen phosphorus potassium (NPK) and urea fertilizers to be given to families from the Lilongwe and Nkhwazi congregations. With sufficient rainfall, these inputs should result in an increased harvest. In return, provided a successful harvest, each beneficiary family will supply two bags of maize to use next year in the relief program. Over 60 families received aid in the form of food supply, farm in-

puts or both, depending on their family size and the current state of food scarcity.

The relief effort in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the drought is so severe that the president has declared a state of emergency. The country is in a situation more dire than that in Malawi, with many people, even among the brethren, running out of food. The delayed rainfall has resulted in the dropping of the water table, making it difficult to access well water.

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2 How You Can Support United Youth Camps



We have officially finished off the 2024 camp season as Winter Camp concluded on Jan. 1, 2025. It was another successful year due to God's blessings, dedicated staff, wonderful campers and the financial support of the Church and God's people. In 2024 we had 466 preteen campers, 616 teen campers, 536 preteen camp staff, and 332 teen camp staff.

Camp preparations this year are now well underway. The camp directors had in-person meetings at the home office in November with additional Zoom meetings, emails and phone calls between as we prepared and planned for the upcoming camps. We analyzed how the previous year went and looked at ways to continue refining and improving the program. We also spent a considerable amount of time discussing and developing the 2025 camp theme, which serves as the core of our whole program.

Along with all the physical and spiritual planning that takes place is the reality that camp is expensive. There is a significant financial cost to run the camp program due

to a number of factors. All of the camps are facing increased costs due to inflation and rising food prices. We also have families within the Church who need financial assistance to send their kids to camp, and when possible, we subsidize their tuition through scholarships.

The camp directors have been very thankful for all the support, including financial support that we receive from the Church and home office. We all recognize how much God cares for all of His people, and especially His youth, the preteens, teenagers and young adults. They are the future of God's Church and future leaders of His congregations. The camp program is an extension of that love and care that we also have for them. We try to model God's way of life and His love for them to help them see the vision of God's Kingdom and His plans for them. We challenge them to take ownership of their calling and relationship with God. Camp gives them a break from the stress of the world and allows them to live in an environment led by God's way 24/7 for a week.

Everyone serving in the camp program invests their time, money and energy because it is so worth it. To help the youth grow in their relationship with God is vitally important. We get to live in the "Zone" for a week, putting into practice God's laws and principles in a very practical way to show that God's way works. It is a safe haven from the challenges of the world, a week of peace and calm from the spiritual attacks that are all around us. Our camps are an invaluable program for all who are involved in them. There truly is nothing like it.

If you are interested in investing in our youth and contributing to help further the camp program and all it stands for, I ask that you consider donating to the UYC Camp Fund. In doing so, you are investing in the lives of the youth of the Church and in doing so, the future of the Church. You can donate by visiting donate.ucg.org and selecting the youth camp fund.

*Aaron Creech
Assistant National Camp Coordinator*



Operation Managers' Updates

Ministerial and Member Services

At the beginning of November, Len Martin was appointed the pastor of the congregations in London, Kentucky and of the congregations in Knoxville and Kingsport, Tennessee.

At the beginning of December, Jay Ledbetter was appointed the pastor of the congregations in Houston and Waco, Texas.

Several new hires were made in December. Carl Kin-

sella was hired to serve alongside Rex Sexton as assistant pastor for Portland and The Dalles, Oregon and will also support Ben Light and his congregations.

Joe Neff was hired as a ministerial trainee to serve the congregations in Spokane, Chewelah and Kennewick, Washington alongside pastor Paul Moody.

James Ginn was hired to coordinate the United Church of God's efforts in Eastern Europe, Scandinavia and the Baltics.

Thank you for your prayers, asking God, the “Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest,” (Luke 10:2).

Prayer for God's Spirit and wisdom to guide them in their new roles is certainly needed. Your petitions for these men, their families and the congregations where they serve are greatly appreciated. **UN**



Steve Myers is the Ministerial and Member Services operation manager for UCG and an elder who serves in the Cincinnati, Ohio area. He can be reached at steve_myers@ucg.org

Upcoming Events

60th Anniversary of the Church of God in Maryland



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On March 8, 2025, the UCG Columbia, Maryland congregation will host a celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Church of God in Maryland.

Brethren will be able to reminisce over old photos and memorabilia while enjoying a meal. Sabbath

services will begin at 1 p.m. at The Other Barn, 5851 Robert Oliver Place, Columbia, Maryland 21045.

All past attendees of the congregations in Maryland are invited to attend this special celebration. If you are interested in attending and are not currently

attending the Columbia, Maryland congregation or have any pictures or other items related to the Church of God in Maryland that you would like to have included in the slideshow, please contact Rhonda Diggins at rdiggins@yahoo.com by Feb. 14, 2025. **UN**

Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Family Weekend

Join us for a dynamic weekend March 21-23, 2025 featuring:

- Enriching Bible studies.
- Uplifting church services.
- A memorable teen prom (for ages 12–19) with recognition of graduating seniors.
- A young adult dinner and activities (for ages 18–35).
- A family dance.
- Engaging sports events.

This weekend is a perfect opportunity for our Church

family to deepen connections, strengthen faith and create cherished memories together. Most activities will take place at the Four Points Sheraton in Coppell, Texas which conveniently provides a free shuttle to and from the DFW Airport.

The weekend will begin at 7 p.m. on Friday evening with a dessert social, and will conclude on Sunday at 3 p.m. Registration for the weekend will be available soon. **UN**



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- Learn God's Word inside and out.
- Make friends and memories that will last a lifetime.
- Prove the truth of the Bible for yourself.
- Tuition is \$2,500; waivers are available based on need.

Apply today at: **abc.ucg.org/applications**

Ambassador Bible College Educational Tour of Turkey



Space is still available for the Ambassador Bible College study tour to Turkey. The tour visits the sites of some churches of Revelation and a portion of the travels of Paul. Cities visited will be Ephesus, Pergamon, Istanbul, Alexandria, Troas, Colossae and Hierapolis. This tour takes place during the spring Holy Days of 2025 (April 14-24). ABC instructor Darris McNeely will be the tour host.

For a tour itinerary and information on registering, please email: **darris_mcneely@ucg.org**

Drought Recovery Efforts in Malawi and Zimbabwe



A family in Malawi who received farming inputs.



Church family in Zimbabwe



An example of effects of the drought in Zimbabwe.

Continued from cover page

For UCG congregations in Zimbabwe, the entire country is pastored by Mabasa Chichaya. Membership is about 150 people. One of the regions hit hardest by the drought is the village of Chemba. The area is difficult to reach, especially in the rainy season, when transportation is very difficult. The area has sandy soil, which makes it especially difficult for brethren to grow crops there.

Good Works has provided much of the aid for brethren in Zimbabwe. Even then, one

difficulty that exists is that the banks and government in Zimbabwe often become suspicious when large amounts of money are transferred into the country, creating delays in delivering the aid. Thankfully, in the most recent funds transfer, God made the path very easy, as money was successfully sent and received in the same day.

The next step in delivering aid rests on the labor of love from pastor Mabasa Chichaya. He purchases supplies and, accompanied by one of the deacons, makes deliveries to the farthest reaches of Zimbabwe.

Some of the aid sent to Zimbabwe

is used for seed, helping people gain independence in food production. An ongoing project is the drilling of borehole wells. These require heavier equipment than the tools farmers have available to drill their own wells. With the drop in the water table, even a 100 meter deep well needs to be doubled, in many cases, before one can access water. These projects are a great asset to individual families and their larger communities.

How you can help

As the situation unfolds, prayers are already beginning

to be answered, as the beginning of 2025 saw some much-needed rainfall. In both Malawi and Zimbabwe, brethren wait prayerfully as their recently-planted crops begin to grow.

At this time, the most important way to help the brethren is through prayer, taking the situation to God, as He controls the rain. Pray for continued rainfall, so the new crops will grow without interruption. Pray for safe transportation and the successful transfer of funds as aid is delivered throughout the affected regions. And praise God for what

He has accomplished in this situation so far!

We often wonder why these things happen, and why such dire circumstances affect our brethren. Although many factors are out of our control, God watches what we do in these situations. He observed not just those who are experiencing the trial, but those who are not. Do we watch from afar and say “God will take care of it” or do we reach out and do what we can, both financially as God has blessed us, and through our fervent prayers? Let’s remember our brothers and sisters! **UN**

United Youth Camps 2024: Winter Camp Report



The 2024 camp season concluded with Winter Camp over the winter break. We had 175 people gathered from across the United States, Canada and Australia as we once again held camp in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

We had a wonderful group of campers and staff that contributed to building “The Zone” as we lived and talked about God’s way of life all week. We establish the focus on God through *Compass Check*, Christian living, Bible class, Q&A sessions and dorm parent discussions. We endeavor to model it through our actions and personal conversations during the day. The campers and staff really con-

nected to the theme and went home energized to stand strong!

Winter Camp has a unique set of activities from indoor and outdoor winter sports (like broomball and snowboarding), to a Western-themed escape room, a gym night with rock climbing and a s’mores night. Winter Camp has a reputation for a close “family camp” feel since we spend so much time together due to the weather and early sunsets. It allows for a slower pace with lots of fellowship time and emphasis on building relationships.

We have a dedicated staff who make camp possible and a huge success year after year. We can’t do this without God’s



blessing and the support of the staff and all who donate and contribute to the camp program. Thank you for investing in the youth of God’s Church.

For me, one of the biggest take-aways I have each year

is the encouragement I leave camp with after being with these young people. I see the future and I have high hopes for it as I see the dedication, commitment and maturity of many of the kids who come through our



program. They have a lot they have to stand strong against, but they are doing it. I am so thankful to get to see it, get to know them, and work with them year after year.

Aaron Creech

European Leadership Conference

From Dec. 22–26, 2024 the Church held a training, planning and discussion conference in Zandvoort, the Netherlands where more than 65 ministers, deacons and leadership of the Church in Europe attended.

Representatives visiting from France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, other Baltic/Scandinavian areas, and even Spain were there (along with those of us from the United States). We all came together to discuss the future of Europe, how to more effectively preach the gospel to a continent that figures so prominently in Bible prophecy, and how we can best serve the people of God in these areas.

The conference brought together people speaking many

different languages, but we were all united by God’s Spirit and His truth. It was a beautiful and inspiring event to be part of this week and we trust the unity and spirit of brotherhood will extend to all the Church.

Without going into too much detail, I believe I speak for everyone present when I say that we see the future: how God and Jesus Christ would have us begin, earnestly and fully, the commission of preaching the gospel “in all nations” in a way that hasn’t been done in Europe for decades, and something that must be done now.

Serving the Church around the world

It occurs to me that over the last year we have had the



opportunity to meet so many of the ministry and members around the world. We still have people to meet and places to go over the next year, but as we do, we are learning what needs to be done and we are committed to serving God’s people all over the world. We are all family, living in so many different places and with so many dif-

ferent cultures, but all bound together as His family by His Spirit and His truth, which “sanctifies us” and sets us apart from the world.

Brethren, please pray even more fervently for God’s Kingdom to come and for His will to be done. Ask Him to guide us all and establish our steps each day. Let us be grounded in and

committed to His truth, following Him and His Church as we walk in all His ways.

You are all in our thoughts and prayers, and are prominently in our plans, as we in the home office administration begin preparing strategic plans and budgets for the upcoming fiscal year and beyond.

Rick Shabi

British Isles: London Open House Sabbath Service



The United Church of God in London, England welcomed Rick Shabi for a visit on the Sabbath of Dec. 21, 2024 as he

and his wife, Deborah, traveled through on their way to the regional European conference in the Netherlands.

The opportunity was taken to host an “open house” for members of the wider Church of God community to come together in worship, unity and fellowship and to additionally take part in a Question and Answer session hosted by Mr. Shabi.

For most Sabbaths, the London congregation is usually around 30–40 people, but for the open house the numbers swelled to a little over 100—with at least five different “Churches of God” represented, as well as a number of brethren who do not currently associate with any particular organization.

Mr. Shabi’s sermon reminded

everyone of what Christ said in John 17:17—how we are all bound by His Spirit and truth—in a message titled “Set Apart by Truth.” For some, the singing of the old and well-known Church of God hymns, including “O Come and Let us Worship Him” and “We are God’s People,” was an emotional reminder we are indeed all God’s very own special people, called out of this world to be sanctified and prepared for service in the soon-coming Kingdom of God.

