



## Members and Attendees Share Input Through 2025 Survey

by Julie Brown

United Church of God once again conducted a survey in 2025 to gather input from members and attendees regarding the programs and congregational experience UCG provides. Nearly 2,500 people participated from 24 countries, with more than 2,300 valid responses after quality checks. This represents a strong cross section of the Church and provides a margin of error of 2.4 percent at a 99 percent confidence level—an excellent level of reliability for understanding how the body of Christ is experiencing church life today.

As in past cycles, every comment was read and categorized to ensure the voice of the membership was accurately reflected and all responses were anonymous. The results were presented to the Council of Elders and administration, who have already begun incorporating the findings into strategic planning and operational decisions.

### Overall Findings

The quantitative results show that the Church continues to be seen as a strong positive force in spiritual growth. Many respondents expressed deep appreciation for the teaching, resources, and stability they receive through UCG.

At the same time, several themes emerged where members see opportunities for improvement:

- Congregational care and belonging show mixed results. Many feel loved and supported, while others feel less engaged or unsure how to connect.

- Biblical resources are valued, but some members desire more support during difficult personal trials.
- Weekly messages are appreciated but sometimes described as repetitive or lacking depth; there is room to elevate the delivery style and effectiveness of messages.
- Service and involvement remain areas of both strength and challenge. Many serve regularly, yet others want to serve but don't know how to begin.
- Being a light in the community is an aspiration for many, but members desire clearer pathways and encouragement to do so.

The qualitative comments—thousands of them—add richness and clarity to these themes.

### Service: A Desire to Contribute and a Need for Inclusion

One of the strongest messages from this year's survey is the desire among members to serve more fully. Many respondents expressed gratitude for opportunities they already have. Others, however, shared that they want to serve but feel unsure how to get involved, or feel their offers to help are not welcomed.

Some described congregations where the same small group carries most of the responsibilities. Others noted that service is often associated only with visible tasks—speaking, leading music, organizing activities—rather than the broader, relational service Scripture describes.

A recurring theme was the longing to feel invited. Several comments reflected this sentiment: “I don't feel like the Church gives me an opportunity



Scan this QR code to watch the video.

to serve; I step out on my own and offer myself to anyone who needs it” and “There are brethren with talents who want to serve, but they are never asked.”

At the same time, those who have been serving for many years expressed feeling stretched thin. This creates a cycle where some are overloaded while others stand back, unsure how to join in.

The survey results point to a simple but powerful truth: service is about people, not tasks. It is less about filling roles and more about making sure every person feels wanted, valued, and included. Each of us has a part in this—not only leaders or longtime volunteers. As one respondent put it, “Every member of the body has a role to play.”

### Belonging: Many Feel Loved, Yet Some Feel Invisible

A large majority of respondents feel cared for and treated with Christian love in their congregations. Many described their local church as “family,” a refuge, and a source of strength.

Yet the comments also reveal a quieter reality: some members feel overlooked,



Julie Brown presents the results of the 2025 member survey.

lonely, or unsure how to break into established social circles. A number of respondents used words like “cliques,” “inner circle,” or “outsider” to describe their experience.

One comment captured this poignantly: “I have been here almost two years and only a few people even know my name.”

These are not the majority of experiences—but they matter deeply. Christ's example reminds us that the one sheep who feels lost deserves our full attention. The survey highlights an opportunity for every congregation, and for each of us to be more proactive in noticing, welcoming, and drawing in those who may be standing alone.

### Spiritual Growth and Teaching

Members continue to express strong appreciation for the Church's role in fostering spiritual growth. Online sermons, ABC class videos, and media resources were frequent-

ly praised as valuable tools for learning and encouragement.

At the same time, many respondents expressed a desire for:

- Practical guidance for Christian living in a rapidly changing world
- More opportunities for meaningful spiritual conversations

Some noted that fellowship can feel superficial, with members unsure how to discuss biblical topics or navigate differences of opinion peacefully. This is an area where congregations can continue to grow—creating environments where spiritual conversations feel natural, safe and enriching.

### Support in Difficult Times

Experiences in this area varied widely. Many respondents shared heartfelt gratitude for the love and support they received during trials. Others,

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however, felt alone or unsure where to turn for help.

This contrast suggests that while many congregations excel in care, there is room to strengthen consistency—ensuring that no one feels forgotten during hardship.

### Being a Light in the Community

Members expressed a strong desire to be more active in their communities and to shine God's light beyond the walls of the church. Younger adults in

particular expressed interest in service projects, outreach and opportunities to work together in meaningful ways.

Many respondents noted that while personal example is important, coordinated congregational efforts could help members feel more confident and connected in this aspect of the Church's mission.

### Pastoral Appreciation

Across all regions, respondents expressed deep admiration for their pastors and their

wives. Many comments described pastors as loving, dedicated, and sacrificial in their service. At the same time, members recognize the heavy workload pastors carry and the need to balance expectations with available resources.

### Conclusion

This year's survey paints a picture of a deeply valued Church, but one with opportunities to grow stronger, be more connected and more welcoming. The most consistent mes-

sage across all comments is simple: people want to feel included. They want to serve. They want to belong. They want to grow. They want to feel wanted. And they want to help others grow.

These are not tasks assigned to a few—they are responsibilities shared by all of us. Each of us has the ability to notice someone standing alone, to invite someone into a conversation, to ask someone to help, or to offer help themselves. Service is not a checklist; it is a way of being with one another.

As one respondent beauti-

fully expressed, "God has placed me in the perfect place to foster my growth, understanding, and healing." Our collective opportunity is to help every member and visitor, to feel that way.

The survey team extends sincere appreciation to all who took the time to participate. Your input is invaluable, and your voice is heard. Thank you for helping us strengthen the work we are doing together.

The full video presentation of the 2025 members' survey results can be viewed at: [youtu.be/NETfOsHWB\\_g](https://youtu.be/NETfOsHWB_g)

## Local Church News

### Bearing Fruit in Every Season of Our Lives—Women's Enrichment Weekend



Elaine Carlisle and Linda Moffitt (photo by Jean Updegraff)



Michelle Thomas, Pam Pinzini and Mary Ann Miller (photo by Jean Updegraff)



Presenters (photo by Steve Kennedy)

God's Word encourages and admonishes us to bear godly fruit throughout every stage of our Christian walk. This truth was the foundation of our 23rd Women's Enrichment Weekend, held January 23–25, 2026, with the theme "Bearing Fruit in Every Season of Our Lives" taken from Psalm 1:3. The theme emerged as the top choice from surveys of attendees in recent years. Our gathering took place at the beautiful Embassy Suites in Brea, where we were blessed to return for a second year.

A total of 110 ladies attended, with more than