Following the service, everyone enjoyed a buffet meal while brethren old and new met or renewed acquaintances. Some brethren had not seen each other

for decades and it was a remarkable opportunity to see other members of the Church of God and to be strengthened—being reminded that God is active in the lives of all His children.

After the food and fellowship, Mr. Shabi answered questions from the congregation. Many positive comments have been received and brethren from various Churches of God appreciated the openness, friendliness and opportunity to see faces old and new.

Our sincere thanks to all those who worked so hard to arrange such a special and encouraging occasion.

David Elliott

Volunteers Needed: Feast of Tabernacles Input Committee 2025

We are looking for volunteers to join the Feast of Tabernacles Input Committee for 2025. This is an opportunity for experienced professionals in meeting planning, conferences and hospitality to provide valuable input and ideas for enhancing the Feast of Tabernacles.

Purpose:

The committee will gather to exchange ideas and provide professional input on how we can continue to improve the Feast of Tabernacles each year. Your insights and experience will help guide planning efforts and ensure we provide an excellent experience for all attendees.

Experience:

We are looking for individuals who have professional experience in event planning, particularly in the corporate or association sectors, or in the hospi-

tility industry, such as hotels and travel.

Requirements:

Applicants must be baptized members of the United Church of God. Please note that spouses of UCG members may apply, but applicants cannot be current employees of the United Church of God.

Expectations:

The committee will meet three times a year via web connection, and members may be tasked with specific research projects or other delegated responsibilities. Each committee member will serve between 12 to 18 months, after which re-application will be required if you wish to continue serving.

Why Volunteer?

In light of the significant changes in event planning and hospitality that have taken place in the post-COVID world, we are looking to tap into the expertise of our members. Your professional insights will help us navigate challenges related to culture, technology and affordability as we continue to improve the Feast of Tabernacles.

Please note that this committee is not a decision-making body or site-selection team, but rather a group focused on offering input and suggestions to guide the planning process.

If you have the experience and passion to help shape the future of our Feast of Tabernacles celebrations, we encourage you to apply. Your contribution could make a real difference in how we plan for 2025.

To apply, please contact Charles Melear at: charles_melear@ucg.org

Financial Audit Summary

Clark Schaefer Hackett & Co. (CSHCO) was again engaged to perform the audit.

As has been our practice, the audited financial statements of the United Church of God, *an International Association*, are included in the first issue of *United News* following the December Council of Elders meetings.

In accordance with our by-laws, an external audit of our financial statements, and related assessment of risk, internal controls, and other accounting policies and procedures are performed each year. The final report is presented to the Council of Elders at its December meeting; thereafter being made public in the Church's newspaper.

As of the date of this writing we are just over five months into the Church's current fiscal year and would like to share some highlights of our past and current fiscal year.

First, God continues to bless the Church financially for which we are thankful to Him and to the members, donors, co-workers and others who faith-

fully support His work. Income for the current fiscal year-to-date period is a little above both our budget and compared to the same period in the prior year. Also, our expenses are a little below budget for the current fiscal year-to-date period.

As you review the audited financial statements, we would like to draw your attention to a few items of interest.

Unmodified opinion

On pages 1 and 2 of the Independent Auditors' Report, CSHCO states its opinion that the financial statements "present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of [the Church] as of June 30, 2024 and 2023."

Assets and liabilities

The Statements of Financial Position (on page 3 and otherwise known as Balance Sheets) disclose our asset and liability balances at each of the fiscal year-end periods shown. Note that God has blessed the Church with an increase of

7.5% in total net assets over the prior year. On page 15 (Note 8) of the audit report, the balance in each donor restricted fund is noted. Donor restricted funds are used only for their respective designations and purposes.

Income and expense

The Statements of Activities (on page 4 and otherwise known as Income Statements) provide an overview of income and expenses by category for the fiscal year. The Church's overall "income," which primarily consists of tithes (listed as contributions in the statement) and Holy Day offerings, as measured without regards to any net assets released from restrictions (that is, from restricted funds), increased overall by a little over \$0.4 million in fiscal year 2024.

Financial assistance

On the Statement of Functional Expenses (page 5) you will note that in fiscal year 2024 the Church, in recognition of its

responsibility to help provide for the short-term or long-term needs of its members, funded, in the aggregate, over \$1.54 million to the various ongoing assistance initiatives.

International subsidy

Recognizing our commitment to members outside the United States, the Church provides regular subsidies to international areas including congregations in Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, Southern and Southeast Asia, Mexico, South America and others.

The total amount of international assistance in fiscal year 2024 exceeded \$1.68 million. This excludes the cost of printing, postage and shipping of foreign language magazines and booklets paid through public proclamation program services.

Expenses


While the Statements of Activities show overall expenses by both program services as well as management and general categories, there are further details on expenses provided in the Statement of Functional Expenses on pages 5 and 6 of the audit report.

God continues to provide what the Church needs to support the mission of preaching the gospel, making disciples and caring for them around the world. We would like to again express our gratitude to Him, and to the members, coworkers and donors who faithfully support His work. May we all continually seek God's will and faithfully submit to it.

As always, if you have any questions about the finances of the Church or anything in the attached audited financial statements, please feel free to contact the Treasurer, Barry Korthuis. **UN**



Barry Korthuis serves as the treasurer and Financial Services operation manager for UCG. He can be reached at barry_korthuis@ucg.org



**United Church of God,
an International Association**

Financial Statements
June 30, 2024 and 2023
With Independent Auditors' Report




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One East Fourth Street, Suite 1200, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
P 513.241.3111 | F 513.241.1212

INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT

Council of Elders
United Church of God, an International Association:

Opinion
We have audited the accompanying financial statements of **United Church of God, an International Association** (a not-for-profit organization) which comprise the statements of financial position as of June 30, 2024 and 2023, and the related statements of activities, functional expenses, and cash flows for the years then ended, and the related notes to the financial statements.

In our opinion, the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of **United Church of God, an International Association** as of June 30, 2024 and 2023, and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

Basis for Opinion
We conducted our audits in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditors' Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements section of our report. We are required to be independent of **United Church of God, an International Association** and to meet our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the relevant ethical requirements relating to our audits. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Responsibilities of Management for the Financial Statements
Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America, and for the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is required to evaluate whether there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about **United Church of God, an International Association's** ability to continue as a going concern within one year after the date that the financial statements are available to be issued.

Auditors' Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements
Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditors' report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not absolute assurance and therefore is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control. Misstatements, including omissions, are considered material if there is a substantial likelihood that, individually or in the aggregate, they would influence the judgment made by a reasonable user based on the financial statements.



In performing an audit in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards, we:

- Exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit.
- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, and design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks. Such procedures include examining, on a test basis, evidence regarding the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of **United Church of God, an International Association's** internal control. Accordingly, no such opinion is expressed.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by management, as well as evaluate the overall presentation of the financial statements.
- Conclude whether, in our judgment, there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about **United Church of God, an International Association's** ability to continue as a going concern for a reasonable period of time.

We are required to communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit, significant audit findings, and certain internal control related matters that we identified during the audits.

Clark, Schaefer, Hackett & Co.

Cincinnati, Ohio
December 3, 2024

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, an International Association
Statements of Financial Position
June 30, 2024 and 2023

	2024	2023
Assets:		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 17,518,969	17,160,100
Prepaid expenses	381,385	362,730
Property and equipment, net	8,525,056	7,118,580
Other assets	30,603	30,432
Operating lease right of use assets	628,026	411,335
Total assets	\$ 27,084,039	25,083,177
Liabilities and net assets:		
Liabilities:		
Accounts payable	\$ 241,289	256,715
Accrued payroll and vacation pay	479,015	448,635
Accrued insurance obligations	43,665	75,254
Accrued other	242,052	98,538
Operating lease liabilities	628,026	411,335
Mortgages payable	362,408	447,340
Total liabilities	1,996,455	1,737,817
Net assets:		
Without donor restrictions:		
Undesignated	17,984,464	17,289,774
Designated by Council of Elders for cash reserve	3,827,000	3,458,000
Designated by Council of Elders for general reserve	1,639,187	1,250,951
Designated by Council of Elders for healthcare reserve	500,000	500,000
	23,950,651	22,498,725
With donor restrictions	1,136,933	846,635
Total net assets	25,087,584	23,345,360
Total liabilities and net assets	\$ 27,084,039	25,083,177

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, an International Association
Statements of Activities
Years Ended June 30, 2024 and 2023

	2024	2023
Net assets without donor restrictions:		
Revenues, gains and other support:		
Contributions - individuals	\$ 15,610,975	15,923,048
Contributions - local congregations	443,740	276,912
Holy day offerings and festival fund contributions	6,150,924	6,154,250
Estate and personal property donations	614,800	386,634
Interest income	769,384	351,963
Other income	187,901	244,538
Net assets released from restrictions:		
Satisfaction of restrictions	581,296	150,482
Total revenues, gains and other support	24,359,020	23,487,827
Expenses:		
Program services:		
Field Ministry / Local Congregations	8,900,230	7,907,101
Festivals	449,169	415,751
International	1,687,735	1,655,404
Public Proclamation	6,047,882	5,743,974
Total program services	17,085,016	15,722,230
Management and general:		
Council of Elders / Home Office /		
Insurance & Benefit Plans	5,732,073	5,254,955
General Conference	34,205	31,650
Executive Reserve	55,800	60,000
Total management and general	5,822,078	5,346,605
Total expenses	22,907,094	21,068,835
Increase in net assets without donor restrictions	1,451,926	2,418,992
Net assets with donor restrictions:		
Contributions	871,594	233,345
Net assets released from restrictions:		
Satisfaction of restrictions	(581,296)	(150,482)
Increase in net assets with donor restrictions	290,298	82,863
Change in net assets	1,742,224	2,501,855
Net assets at the beginning of period	23,345,360	20,843,505
Net assets at the end of period	\$ 25,087,584	23,345,360

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, an International Association
Statement of Functional Expenses
Year Ended June 30, 2024

	Program Services				Management and General			Totals
	Ministerial Services/Field Ministry/Local Congregations	Festivals	International	Public Proclamation	Council of Elders/Home Office/Insurance & Benefit Plans	Executive Reserve	General Conference	
Salaries and related benefits	\$ 4,995,230	-	-	1,468,098	1,669,249	52,100	-	8,184,677
Contracted services and fees	13,835	2,517	-	445,495	897,765	-	5,775	1,365,387
Broadcast media and advertising	-	-	-	1,326,176	-	-	-	1,326,176
Print media and advertising	10,784	21,442	-	1,145,603	26,465	-	2,705	1,206,999
Postage and shipping	16,279	9,697	-	1,287,267	47,850	-	1,499	1,362,592
Lease and rental expense	26,991	187,924	-	3,780	16,260	-	-	234,955
Telephone and utilities	29,050	181	-	2,447	148,895	-	-	180,573
Supplies	33,890	13,068	-	6,795	86,412	-	3,580	143,745
Travel, mileage, meals, and lodging	934,006	25,279	209,201	13,235	179,964	-	18,055	1,379,740
Depreciation	-	-	-	-	284,934	-	-	284,934
Grants and charitable support:	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
International support	-	-	1,478,534	347,297	871	-	-	1,826,702
Domestic support:	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Financial assistance	274,171	188,444	-	-	1,086,107	-	-	1,548,722
Allocations to local congregations	2,493,004	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,493,004
Insurance and health care	-	-	-	-	1,260,774	-	-	1,260,774
Other	72,990	617	-	1,689	26,527	3,700	2,591	108,114
Total expenses	\$ 8,900,230	449,169	1,687,735	6,047,882	5,732,073	55,800	34,205	22,907,094

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements.

5

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, an International Association
Statement of Functional Expenses
Year Ended June 30, 2023

	Program Services				Management and General			Totals
	Ministerial Services/Field Ministry/Local Congregations	Festivals	International	Public Proclamation	Council of Elders/Home Office/Insurance & Benefit Plans	Executive Reserve	General Conference	
Salaries and related benefits	\$ 4,558,615	-	-	1,560,846	1,719,715	60,000	-	7,899,176
Contracted services and fees	22,366	4,718	-	391,840	788,214	-	5,737	1,212,875
Broadcast media and advertising	-	-	-	1,405,278	-	-	-	1,405,278
Print media and advertising	7,963	14,006	-	928,409	22,564	-	1,160	974,102
Postage and shipping	20,585	6,083	-	1,129,632	81,976	-	2,076	1,240,352
Lease and rental expense	8,978	223,228	-	1,275	7,742	-	-	241,223
Telephone and utilities	27,316	1,089	-	1,313	137,903	-	-	167,621
Supplies	68,304	19,827	-	11,288	75,254	-	3,409	178,082
Travel, mileage, meals, and lodging	823,273	26,136	167,979	18,337	98,444	-	17,603	1,151,772
Depreciation	-	-	-	-	296,708	-	-	296,708
Grants and charitable support:	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
International support	-	-	1,487,425	292,030	378	-	-	1,779,833
Domestic support:	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Financial assistance	226,894	120,614	-	-	955,618	-	-	1,303,126
Allocations to local congregations	2,087,238	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,087,238
Insurance and health care	-	-	-	-	1,020,170	-	-	1,020,170
Other	55,569	50	-	3,726	50,269	-	1,665	111,279
Total expenses	\$ 7,907,101	415,751	1,655,404	5,743,974	5,254,955	60,000	31,650	21,068,835

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements.

6

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, an International Association
Statements of Cash Flows
Years Ended June 30, 2024 and 2023

	2024	2023
Cash flows from operating activities:		
Change in net assets	\$ 1,742,224	2,501,855
Adjustment to reconcile change in net assets to net cash provided by operating activities:		
Depreciation	284,934	298,708
Amortization of right of use assets	149,701	126,777
Effect of change in operating assets and liabilities:		
Prepaid expenses	(18,655)	(173,642)
Other assets	(171)	(30,432)
Accounts payable	(15,426)	70,745
Accrued payroll and vacation pay	30,380	(135,628)
Accrued insurance obligations	(31,589)	15,414
Accrued other	143,514	(21,389)
Net cash provided by operating activities	2,284,912	2,650,408
Cash flows from investing activities:		
Purchases of property and equipment	(1,691,410)	(105,186)
Net cash used by investing activities	(1,691,410)	(105,186)
Cash flows from financing activities:		
Payments on operating lease liabilities	(149,701)	(126,777)
Principal payments on mortgages payable	(84,932)	(122,016)
Net cash used by financing activities	(234,633)	(248,793)
Net increase in cash and cash equivalents	358,869	2,296,429
Cash and cash equivalents, beginning of year	17,160,100	14,863,671
Cash and cash equivalents, end of year	\$ 17,518,969	17,160,100
Supplemental Cash Flow Disclosures:		
Interest paid	\$ 7,883	11,028

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements. 7

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, an International Association
Notes to the Financial Statements
June 30, 2024 and 2023

1. CHURCH AND ACTIVITIES:

The United Church of God, an International Association, (herein referred as the "Church") is a worldwide religious association. In the United States of America, the Church is a California Nonprofit Religious Corporation (incorporated on May 10, 1995). Affairs of the Church are coordinated through the Home Office located in Milford, Ohio, where the state of Ohio has the Church officially registered.

The Church is not affiliated with other religious churches, nor does it publicly appeal for funds or involve itself in politics. The mission of the United Church of God, an International Association, is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God in all the world, make disciples in all nations and care for those disciples.

The Church is overseen by a General Conference of Elders, which, in turn, appoints a 12-member Council of Elders to function as a board of directors that establishes operational policies for the Church. The officers and employees of the Church are responsible for operation of the Church in conformance with Council policies.

2. SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES:

Basis of presentation

The accompanying financial statements include only the activity of the Home Office for the Church.

The Church has associated organizations, operating in other countries, which have resources that are principally derived and expended locally. The Church provides grants-in-aid and other services to some of these organizations. The accounts of these organizations are not included in the accompanying financial statements.

The financial statements have been prepared on the accrual basis in accordance with the AICPA Audit and Accounting Guide, "Not-for-Profit Organizations" which requires the Church to report information regarding its financial position and activities according to the following net asset classifications:

- Net assets without donor restrictions: Net assets that are not subject to donor-imposed restrictions and may be expended for any purpose in performing the primary objectives of the Church. These net assets may be used at the discretion of the Church's management and the Council of Elders.
- Net assets with donor restrictions: Net assets subject to stipulations imposed by donors. Some donor restrictions are temporary in nature; those restrictions will likely be met by actions of the Church or by the passage of time. Other donor restrictions are perpetual in nature, whereby the donor has stipulated the funds be maintained in perpetuity. The Church has no net assets with perpetual donor restrictions as of June 30, 2024 and 2023.

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, an International Association
Notes to the Financial Statements
June 30, 2024 and 2023

Church support

Members of the Church practice tithing (which is the donation of ten percent of one's income for the Church's unrestricted use). The majority of the Church's support and revenue consist of such unrestricted donations, whether from individuals directly to the Home Office or from monies received by local congregations and subsequently given to the Home Office.

Members also save an additional ten percent of their annual income for personal use in attending biblically mandated festivals or holy days. This is commonly referred to as the second tithe. Members may contribute to the Church a portion of the second tithe that they save for use at the annual festivals. These contributions, known as the "Festival Fund," are used to pay for expenses involved in festival operations and help provide needed financial assistance to members and their families so they can attend the Feast of Tabernacles. Funds are also sent internationally to assist members.

Those members who are financially able contribute to the "Assistance Fund." Monies contributed to the fund are used to provide financial assistance to those in need.

Members may designate that their contributions be used to support the Church internationally. This fund is known as the "International Fund."

Use of estimates

The financial statements are prepared in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles which require management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the amounts of assets and liabilities, the disclosure of contingent liabilities as of the financial statement date, and the amounts of revenues and expenses during the reporting period. Actual results could differ from those estimates.

Income taxes

The Church is exempt from Federal income tax under Internal Revenue Code (IRC) Section 501(c)(3). Donations to the Church are tax-deductible under IRC Section 170(b)(1)(A). However, income from certain activities not directly related to the Church's tax-exempt purpose would be subject to taxation as unrelated business income. The Church has been granted tax-exempt status in the states in which it operates that provide exemptions from taxes.

Cash and cash equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents consist of cash and investments with initial maturities of nine months or less.

Concentration of credit risk

The Church maintains its cash and certificates of deposit at several commercial and savings banks which, at times, exceed federally insured limits. The Church has not experienced any losses in such accounts and believes it is not exposed to any significant credit risk.

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, an International Association
Notes to the Financial Statements
June 30, 2024 and 2023

Property and equipment

Purchased property and equipment are recorded at cost. Donations of property and equipment are recorded as support at their estimated fair value on the date of donation. Such donations are reported as without donor restrictions unless the donor has restricted the donated asset to be used for a specific purpose. Major improvements to real property are capitalized and normal repair and maintenance costs are expensed as incurred.

Property and equipment owned by the Church are depreciated using the straight-line method over their estimated useful life as follows:

Computer/Information Systems	3 years
Office Equipment	5 years
Vehicles	5 years
Office Furniture and Fixtures	7 years
Land Improvements	10 years
Buildings	40 years

Components of programs and supporting services

Field Ministry/Local Congregations: This function includes expenses pertaining to the field ministry, local congregations, and youth camps.

International: This function includes expenses pertaining to the support of international congregations and offices.

Public Proclamation: This area contains all media-related expenses.

Festivals: This function includes costs that are directly involved in the fall Feast of Tabernacles and the other annual festivals.

Home Office: This function includes administrative and other expenses for the Home Office.

Council of Elders: The expenses in this function are those that pertain to the Council of Elders, including phone and face-to-face conferences.

General Conference: Expenses in this function include any expenses relating to the Cincinnati, Ohio, General Conference held in May.

Executive Reserve: This function includes funds set aside for special projects, capital expenditures, employee benefits, or other unforeseen expenditures that may occur during the year.

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, an International Association
Notes to the Financial Statements
June 30, 2024 and 2023

Advertising

Advertising in annual publications is amortized over each publication's twelve month estimated useful life. All other advertising costs are charged to operations when incurred. Advertising expense was \$951,656 and \$1,090,378 for the years ended June 30, 2024 and 2023, respectively.

Allocation of functional expenses

The costs of providing various programs and other activities have been summarized on a functional basis in the statements of activities and, accordingly, certain costs have been allocated among benefited programs and supporting services. There are no joint costs for fundraising activities. All expenses are charged to the various programs and other activities based on direct expenses incurred with exception of the following functional expense categories which include allocated expenses based on periodic time studies conducted by management: salaries, contracted services, print media and advertising, travel, and other expenses.

Reclassifications

Certain amounts in the 2023 financial statements have been reclassified to conform to the current year presentation.

Subsequent events

The Church evaluates events and transactions occurring subsequent to the date of the financial statements for matters requiring recognition or disclosure in the financial statements. The accompanying financial statements consider events through December 3, 2024, the date on which the financial statements were available to be issued.

3. PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT:

Property and equipment consisted of the following at June 30:

	2024	2023
Buildings and construction in progress	\$ 10,757,913	9,104,613
Land	449,952	449,952
Land improvements	447,012	447,012
Furniture and fixtures	97,092	97,092
Office equipment	626,457	632,654
Vehicles	56,240	56,240
Total property and equipment	12,434,666	10,787,563
Less: accumulated depreciation	3,909,610	3,668,983
	\$ 8,525,056	7,118,580

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, an International Association
Notes to the Financial Statements
June 30, 2024 and 2023

4. OPERATING LEASES:

The Church is obligated under various agreements to lease vehicles and equipment through 2029 that provide for monthly rental payments ranging from approximately \$500 to \$5,000.

Leases	Classification	6/30/2024	6/30/2023
Assets			
Operating	Right of use assets	\$ 628,026	\$ 411,335
Liabilities			
Operating	Operating lease liabilities	\$ 628,026	\$ 411,335

Lease Term and Discount Rate:

	6/30/2024	6/30/2023
Weighted Average Remaining Lease Term (years)		
Operating leases	3.57	2.59
Weighted Average Discount Rate		
Operating leases	6.68%	5.09%

Maturities of lease liabilities:

Year Ending June 30:	
2025	\$ 231,941
2026	185,324
2027	138,957
2028	91,058
Thereafter	69,395
Total lease payments	716,675
Less: interest	(88,649)
Present value of lease liabilities	\$ 628,026

All lease expenses, including those for various short term leases, for the years ended June 30, 2024 and 2023 were \$234,955 and \$241,223, respectively.

5. DEFINED CONTRIBUTION PENSION PLAN:

Effective April 1, 1999, the Church established a 403(b)-thrift plan for all full-time employees. Matching contributions were made for the years ended June 30, 2024 and 2023 in the amount of \$255,225 and \$247,412, respectively.

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, an International Association
Notes to the Financial Statements
June 30, 2024 and 2023

6. MORTGAGES PAYABLE:

In December 2014, the Church signed a \$25,000 mortgage with United Church of God, Fort Wayne, secured by a church building. The mortgage will be repaid in monthly installments over 10 years, with an interest rate of 0.50%. The balance at June 30, 2023 was \$3,620. The mortgage was fully paid off during the year ended June 30, 2024.

In August 2018, the Church received a building as part of a contribution that included a \$345,000 mortgage with three members of the United Church of God, Columbus, secured by the church building. The mortgage will be repaid in monthly installments over 15 years, with an interest rate of 0.00%. The balance at June 30, 2024 and 2023 was \$210,833 and \$238,305, respectively. No interest has been imputed on the mortgage, as the amount was deemed immaterial.

In December 2019, the Church purchased a building utilizing funds donated from the United Church of God, Indianapolis along with funds obtained through a \$370,000 mortgage with a financial institution, secured by the church building. The mortgage will be repaid in monthly installments over 15 years, with an interest rate of 4.5%. The balance at June 30, 2024 and 2023 was \$151,575 and \$205,415, respectively.

The future minimum payments on the mortgage payables are as follows:

Years Ending June 30:		
2025	\$	79,037
2026		81,611
2027		59,927
2028		23,000
2029		23,000
Thereafter		95,833
Total	\$	362,408

7. COMMITMENTS AND CONTINGENCIES:

The Church is currently making discretionary payments to certain individuals. The payments totaled approximately \$1,549,000 and \$1,303,000 for the years ended June 30, 2024 and 2023, respectively. These discretionary payments are provided, in part, based upon the individual's needs and, accordingly, could be discontinued in the future. No amounts have been accrued in the accompanying financial statements for future payments relating to these arrangements.

The Church is self-insured for medical insurance and maintains a stop-loss coverage policy covering individual claims in excess of predetermined amounts. Aggregate annual claims are also capped at a fixed rate. Self-insurance costs are accrued based upon the aggregate of the liability for reported claims and an estimated liability for claims incurred but not reported.

UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, an International Association
Notes to the Financial Statements
June 30, 2024 and 2023

8. NET ASSETS WITH DONOR RESTRICTIONS:

Net assets with donor restrictions are available for the following purposes at June 30:

	2024	2023
Studio Fund	\$ 22,455	18,105
Camp Fund	87,594	142,411
Festival Fund	-	109,029
Good Works Program	536,242	506,646
Other Directive Funds	431,860	-
Building Fund	58,782	70,444
	\$ 1,136,933	846,635

9. LIQUIDITY DISCLOSURE:

The Church is substantially supported by contributions from its members. A majority of these contributions are recorded without donor restrictions; however, the Church does receive contributions that are recorded with donor restrictions. Because a donor's restriction requires resources to be used in a particular manner or in a future period, the Church must maintain sufficient resources to meet those responsibilities to its donors. Thus, financial assets may not be available for general expenditure within one year.

The following table reflects the Church's financial assets as of June 30, 2024 and 2023, reduced by amounts that are not available to meet general expenditures within one year of the statements of financial position date because of donor restrictions:

	2024	2023
Financial assets:		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 17,518,969	16,882,494
Certificates of deposit	-	277,606
Financial assets available at year-end	17,518,969	17,160,100
Less those unavailable for general expenditures within one year due to:		
Restricted by donor for specific purpose	1,136,933	846,635
Financial assets available to meet cash needs for general expenditures within one year	\$ 16,382,036	16,313,465

GN

The Good News

Malachi to Malachi

Malachi means “my messenger.” God has called us to be His end-time messengers, both individually and collectively as His Church and work.

by Robert Curry

“I don’t usually think of myself as one of God’s messengers,” confided the local elder’s wife, “since I don’t give sermons or sermonettes.” Yet, she has sung in choirs and performed special music, which often impact a church service with a powerful message beyond spoken words. And here she was, not only commenting in a sermon chat about Malachi, but contributing the first comment, serving to get a good discussion going!

She was fulfilling God’s expressed desire in Malachi 3:16-18: “Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name. ‘They shall be Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.’ Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him” (emphasis mine throughout).

If this “book of remembrance” is the same as the “Book of Life,” imagine having not only your name written in there upon baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit, but God having really liked something you said enough to treasure it—and you—as a gem! It makes me wonder how big a book God is talking about. Some brethren are so helpful in fellowship (Hebrews 10:23-25) that they might need their own book!

Today we as God’s messengers are taking the message of Malachi—and the whole Bible—to the entire world as His watchmen (Ezekiel 33), ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) and witnesses (Matthew



We are God's messengers, taking God's message to the entire world.

24:14). “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

It's always exciting to find out what new doors God will open for His messengers!

But we are also God’s messengers when we call, write or visit brethren including shut-ins, widows or the ill. We certainly should be God’s messengers on social media! In short, we should be a malachi for God in all our everyday interactions.

It’s always exciting to find out what new doors God will open for His messengers!

All Glory to God, not to the Messenger

As a writer I can’t think of anything better than to have a Bible book named after you. Malachi is the

last of 12 minor prophets which are lumped together as one book in the Hebrew canon.

Surprisingly, scholars have widely varying ideas about who wrote this book; for instance, Ezra (Aramaic paraphrase, Targum of Jonathan) and Mordecai (Talmud). Josephus never mentions Malachi, nor does the rest of the Bible, even when Malachi is quoted in the New Testament. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary says, “The suggestion that ‘Malachi’ is not a proper name but a title has ancient support in the [Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament], which reads ‘his messenger.’”

How appropriate that we as God’s messengers today must be ever mindful of our humble calling “that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:29).

The Coming Messengers

Malachi speaks of messengers to come who will prepare the way before the comings of Jesus Christ (Malachi 3:1-5). Verses 2-5 and 4:5 where God promised to send “Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” clearly refer to Jesus’ second coming.

In Matthew 17:10-13, Jesus’ “disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ Jesus answered . . . ‘Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already . . .’ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.”

God’s Church has been an Elijah messenger before the second coming! As John the Baptist did, in all of our messages we must “make straight the way of the Lord” (John 1:23). We should always make the truth plain!

Priests and Levites

Malachi has correction for priests and Levites (1:6-2:9). In the unique literary style of Malachi, where God says something and then states what His people argue back (or are thinking), we might retort, “What’s that got to do with me?”

We are called to be priests in the Kingdom (Revelation 5:10). But already we “are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood . . . that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Like Levites, religious leaders, we are striving to be God’s servant leaders.

Continued on page 12

Malachi to Malachi
Continued from page 11

Consider studying what God warns in these verses about thinking “the table of the Lord is contemptible” (Malachi 1:7) and sneering at it as “Oh, what a weariness!” (verse 13). A few weeks ago I caught myself letting down because of feeling my age and had to let Galatians 6:9 restore needed zeal!

“For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 2:7).

The Cornerstone of God’s Message: Family

God’s messengers must live, teach and promote godly families: faithful marriage—not divorce which God hates because it brings violence to lives (Malachi 2:10-16).

Verse 15 reveals the purpose of life: God “seeks godly offspring.” A key belief that sets us apart as a Church is the understanding that we will be actual members of the God family.

Malachi ends with a challenge God’s messengers must fulfill “lest [Jesus] come and strike the earth with a curse.” God’s Elijah messengers must “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers” (4:6).

You might still think “This is good, but you don’t say how to do it!” Mentioning the “hearts of the fathers” first shows a most important principle: parents must set the example by going first.

Like in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father (representing God our Father) had to let the wayward son make his own decisions, but he was ever watching alertly for his return. “When he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). At that point, he didn’t know that his son was repentant, but he humbly reached out for him!

The parable should be called “The Parable of the Lost Sons” because both sons had a problem that separated them from their father. The father and oldest son had a very distant, not intimate relationship. This older son asked one of the servants what was going on—not his father—and then angrily refused to go to the celebration. But the father went first to him also: “came out and pleaded with him” (verse 28).

“Fathers” Includes Our Patriarchs and Founding Fathers

We must turn back children to God their Father and their parents. Also, in many places God says that Israel has been blessed, not for their righteousness, but because of God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Deuteronomy 9:5). And history books show how the founders of America knew that the new nation was being blessed because of God.

No wonder Satan’s forces are trying to cancel our heritage! He is the lead curser! Psalm 107:43 hits our modern situation right on the head: “Those who are wise will take all this to heart; they will see in our history the faithful love of the Lord” (New Living Translation).

God will help us be His Malachis individually and as His Church and work. Let’s learn from what this minor prophet teaches, live it, teach and proclaim it! **GN**



Matthias Zomer/Pexels

Reaching Out to the Lonely

How can we become better-attuned to the needs of others so we can better serve them?

by Anna Pickett

Even now, after so many years, writing about this is still painful. My husband left me alone at age 30 to raise three children, including one with cerebral palsy. I suffered emotional breakdown, heartbreak and intense loneliness for many years.

If you’ve ever felt like crying from the rooftop “I am lonely!” you are not alone. If you’ve longed for someone to notice, and no one did, I know how you feel. I was one of millions who felt this deep loneliness, and some feel it more intensely than others.

Among the lonely you will find people of all ages and backgrounds. You will find them everywhere—in schools, universities, workplaces, prisons, coffee shops, hospitals, nursing homes, and even in your own family and church. These are the children of single parents, the bullied teens, the single people who’ve never found a mate, the husband or wife whose spouse is unsupportive, the neighbor with a disability, the widows and widowers, the homeless and those who have never felt loved or respected. Can you add some more people to this list? I am sure you can.

Created to be Social

God created us to have relationships, firstly with Him, but also with other humans. Loneliness can be intense and very hard to live with. It can be difficult to alleviate on our own. Just as our spiritual and physical needs depend on input from outside, so our emotional-social needs include receiving love and respect. “This is My commandment,” Christ said, “that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

Although this kind of suffering is often in our very midst, why is it that we may not be well-attuned to the loneliness of others? I think these are

some of the reasons:

- Not looking beyond our own needs, to those of others (Philippians 2:4).
- Waiting for someone to tell us there is a need.
- Not recognizing the reality of emotional pain, and why it’s difficult to express.

Despite these challenges, you can learn to be a powerful support in another person’s life. First, ask God to open doors for you in this area (Matthew 7:7-8). It will require a level of commitment to make a meaningful, and sometimes lifelong, difference in the life of another person. The learning curve in discovering how best to assist will include setting aside some of your time on a regular basis, and perhaps some financial expense when you see a need.

It requires effort and learning to find out how to best meet others’ needs. You could start by simply asking, “What would be helpful?” Then be patient and a good listener. Be gentle and reassuring. Let them know you are there for them and that you care.

Let the lonely person know that you will be praying for them. The Lord is near to those who are brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18; Matthew 11:28), so be sure to involve Him in your efforts to help your friend.

And always remember, love, respect, loyalty, and confidentiality will go a long way toward healing. As you walk alongside a lonely person, you are serving Christ (Matthew 25:37-40).

Helping as a Church Family

There are many ways the Church can work together to make a meaningful difference in a person’s life. Sending monthly “Care Cards” is one example of a loving step in this direction.

Scripture explains that we have a responsibility to reach out to others—especially those in the Church. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

I am very thankful to friends and brethren who took me under their wings and helped to turn around the pain of loneliness in my life. And I am deeply grateful to God for my wonderful, loving second husband, Ken, who was with me for 33 years until he died two years ago. The love Ken gave me in the years we were together still radiates in my heart each day. God’s people really can make a difference and ease the pain of loneliness.

Let’s remember that “the law is fulfilled [made full] in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Galatians 5:14). **GN**

Temporary Inconvenience, Permanent Improvement

God is growing us to be something far greater than we are now, but it is a process.

by Mike Iiams

Change is something we desire from a very young age—we want to be taller, stronger, we want a bicycle, then a car, then a mate, and we continue marching through life trying to get to the next stage. And then at some point we want to rest—stop the change. Yet, change is something we should embrace, because God does.

Our life is called a vapor in James 4:14. We have a “shelf life,” so we should use it well.

In our time on earth, many have been privileged to be called by God. That calling specifically involves change. God calls us from where we were, and expects us, and helps us, get to where He wants us to be—“to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). That’s a lot of change!

God is growing us to be something far greater than we are now, but it is a process. We can’t exactly see where God wants us to be, although we can read the Scriptures, and put a lot of ideas together. We’re His workmanship, and we have to cooperate to get to the finished product (1 Corinthians 15:50-57).

2 Corinthians 5:17 says we become a “new creation,” not a remake of something old and worn out.

Ephesians 4:17-24 further explains we need to put off the old corrupt ways, and put on the new man; lots

of change. That new man gets created in true righteousness and holiness. What does that creation look like?

Only Temporary

Before I answer that, let me take you back to my childhood (early '60s). In southwest Pennsylvania the interstate highway system was being constructed. A winding two-lane road was being replaced by a four-lane high-speed interstate highway. I well remember the construction, because we had to drive through it on our way to church services every week in Pittsburgh. Every week there were changes; the heavy equipment carved out the hills, built bridges, created exit ramps and interchanges that tied into the sideroads. Every Sabbath was an adventure. I enjoyed the construction, but there was a sign that I vividly remember along the construction route. It read, “Temporary Inconvenience Permanent Improvement.” I remember thinking how simple that sign stated what we all hoped for.

So, when the State of Idaho announced they were going to widen the two-lane road in front of our house, that sign came to mind. As thousands of cars travel past our house every day, it is very interesting to watch the highway contractor orchestrate this feat while keeping the traffic flowing. They are about four years into the process, and will not be finished for a couple more.

We reflect back on the initial meetings when the state told us this would take several years—maybe they said four to five years, but we weren’t concerned.

Many reading this can reflect back on their conversion and counseling—you might have been told, “count the cost” (Luke 14:28). And “he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13). In your heart, you might have said, “no problem, I can do this, it won’t be long now...” Well, you’re still at it—overcoming and enduring, and our road isn’t finished—it’s taking a little longer than expected.

It takes a lot more than I dreamed of to convert a highway to four-lanes. Funding, design, surveyors, acquisitions, move all the utilities, dig ditches to bury the new stuff, re-dig ditches to remove the old stuff, pile driving all night, pavement eaters, bulldozers, excavators—noise, and more noise! Trucks hauling it away; trucks bringing more materials. They’re on a

mission. Every last scoopful of the old road was taken away, and replaced with materials specifically selected and installed right where the engineers want it. And the road graders, bulldozers, and compactors grade and compact it into place—repeatedly, until it is exactly where the engineers want it, and packed firmly into place—so it won’t change in the future.

It is not uncommon for a Christian to feel overrun with trials and situations that make them feel like this roadbed—will it ever stop? Will I ever get to the place where the Great Designer is satisfied with me? I take you back to the sign; “Temporary Inconvenience Permanent Improvement.” It is a process. Without the process, we won’t have a nice new road, and you won’t have eternal life with your Creator.

All the clattering, banging, grinding, clackity-clack, and unpleasant screeching of the worn-out bulldozer are just things we have to put up with—we don’t get to choose the noises, and society has plenty of noise. At times we are given breaks, such as the peace we find in attending the Sabbath and Holy Days. We can go find peace away from the noise, get refreshed, and then go back home. While we were at the Feast in Australia, the workers blacktopped the stretch of road in front of our house, but they still have the other half of the road to do in the spring—so we get a few months of peace over the winter.

1 John 3:1-3 discusses God’s love for us; He calls us children. It says we shall be like Him. Notice verse 3, “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” The process is not easy, but the reward will be worth any amount of inconvenience we have to put up with. This is temporary; the road will be finished someday.

Romans 8:16-17 goes on to emphasize that “we are children of God...heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”

Imagine looking back and thinking how easy it would have been to give up, but you didn’t—you believed God, and trusted His ability to bring to pass what He promised. We must look forward and know this life is a temporary inconvenience and a permanent improvement is coming. Quitting will never be the right answer.

A Lasting Change

God is working His plan for far more than us “called-out ones” now. He is strategically working with all humanity, and has plenty of infrastructure to bring it to pass. You and I are art of that infrastructure. We are being shaped, molded and prepared to be set in place—Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone, and the building is constructed with the apostles, prophets, and all who have endured to the end.

It is important to remember God has big plans, but His plans don’t include the ways of man. Man rejected God’s ways, and developed his own forms of government, education and lifestyle. When God’s government is set up on this earth, He will reintroduce what has always been truth—He doesn’t need man’s input on truth and the best way to live.

The inconvenience of road construction in our front yard hasn’t been pleasant, but we look forward to a wonderful new road that will serve the travel needs of thousands, for years to come. Likewise, as Romans 8:18 encourages us, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Or, in my words, this life is a necessary temporary inconvenience, and God has a permanent improvement in the works. **GN**



Jamar Penny/Unsplash

What is the Second Commandment?

What is the difference between the First and Second Commandments?

by Don Hooser

Ever since God revealed the Ten Commandments, there have been serious misinterpretations and misplacements of the Second Commandment. What is the Second Commandment? What is the difference between the First and Second Commandments? Our United Church of God study aid, *The Ten Commandments*, explains God's Commandments accurately so we refer you to that study guide for further understanding.

The First Commandment as revealed in Exodus 20:2-3 and Deuteronomy 5:6-7 is: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me."

The Second Commandment as revealed in Exodus 20:4-6 and Deuteronomy 5:8-10 is: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Large portions of mainstream Christianity and Judaism have combined these *two* commandments into one commandment. That is, however, inaccurate! Though the two commandments relate to each other and overlap, they are *two* separate commandments!

Though the first and second commandments relate to each other and overlap, they are two separate commandments.

The worship of an image would be making the image into *another "god"* and the First Commandment already says we must have "no other gods." God definitely forbids the worship of images, but that is *already included* in the First Commandment! However, one of the many reasons the Second Commandment is extremely important is because utilizing images is a gateway to breaking the First Commandment. Trying to connect with God through an image evolves into looking primarily at the image. The image can gradually become an idol.

What does the Second Commandment forbid?

The Second Commandment forbids anyone from making or displaying visual images with the goal of incorporating them into their worship of God. Many Christian churches and homes display revered religious images, including crosses, crucifixes, statues and paintings that are supposed to be of Jesus or Mary or a "saint," mystical symbols, steeples, special

shapes, stained glass windows with religious designs, etc. Especially problematic is the practice of directing one's prayers to God *through* Mary the mother of Jesus or some other "saint."

Many religious people don't understand the Second Commandment and the intent behind using images in their worship is sincere. They feel that the images inspire them and help them to feel closer to God. We can admire their good intentions, sincerity and zeal, but we must understand the problem with this practice.

Adding to the issue is the fact that many "Christian" images are in fact inherited from ancient pagan religions! For example, some pagan religions worshipped a "Madonna and child."

Please understand that the Second Commandment does *not* forbid artwork showing people and animals or even artwork showing biblical scenes. God commanded intricate artwork to be engraved in God's temple and elsewhere. But none of that artwork was regarded as representing God.

Ben White/Unsplash



God calls His people to worship Him only.

Why shouldn't we use religious images?

It is human nature to desire to see, hear or touch God. That explains why people are naturally tempted to look at something they can see to represent God. Furthermore, human nature is lazy. It is mentally challenging to contemplate God as invisible and infinite. The human mind desires to bring God "down to earth" in some tangible form.

Such practices enormously *diminish* God in people's minds. The Creator of all things cannot be equated with anything in His creation! To read how strongly God feels about this issue, see Deuteronomy 4:12, 15-19, 23-29; 7:5; 12:1-5!

How do people justify use of religious images?

What justifications do people give for their display of religious images? One common excuse is mistakenly viewing the scriptures that are defining the First and Second Commandments *as only one commandment* forbidding the worship of idols and false gods! It is easy, then, to think, "We aren't disobeying this commandment because we are not treating these images as idols and we're not worshipping them."

In the scriptures about the Second Commandment, most English Bibles translate the common Hebrew word "pesel" as "carved image." "Pesel" means any image intended to be relatively permanent which includes statues, paintings, pictures, figurines,

Moses Breaking the Tablets of the Law (1659) by Rembrandt



Many people have mistakenly combined the first and second commandments.

stained-glass images, etc.

Some Bibles translate "pesel" as "idol." That is confusing and misleading because the word "idol" usually means something that is worshipped. Generally, Christians who use images in their worship don't believe that they regard the images as "idols." The word "idolatry" refers primarily to breaking the First Commandment.

With the words "bow down to them nor serve them," God is not referring just to worshipping the images. These words refer primarily to a person's reverence toward and special care of the images *as "holy" and representative of God*.

Numbering the Commandments

The Roman Catholic Church and some other Christian churches view the verses of the First Commandment and the Second Commandment together as the First Commandment. (And many Catholic listings *condense* the wording of their First Commandment.) Then, how do Catholics claim there are still 10 commandments? They divide the last Commandment (against coveting) *into two* commandments!

Furthermore, in a Catholic list, those last two commandments are usually stated in this *very abbreviated* form with several words omitted: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife" and "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods." Now notice the different word order of the Tenth Commandment in Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:21. That difference shows it is just a different way of phrasing the same thing, which is only one commandment. And Paul referred to only one commandment against coveting (Romans 7:7; 13:9).

Present-day Judaism regards "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" as the First Commandment, while it regards all the verses of Exodus 20:2-6 and Deuteronomy 5:7-10 (which actually cover two commandments) as the Second Commandment. In this way, the total number of commandments is still 10.

An important commandment

In conclusion, we must understand that Exodus 20:4-6 and Deuteronomy 5:8-10 are defining the Second of the Ten Commandments. Many churches do not understand this Commandment. Though it might seem relatively unimportant, when we read the entire Commandment, we see that it is extremely important in God's sight. Rather than glorifying images as part of worship, God calls His people to worship Him only "in Spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). **GN**

A Year in Review

by Lena VanAusdle

Brethren around the world faced a number of difficult situations in 2024, but through God’s mercy and the generosity of God’s people we have been in a position to help. As always, the Good Works advisory team (Matthew Hernandez, Nick Lamoureux, Clint Porter, Scott Buchanan and Lena VanAusdle) faithfully prayed over and considered each proposal we received. The process is always interesting, but sometimes difficult, as all the proposals we receive represent hard work and good causes, but they don’t always fit within our budget or our stated goals (to see our prioritization list please visit ucg.org/members/outreach/good-works).

Projects we have supported this year include the following:

Irrigation Improvements for Farm in Zimbabwe

Improvements on an existing borehole, a reserve water tank, and a solar-powered irrigation system for a farm in Zimbabwe (the cost for this project is \$4,800).

Special Education Schools in Chile and Argentina

Community outreach at schools for special education in Chile and Argentina where volunteers will work with children and provide the funds for equipment and clothing for school and students (\$1,400).

Bibles in Southeast Asia

It will benefit our members greatly to have access to parallel Bibles in English/Hindi, English/Bangla, and English/Urdu. We will be providing these Bibles for Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, along with supplies to establish Sabbath schools for children in these same areas (\$1,600).

Nigeria Youth Camp

Volunteers from Ghana will be traveling to Nigeria to serve as staff for their Youth Camp; this will provide the opportunity for our Ghanaian leaders to gain experience and will provide support for the camp in Nigeria (\$2,550).

Funding for Brethren in Nigeria

As an ongoing project, we will continue to distribute the funds already raised to the brethren in Nigeria as needed.

Farm Upgrades in Malawi

Two farms in Malawi received funds for upgrades and new structures and ventures (a chicken coop and other farming implements). The cost for these two projects was (\$1,985).

South Africa Youth Camp

At the time of writing, two volunteers from the United States are in South Africa serving at the United Youth Camp (costs for this project will be finalized after camp has concluded).

Drought Relief in Zimbabwe

A recent development has been a severe drought in Zimbabwe that has caused major crop failures. Good Works will be providing support and is currently seeking to raise \$17,000.

Rainwater Collection in Guyana

Another recently approved project is the construction of a rainwater collection system in Guyana. This will help the brethren there conserve water through the rainy season, giving them access to water after the rainy season ends. We are raising \$5,400 to fund this project.

New Roof for Leyte Congregation Building

In the Leyte, Philippines area, the roof of their church hall was attacked by termites and was in desperate need of replacement. Good Works supplied \$6,000 for the completion of this project.

Future Projects

Good Works can only be successful through God’s blessing, the generosity of His people, and if we have projects to support. If you have an idea for a project (in any country!) please visit GoodWorks.ucg.org for information on past projects and how to submit a proposal for new projects. **UN**



The drought in Zimbabwe has taken a terrible toll on the nation’s agriculture.



Deepening a borehole for a well in Zimbabwe improved access to water.



Two farms in Malawi received funds for upgrades, such as this chicken coop.



Good Works provided supplies for two schools for children with special needs.

Practical Tools for Navigating Anxiety

by David Cobb

Jesus Christ taught that we are not to worry (Matthew 6:31), or to have an anxious mind (Luke 12:29). But Jesus was not saying that we should simply “not feel” worried or anxious. Rather, His powerful message is that reliance on God provides us with the ability to work through these difficult but very common feelings. It is important to remember not to obsess or ruminate about a problem situation, which increases anxious feelings.

Worry and anxiety can be caused by a variety of factors including:

- Our circumstances, especially when we are not safe or lacking basic needs.
- Uncertainty and lack of stability in our communities or society as a whole.
- Thinking pattern tendencies that personality and emotional makeup gravitate toward.
- Learned thinking patterns and behaviors absorbed from our environment.
- Loneliness and lack of connection in healthy relationships.
- Some people experience anxiety as a permanent symptom of a medical condition.

Many people face one or more of these factors during their lives, and if you have experienced acute anxiety, you are not alone!

Through my own experience with anxiety (my personality and emotional makeup gravitate that way), I have learned that there are multiple readily available tools that provide meaningful support to help navigate these feelings with God’s help.

Proactive Education

“A wise man will hear and increase learning . . .” (Proverbs 1:5).

When experiencing anxiety, the default response is sometimes to avoid our feelings and think about them as little as possible. It’s difficult in the short-term, but much more helpful in the long-term to proactively pursue learning about them. There are many credible resources that bring understanding to the experience and alleviate fear.

When we have feelings that are both powerfully difficult and intensely personal, not being able to explain the feelings or why we have them magnifies their impact. Understanding the what and why does not eliminate all difficulty, but it does greatly diminish the impact.

What exactly *is* anxiety, anyway? Researchers Catherine Pittman and Elizabeth Karle define it by contrasting it with the very similar emotion of fear:

“Both arise from similar brain processes and cause similar physiological and behavioral reactions; both originate in portions of the brain designed to help [us] deal with danger. Fear and anxiety differ, however, in that *fear* is typically associated with a clear, present and identifiable threat, whereas *anxiety* occurs in the absence of immediate peril. In other words, we feel fear when we actually are in trouble . . . We feel anxiety when we have a sense of dread or discomfort but aren’t, at that moment, in danger.”¹

Understanding this distinction that anxiety generally arises from *perceived* or *anticipated* dangers that haven’t occurred is critical. It opens pathways for deescalating perceptions and anticipation to reduce or

This article is written with the intent of helping our readers navigate through mild feelings of anxiousness or worry. It is not intended to deal with more serious aspects of anxiety, depression or other serious issues. This article is based on the author’s personal experiences and the suggestions are offered for the benefit of the reader and not a replacement for diagnosis.



Hannah Olinger/Unsplash

Writing simple statements about our emotions and talking to God about them in prayer is one way to process them.

avoid the anxiety that they can generate. Understanding anxiety’s role is also critical—both what it is, and just as importantly what it isn’t.

Developing a clear and accurate perspective on anxiety’s purpose opens pathways for healthy responses to what we experience. An alarm that alerts us to potential danger such as a fire or tornado is inherently a bit frightening, but is ultimately meant to keep us safe. Alarms are meant to get our attention and spur us to necessary action.

Anxiety can feel like an uncontrollable force in the mind and body that can’t be turned off or tamed. From that perspective, it feels like an unknown quantity that operates on its own power, which quite naturally makes us afraid of it. Proactive education greatly reduces that fear and allows us to redirect our focus and energy to identifying and addressing the cause of the alarm. As relationship and mental health counselor and author John Delony explains, it’s not very helpful to “fix or disable the alarm system instead of putting out the fires and clearing out the smoke.”²

Proactive Emotional Processing

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties . . .” (Psalm 139:23).

Difficult emotions are unavoidable as we experience life. The physical existence that we inhabit is temporary, imperfect and incomplete—and we ourselves are too! Yet, we are often surprised and dismayed when we encounter uncomfortable emotions, and do our best to avoid them.

Challenging emotions such as discouragement, loneliness and grieving are indeed unpleasant. However, we feel them for a purpose! They are meant to allow us to recognize and respond to hard things in life

in healthy ways that bring us through the experience, and help us to grow emotionally and spiritually. For additional guidance on processing difficult emotions that often generate fear, see “Facing Your Fears” in the Summer 2017 edition of *Compass Check*.

Writing simple statements about our emotions and talking to God about them in prayer are simple but very powerful tools that increase our understanding and ability to process them. Writing things down brings two immediate benefits:

- The process of writing helps bring clarity to our thoughts and feelings.
- Writing is a healthy form of expression that provides an outlet for externalizing thoughts and feelings that can generate anxiety.

There are many different styles and methods for writing regularly—don’t worry about doing it perfectly; just start and develop a method that works for you based on your preferences. The practice that I have developed is to carry a small, simple notebook and pen where I can easily write a few simple statements about thoughts, emotions, experiences and scriptures, or things I read and hear that resonate with me.

There are many readily available lists of words that describe both positive and challenging emotions available from various resources. Find one (ask a trusted resource for help if needed), and begin using it to write very simple statements about both your positive and challenging emotions such as:

- “I am feeling . . .” Write the emotion and something about how you are experiencing it, whether you know why you feel that way or not.
- “I am processing . . .” Write the feeling and the emotional or physical experience that you aren’t quite sure what to do with or how to handle.

- “I am grateful for...” Write something that you are thankful for or appreciate. Regularly focusing on the many good things in our lives does not prevent us from having trouble, but it does help with keeping those difficulties in proper perspective.

To clarify, the goal of this practice is not to have more “positive” thoughts or less “negative” ones, but to perceive and process our thoughts and feelings *more accurately*. This means acknowledging hard things and not minimizing or exaggerating them, learning to see them for both what they are and aren't, and developing healthy responses.

The best way to do that is to talk to God about what you write, because He already knows and understands it better than we do. He loves you and wants to help you work through it! As King David wrote, “O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off” (Psalm 139:1-2). God can provide understanding of both the present and any future steps needed that will lead to true peace! A biblical prescription for anxiety can be found in Philippians 4:4-8,

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

Proactive Connection

“A man of understanding will attain wise counsel” (Proverbs 1:5).

When we experience anxiety, it is easy to isolate ourselves in various ways to avoid the things that we perceive to be making us anxious. Avoidance is an unhealthy response for two reasons. First, the things and situations that seem to cause anxiety are often only a signal that we are feeling unsafe at a deeper level, and

avoidance delays identifying the actual cause of the feeling. Second, avoidance and isolation *feed* anxiety, giving those feelings stronger and deeper roots.

As Pittman and Karle explain: “[The] dynamic of experiencing anxiety and then escaping it by avoiding the situation just serves to maintain anxiety, and this is exactly what makes anxiety reactions so difficult to modify. In this way, anxiety can be self-perpetuating.”³ This is a daunting reality, but one that can be overcome. Changing our response to anxiety is most achievable when education and processing occur *within healthy relational connections*.

The power of talking to others about the anxiety that we experience cannot be overstated! Delony describes the powerful benefit of sharing genuinely this way:

“Processing your thoughts and feelings out loud with a trusted friend, family member, counselor or group can be transformative and healing. Connecting with a loved one—in person, face-to-face if possible—is one of the best ways to quickly calm your anxiety and regain a sense of safety . . . alarms.”⁴

These principles are found throughout the Bible as well, in scriptures encouraging us to help one another in difficulty (Proverbs 17:17; Galatians 6:2) and rely on the combined strength that relationships provide (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). In contrast to what we naturally feel and assume, sharing our difficulties does not weaken us—it strengthens us to face and work through them!

For additional guidance on seeking support from the ministry or professional counseling resources, see “Facing Your Fears—Part 2” in the Winter 2017 edition of *Compass Check*.

Summary and Author's Note

The ability to turn negative thoughts, which contribute to anxiety, into positive thoughts, words and phrases using God's Word can be a powerful means of

reducing anxiety. God gives us information on how to handle any situation we may encounter in life. Internalizing these concepts and beliefs and strategies can greatly reduce feelings of anxiety.

This article is meant to share practical tools that provide value, no matter what level of anxiety you may encounter. If you experience general anxiety with low-impact symptoms that have little or no effect on your normal activities, pursuing these practices can help you maintain healthy responses that mitigate and prevent additional impact.

If you experience acute anxiety with higher-impact symptoms that affect your ability to engage in normal activities, take heart and remember, you are not alone! Pursuing these practices, combined with additional support and tools in each category, can have an enormous positive impact in equipping you to reduce and navigate anxiety in healthy ways. If you feel you are suffering from any of these serious conditions, talk to your minister about contacting the Church's free help-line, Light of Hope.

I know this from my own experiences, and I am confident that the same is possible for you as well. Notice that each of the practices begins with the same word: *proactive*. I haven't used that word lightly, because it's been anything but easy for me. To be honest and transparent, a lot of my learning has occurred when forced through difficulty into *reactive* growth.

But I am learning and practicing the benefits of leaning into discomfort and actively pursuing further growth. I encourage you to lean in as well, especially to writing and sharing. As Dawson Trotman, a 1900s Christian evangelist said, “Thoughts disentangle themselves when they pass through the lips and fingertips.” Through God's work in us, the unhealthy aspects of our human fears, including anxiety, can be transformed into a healthy fear (respect, reverence, worship) of Him that produces wonderful spiritual fruit (Psalm 34:1-9). **UN**

References

¹*Rewire Your Anxious Brain* by Catherine M. Pittman and Elizabeth M. Karle, New Harbinger Publications, 2015, p. 2.

²*Redefining Anxiety* by John Delony, Ramsey Press, 2020, pp. 6-7.

³Pittman and Karle, p. 129.

⁴Delony, pp. 38-39.

Feast of Tabernacles 2025 France

Your French brothers and sisters in Christ are pleased to welcome you back to Club Miléade La Gaillarde for the Feast of Tabernacles in 2025. The Feast will be held on the beautiful French Riviera near the well-known tourist destinations of Saint-Tropez and Saint-Raphaël. We have enjoyed the Feast in this region of France for many years, and this will be our fourth time celebrating the Feast at this seaside location.

Located an hour south of the Nice airport, Club Miléade La Gaillarde is situated just across the street from the beautiful Mediterranean Sea with 180-degree ocean views and an underpass walkway to the well-known beach of La Gaillarde. The outdoor heated pool and children's play area overlook the water and the hotel's main building has a restaurant and bar, playroom for children and a spa where visitors can schedule a massage, enjoy a sauna or relax in the indoor jacuzzi overlooking the sea. The auditorium for church services is located next to the main building and the hotel accommodations, many with ocean views, are a short walk from the main complex. This site's room and board package provides the opportunity to experience full-course buffet-style French meals while enjoying fellowship with other brethren from around the world. We plan to offer three afternoon excursions to nearby points of interest.



Registration is expected to begin in March. Keep an eye out for announcements with further details on ucg.org/members/feast-of-tabernacles and the 2025 UCG Feast of Tabernacles Locations Facebook page.

A Feast Full of Blessings



It was an amazing time for 206 members of the United Church of God from the north-west, central and the Copperbelt regions of Zambia who gathered at Mufulira for the Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day. It was an amazing opportunity for reunion and friendship among the brethren. Special music was performed in local languages, with multiple ethnic/linguistic groups represented at the Feast site. We even needed two translators!

Messages pointed to the coming Kingdom when Christ's rule will take over mankind's reign of selfishness, hunger, sorrow, weeping and segregation as we notice today in this evil world.

When we consider the millennial age to come, what is it about that time "specifically" that makes it so wonderful and so desirable?

The millennial age that this Feast pictures will be such a wonderful time because 1) God's Kingdom will reign supreme and 2) The peoples of the earth will desire to have it rule over their lives (Micah 4:1-4). And they will live in willing subjection to "the way" of God. As a result of the first two conditions, God's blessings will flow out over the earth.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). One of Jesus Christ's titles is Prince of Peace. If the mind of Jesus Christ is truly in us, then peace will be a

part of our nature as well.

The way of life we have been called to live today is a comparable reflection of the way of life we see portrayed during the Feast of Tabernacles.

On a beautiful Thursday five lovely babies were blessed during the blessing of little children. These kids are future disciples who have the opportunity to grow in this beautiful truth that is being laid before them.

On another wonderful and special day nine members were baptized. This was an amazing moment that was full of joy from those baptized and those close to them, not forgetting the entire group that stood to witness such an amazing activity take place.

People were reminded of the most important role they will take up in the Millennium and to do so there are certain things we need to do before we can take up the positions. #1 - They must know the way of God. #2 - They must go the way. #3 - They must show the way. A righteous priest of God, properly serving before Him, must know the way, go the way and show the way. A prime example of an individual carrying out this function in a proper way is found in the example of Ezra.

Ezra had set his heart to know, go and show the way (Ezra 7:10). And God was with him.

God's way always works. It will work in the Millennium, and it works in our lives today.

Our calling is special to God.

Even though we live in this world, we shouldn't feel like we are somehow missing out on the blessings that God has to offer to His people. The reality is, He has poured them out on us in great abundance regardless of who we are or where we are.

God protected us from serious sickness and any major problems. He was so good to us in filling the festival site with the knowledge of God, and His hand was seen throughout the eight days people spent together to fellowship and learn His ways.

We are so grateful to our Father in heaven for being with everyone and making it possible for everyone to be part of the Feast of Tabernacles and Eighth Day.

Rodrick Epomba

Houston Family Weekend and Retirement of Gary and Liz Smith



The UCG congregation in Houston recently celebrated their annual Family Weekend but this time they enjoyed something special. They also recognized Gary and Liz Smith for over 42 years of service in ministry to the Church of God and their retirement from employment with the United Church of God.

The weekend started on the Sabbath of Dec. 14 with seminars for adults and teens and Sabbath school for children. Rick Shabi was the guest

speaker for services, which saw a crowd of more than 200 attendees. Most stayed to enjoy a catered meal followed by a program to highlight the Smiths' service to the Church. Later that evening, all enjoyed a family dance.

The next morning, over 150 people returned for a gourmet breakfast served by the local congregation and an update on the work of UCG from Mr. Shabi. The rest of Sunday was spent enjoying a "Humble" County Fair and carnival. The



theme for the weekend was Zephaniah 3:12, "I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord."

The Houston congregation is grateful for a total congregational effort to make this weekend a success and is especially grateful for the Smiths' loving guidance for the last 12 years. May their retirement be the start of a refreshing and enjoyable new season.

Steve Parker



Gary and Liz have served in the ministry of the Church since 1977. Over the years they have served in Illinois, Missouri; Texas, Kentucky; and for 21 years in Ohio, where they also raised their children. Over the years, Gary has also served in the United Youth Camps, as a festival coordinator, as the South Central regional pastor, and by contributing writing for the ministerial journal, *United News*, and both the camp and festival brochures.

Gary shares: "After the COG-WA split in 2010, the opportunity came to move back to Texas. We jumped at the opportunity to serve in a new area and, importantly, our children already lived there. When we introduced ourselves to the Houston

congregation, we told them we would seek to bloom where we were planted. We have sought to be of service to the Houston brethren while continuing to grow as Christians.

While our tour of duty as pastor in Houston is coming to an end, our Christian journey is not complete and we are thankful to be able to be of service to the new pastor, Jay Ledbetter, and to continue to serve the Houston brethren we have grown to know well."

Reflecting back, Liz adds: "I have enjoyed getting to know members in the different church areas. Every member has their own interesting story and it's not until you know their story that you can really understand where they are coming from. Through the ups and downs in the Church and in our lives, God has blessed us in our 40-plus years in the ministry. We are very happy to end our ministry in Houston, and happy to also have our kids and grandkids here and to be a part of their lives." UN

The Value of Women's Enrichment Events

The United Church of God Women's Weekends began over 25 years ago in Spokane, Washington. From there, organized weekends began spreading throughout the country as women heard about and experienced their positive personal and spiritual benefits. The purpose of UCG's women's enrichment events is to create an environment in which women actively help one another grow in spiritual maturity by:

- Sharing valuable spiritual lessons.
- Discussing practical application of godly principles.
- Sharing personal experiences and encouraging one another in our struggles.
- Developing stronger bonds of unity and friendship.

These objectives are achieved through a combination of elements that may include practical presentations, workshops, interactive discussions, uplifting music, spiritual conversations, reflection and fellowship. There may also be opportunities for service projects, community outreach, funding international women's events or other activities. As these women's enrichment events continue to expand into new areas of the world, we would like to share with you some current information and updates.

In 2024 eight Women's Enrichment Events were offered in the U.S., Canada and Africa. The weekend themes were: "God Will See Us Through," "For Such a Time as This," "Dancing in the Rain," "Our Walk with God," "Putting God First in Our lives," "Stand in the Gap," "Women of Faith Standing Together" (Titus 2:3-5) and "Where Friends Gather." These enrichment events were attended by 501 women.

Here are a few comments from those who attended a women's enrichment event in 2024.

"Just a quick note to let you know that the weekend went exceptionally well. The speakers, the activities, church services, the music all flowed together and were edifying to everyone who participated. God's Spirit was definitely present, and we had a wonderful time."—Coordinator

"I enjoyed hearing each of the women speak. They were very genuine and seemed to freely share their life experiences and highlights of their lives that had an impact on who they are today. I appreciated how they looked back through their lives and could see how God had been protecting and guiding them. I'm sure it was not just myself who felt encouraged by these presentations. Many thanks to all those who spoke and who contributed in

other ways to the Women's Weekend."—Attendee

"I just quickly wanted to send you a note thanking you for all the effort to include us this Sabbath! We loved hearing the stories of faith from so many women as well as the wonderful sermon and special music. It was a fantastic blessing to us and really encouraged great discussion about God's direction and plans for our lives."—Attendee

There are currently seven women's enrichment events scheduled in the United States and Canada in 2025 (five of which are listed below). Check out when and where they are being held by visiting the UCG Women of Valor webpage: women.ucg.org. You will be able to find registration and other information on these upcoming events.

We are thankful for the work and many hours of service and support from pastors, women's enrichment weekend facilitators, presenters and many others. These enrichment events are rewarding for all attendees.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact United Church of God women's services team at the following email addresses: Kay_Schreiber@ucg.org, Lena_Vanausdle@ucg.org or Barbara_Welch@ucg.org.

Kay Schreiber

Upcoming Women’s Enrichment Weekends

Nourish to Flourish: Rooted in God's Word	Growing Through the Seasons of our Lives	Fill Your Lamp	Chosen for a Purpose	Bloom Where You are Planted
Puget Sound, Washington Feb. 28-March 2, 2025	Portland, Oregon March 14-16, 2025	Springfield, Missouri March 15-16, 2025	Fairmont Hot Springs, BC Canada March 28-30, 2025	Allenspark, Colorado July 11-13, 2025
<p>A tree has many branches, each limb telling a unique story of challenge and continual growth. Yet from these branches, together spring forth a canopy of life. With intent to nourish, our Father, the perfect Husbandman, has grafted each of us into the body of Christ. As we stay rooted in God's Word, we are fed the vital nutrients of His truth that causes us to flourish. Come join us as we explore and celebrate being rooted in God's way of life (Colossians 2:7).</p>	<p>"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). God's awesome plan for each of His children includes going through various seasons of change. Whether there's seasons of joy or sadness, peace or strife, birth or loss, highs or lows—God is always there to support and lead us through the good and the difficult times. Please join us and learn how God sees us through each season.</p>	<p>Join us for presentations, activities, fellowship and fun! Lunch and a light dinner will be served on the Sabbath and a continental breakfast will be provided on Sunday. As we share our life stories and our faith, we can help each other grow and stand strong. Once again, we will hold a silent auction beginning after the Sabbath.</p>	<p>"Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). God chose to call each person for a purpose. Are we preparing our hearts and minds to step out on faith when the opportunities arise? Come join your spiritual sisters "on the road less traveled" in God's majestic Southeastern BC mountains for an Enriching weekend of fellowship, learning and fun discussing God's purposeful calling and strengthening of our faith. Make plans now to attend.</p>	<p>"Bloom where you are planted" is more than making the best of your circumstances. It's an invitation to grow, thrive, and reflect God's love, no matter where you find yourself. It means to make the best of the circumstances we can find ourselves in, to grow, and to contribute positively regardless of the environment. You're invited to come join your spiritual sisters for a weekend to be renewed, restored and refreshed!</p>
Location La Conner Country Inn 107 S. Second Street La Conner, WA 98257 United States (714) 990-6000	Location Canby Grove Christian Center 7501 S. Knights Bridge Road Canby, OR 97013 United States (503) 266-5176	Location Veterans of Foreign Wars 104 S. First Street Ozark, MO 65721 United States	Location Fairmont Hot Springs Resort 5225 Fairmont Resort Road Fairmont Hot Springs, BC V0B1L1 Canada	Location Highlands Presbyterian Camp and Retreat Center 1306 Business Highway 7 Allenspark, CO 80510 United States
Contact Rob and Tina Slocum ucgseattle@gmail.com	Contact Rebecca Loucks beccaloucks@gmail.com Ruby Scuggs scruggsjr@canby.com	Contact Jamie Bettes (352) 702-6496 12345jamied@gmail.com	Contact Tonya and Michael Erickson tonya_erickson@ucg.org tonyaspeir34@outlook.com	Contact Beth Bradford (720) 989-9618 beth.bradford@comcast.net

Registration details



Registration details



Registration details



Registration details



Registration details





Shiloh Juniper Boyd

June 1, 2024

Births

Shiloh Juniper Boyd

Proud parents Noah and Sonia are ecstatic to announce the birth of their daughter, Shiloh Juniper Boyd, born June 1, 2024. Her first few months of life have been a testament of God's healing, thanks to her church family's continued prayers for her well-being. She continues to grow into a happy and healthy baby and is doted on by her parents, big brother Hendrix, and the Seattle congregation.

Kiara Irene Kinsella

Caleb and Natasha Kinsella and their son Carter of the Salem, Oregon congregation are delighted to announce the arrival of their daughter Kiara Irene Kinsella. She was born on Oct. 10, 2024 at 11:11 p.m. weighing 8 pounds 15 ounces and 20.5 inches long. Grandparents are Carl and Kathy Kinsella of Salem, Oregon.

Evelyn Grace Elizabeth Rowland

Steven and Amanda Rowland of the Cincinnati East, Ohio congregation are excited to announce the birth of their daughter, Evelyn Grace Elizabeth Rowland. Evelyn was born on Nov. 15, 2024. She weighed 8 pounds 10 ounces and was 21 inches long at birth. Although baby Evelyn had a rough start with some medical issues, her parents look forward to bringing her home soon.

Weddings

Jared Weingartz and Sophie Hand

Greg and Kelley Hand of the Columbus, Ohio congregation



Kiara Irene Kinsella

Oct. 10, 2024

and Ken and Cheri Weingartz of the Flint, Michigan congregation are thrilled to announce the marriage of their children Sophie Hand and Jared Weingartz on Nov. 24, 2024. The couple attend the Columbus, Ohio congregation.

RK Whitehead and Veronica Wick

Veronica Wick and RK Whitehead were joined in marriage on Aug. 24, 2024, surrounded by family and friends. The couple attend the Omaha, Nebraska congregation. They plan to call the Omaha metro area their home.

Anniversaries

Earl and Shirley Nees

The Boise, Idaho congregation held a 70th wedding anniversary for Earl and Shirley Nees following Sabbath services on Nov. 9, 2024.

Earl Nees was born in Ontario, Oregon and Shirley (maiden name Berry) was born in Pocatello, Idaho. Earl and Shirley Nees were married on Nov. 8, 1954 in Boise, Idaho.

Earl met Shirley when she was 13 years old through her brothers. Shirley was 16 and Earl was 20 when they married. For the first 10 years of marriage, Earl worked for Safeway. Then in 1962 (62 years ago) Earl's older brother gave Shirley a *Plain Truth* magazine and she began to get interested in God's truth.

Shirley began listening to Mr. Herbert Armstrong on the *World Tomorrow* radio program. After requesting baptism counseling, two Worldwide Church of God ministers met Shirley at a local park and baptized her in 1962. Shirley then began to attend local Sabbath



Evelyn Grace Elizabeth Rowland

Nov. 15, 2024

services in Boise, but Earl had little interest in attending at that time. However, Earl attended one Sabbath service and that was the turning point. He was baptized in 1966. Earl's boss at Safeway said he could not have Saturdays off and his employment ended there. Earl and Shirley then moved to Seattle in 1966 where Earl was employed at Boeing aircraft for eight years.

They moved back to the Boise area where Earl started his window cleaning business. Earl retired when he was 73 in 2007. Earl and Shirley have one son and two daughters, 10 grandchildren, 19 great-grandchildren, three great-great grandchildren, and seven adopted grandchildren.

Earl enjoys playing the guitar and dabbles in painting. Shirley has been a full-time mother and very busy over the years with her large family. Earl mentioned that "God called us early in our lives and we thank God for showing us the truth about life here and on into the future."

Shirley reflects on her 70 years of marriage: "You come into this world with nothing, and you leave with nothing, and family is the most precious thing, and that is what God is building—His family. He is the Father, and we are His children living and learning." Earl adds "To love and to be loved is what holds a family together. I thank God for His love! That is what holds us all together."

Warren and Joan Ott

The Springfield, Missouri congregation celebrated Warren and Joan Ott's 60th wedding anniversary on Dec. 28, 2024. They were married on Jan. 1, 1965.

The couple met at Mercy Hospital while both were at-



Jared Weingartz and Sophie Hand

Nov. 24, 2024

tending school. Warren was studying to become an x-ray technician, and Joan was taking courses to become a registered nurse. They dated for a few years before getting married. Their favorite dates were picnics by the river which Joan says is still one of their favorite things to do. They frequently sit on the porch at their farm in Springfield and relax while watching the creek outside their cabin.

Warren and Joan started listening to Herbert Armstrong's program while dating, learning about God's truth together. In December 1968, they were both baptized, the biggest blessing in their lives! Since joining the Church, they almost exclusively attended the Springfield congregation and have served the brethren there as deacon and deaconess for 12 years. They were also blessed with three children and three grandchildren. Joan stated it is very important to have a sense of humor and laugh every day. All of us in the Springfield congregation agree that we are very blessed to have them in our family!

Dan and Koleen Tompkins

Dan and Koleen Tompkins of Salem, Oregon celebrated their 50th anniversary on Dec. 14, 2024. The Salem congregation honored them on that day with cake. Dan and Koleen met while attending Oregon College of Education (now Western Oregon University) in Monmouth, Oregon and were married in Koleen's sisters' home in Salem on Dec. 14, 1974. They were baptized into the Church in 1979. Dan retired from the Oregon Department of Transportation in 2013 with 38 years' service. They enjoy going on walks and reading. Also, Koleen keeps



RK Whitehead and Veronica Wick

Aug. 24, 2024

busy knitting. Their two sons live in Salem.

Obituaries

Donald Eugene Peabody II

Donald Eugene Peabody II died peacefully at home on Sept. 17, 2024 after a short battle with bladder cancer. Don was born in Bakersfield, California on Nov. 30, 1949 to Donald and Bonnie Peabody. Don and his sister, Diane, grew up in the Sacramento area of California. Shortly after graduation from San Juan High School, Don moved to Pasadena, California where he met and married Laura Rhoades. They have three children, David, Sarah and Daniel as well as six grandchildren, Anthony (and Dylani), Savannah, Briannah, Aiden, Asher and Ethan.

Don worked for the City of Los Angeles as a payroll manager for over 27 years. After the children grew up and left home, Don and Laura first retired to Texas and then landed in Cincinnati where they have lived very happily for the last seven years. Don enjoyed filling out surveys from places he and Laura visited and ate, as well as playing cards and making jigsaw puzzles.

Don loved digging into the Bible and strived to obey God's Word in every way. He is greatly missed as he lies at rest awaiting the resurrection.

Harold Francis Stevens

Harold Francis Stevens, a beloved husband, father, grandfather and friend, died peacefully on Oct. 25, 2024 at the age of 98. He was born on April 13, 1926 in Detroit, Michigan to Herbert and Mabel Stevens. Harold served in the U.S. Marines during WWII. He worked for Ford Motor Co.



Earl and Shirley Nees

70th anniversary

and retired after many years of service. Harold was baptized into God's Church in 1994 by Melvin Rhodes and attended the Ann Arbor, Michigan congregation.

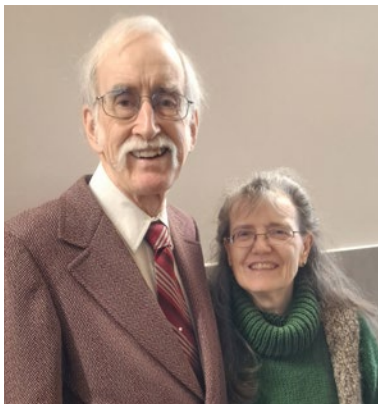
At the age of 81 Harold mar-



Warren and Joan Ott

60th anniversary

ried Mavis Jolin and God blessed them with 17 good years together. He was preceded in death by his first wife Eleanor and six siblings. He is lovingly remembered by his daughter Barbara Stevens and grand-



Dan and Koleen Tompkins

50th anniversary

daughter Nicole Eschberger. Harold's family also includes numerous nieces and nephews. Harold's warmth, kindness and adventurous nature will be forever remembered by his family and friends. **UN**



Donald Eugene Peabody II

Sept. 17, 2024



Harold Francis Stevens

April 13, 1926-Oct. 25, 2024

Announcements for *United News* can be sent by email (preferred) to un@ucg.org, or by mail to *United News*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027. Please include a color photo; if mailing in, please indicate if you would like the photo returned. Announcements should not exceed 500 words, and may be lightly edited for length and/or clarity by *United News* staff.

A Joyful Celebration: Feast of Tabernacles 2024 in Italy

Over 300 brethren gathered in unity and joy to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles on the beautiful, sunny shores of Marina di Grosseto in Tuscany, Italy.

This year's Feast took place at the stunning Hotel Terme Marine Leopoldo II, nestled within a lush pine forest and overlooking the azure waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea. It marked the first time this sacred occasion was hosted at this particular venue, and the setting proved to be the perfect backdrop for a week filled with fellowship, inspiration, and spiritual renewal.

Warm Hospitality Across Borders

The event was a true international celebration, with attendees traveling from countries such as the United States, Canada, Zambia, and beyond. The Italian brethren provided a warm and welcoming atmosphere, making all feel at home as we gathered to worship and reflect on the meaning of the Feast.

It was an incredible experience to see so many from different corners of the world united in faith, all looking forward to the coming Kingdom of God and the millennial reign of Jesus Christ.

Inspirational Messages and Uplifting Music

The messages delivered throughout the Feast inspired



us to look forward with hope and anticipation to the fulfillment of God's promises. Each sermon helped us deepen our understanding of God's Kingdom and the role we all play in His divine plan.

One of the highlights of the Feast was the exceptional special music, which included powerful performances by the festival choir, as well as a talent show that showcased the diverse gifts and talents of the brethren. A particularly memorable moment came with a stunning performance by the Italian choir, which presented an excerpt from *Nabucco*, Giuseppe Verdi's famous opera that depicts the exile of ancient Israel from their homeland. The choir's rendition was not only musically impressive but deeply moving, connecting the themes of exile and hope to the biblical story of God's people.

Building Connections and Making Memories

Beyond the uplifting messages and music, the Feast also provided many opportunities for brethren to grow closer and deepen their relationships with one another. Through various group activities, everyone had the chance to forge new friendships and strengthen existing bonds within the spiritual family.

Cultural excursions to the historic cities of Siena, Florence, and Pisa provided a beautiful way for attendees to explore Italy's rich heritage while enjoying the fellowship of their brethren. These trips offered unforgettable moments of discovery and connection, and the brethren relished the chance to experience Italy's art, history and culture.

For those with a taste for the finer things in life, a wine



and olive oil tasting event was also a highlight of the Feast. The flavors of Tuscany were savored by all, and the experience was a wonderful opportunity to relax, share a laugh, and enjoy the company of fellow feastgoers.

A Spirit of Participation and Cooperation

From the youngest to the oldest, everyone participated with enthusiasm and a spirit of cooperation. It was clear that, whether through singing, sharing meals, or simply being present, every individual contributed to the joyous atmosphere that defined this year's Feast. The spirit of unity, love and joy was palpable, and a sense of community was felt throughout the eight days of the Feast.

As we look back on this un-

forgettable Feast of Tabernacles, we are filled with gratitude for the opportunities to celebrate together and for the inspiration we received. It was a time of deep reflection, meaningful connections, and above all, a reminder of the hope we share in the coming Kingdom of God.

We look forward to gathering again in a new location next year, knowing that the bonds we have formed and the memories we have made will continue to strengthen us as we eagerly anticipate the fulfillment of God's promises.

Jim and Rose Anne Pastor

Stay tuned by visiting feast.ucg.org to receive announcements on where the Feast will be held in Italy this year!

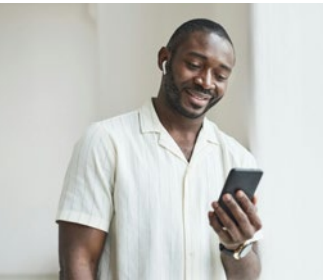
Teens

Have you thought about your future career? The teenage years are the ideal time to plan and prepare for success!



Young Adults

We set an example by what we post on social media. Do your posts and the content you choose to like and set a godly example?



Singles

In our longing to belong to someone, do we forget to focus enough on the One to whom we must ultimately belong?



Men

Masculinity is under attack, yet men have a unique, God-given role. The Bible reveals how you can set an example as a godly man.



Women

Many feminists reject Christianity as anti-woman, but the Bible reveals that women's role is an honorable one.



Couples

Because so many marriages end in failure, couples trying to live godly lives will look for ways to protect and preserve their marriages.



Serving God

How can we serve God in our role as Christian soldiers? Have we lost our enthusiasm, or will we march forward with gusto?



Serving the Community

An often-overlooked way to serve your community is by donating blood. If your health allows, consider sharing with others in this way.



Serving Family

Caregivers are continually on the front line of service helping others, often a family member or Church member in need. How can we serve them?



CHILDREN’S CORNER

God’s Promises

1. “I will never _____ you nor _____ you” (Hebrews 13:5).
2. “Be of good _____, and He shall _____ your _____”(Psalm 27:14).
3. “When He is _____, we shall be like _____, for we shall _____ Him as He is”(1 John 3:2).
4. “_____ not, for I am _____ you”(Isaiah 41:10).

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5. “He gives _____ to the _____, and to those who have no _____ He _____ strength”(Isaiah 40:29).
6. “_____ is the same _____, _____, and _____”(Hebrews 13:8).
7. “My God shall _____ all your _____”(Philippians 4:19).



BEYOND TODAY

Jan. 5-11	The Irrelevant Commandments Presented by Steve Myers Literature offered: <i>The Ten Commandments</i>
Jan. 12-18	Is Jesus the Only Way? Presented by Gary Petty Literature offered: <i>Jesus Christ: The Real Story</i>
Jan. 19-25	The Sabbath Rest: Beating the Tyranny of Tech Presented by Darris McNeely Literature offered: <i>Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest</i>
Jan. 26- Feb. 1	Why Is God So Unfair? Presented by Gary Petty Literature offered: <i>What Does the Bible Teach About Grace?</i>
Feb. 2-8	The 7 Churches of Revelation: Faith, Trial and Victory Presented by Darris McNeely Literature offered: <i>The Book of Revelation Unveiled</i>
Feb. 9-15	Point of No Return Presented by Steve Myers Literature offered: <i>Are We Living in the Time of the End?</i>
Feb. 16-22	Incredible Angels Presented by Steve Myers Literature offered: <i>Angels: God's Messengers and Spirit Army</i>
Feb. 23- March 1	Christians Surviving in a Non-Christian Society Presented by Gary Petty Literature offered: <i>Jesus Christ: The Real Story</i>



United News

NEWS OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF GOD, AN INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION

Periodicals Postage Paid
at Milford, Ohio, and at
additional mailing offices

BY THE NUMBERS

397

Number of elders (286 U.S., 111 international)
serving in the United Church of God.

United Youth Camps 2025 Dates

Summer camps will be held on the following dates:

Preteen Camps

Camp Florida	May 26-30, 2025
Camp Colorado	June 15-18, 2025
Camp Ironwood (MN)	July 13-16, 2025
Camp Ochoco (OR)	July 13-16, 2025
Camp Buckeye (OH)	July 27-30, 2025
Camp Gilmont (TX)	July 27-30, 2025
Camp Seven Mountains (PA)	July 27-30, 2025

Teen Camps

Camp Cotubic (OH)	June 15-22, 2025
Camp Pinecrest (MS)	Jun 29-Jul 6, 2025
Southwest Camp (AZ)	July 6-13, 2025
Camp Woodland (GA)	July 18-25, 2025
Northwest Camp (OR)	July 20-27, 2025
Winter Camp (WI)	Dec. 29, 2025-Jan. 4, 2026

For international camp dates, please visit: ucg.org/members/uyc/international

Ambassador Bible College Continuing Education



The Ambassador Bible College Continuing Education program will be held at the home office in Milford, Ohio from May 19-23, 2025. Faculty members will teach excerpts of classes from the ABC curriculum. Continental breakfast and lunch will be served each day. The cost to attend the program is \$85 per person or \$100 for married couples. Enrollment is limited; registration opens Jan. 27, 2025. To register, please contact Katherine Rowland at (513) 576-9796 or katherine_rowland@ucg.org.

UCG Radio

UCG-Radio, an app developed by our UCG-Australia office, is a way to take UCG content on the go! Listeners find it a convenient and interesting way to listen to sermons, music and more while driving, jogging or around the home.

You can download the UCG-Radio app from Google Play or the Apple App Store. You can also listen in your browser at ucg.radio.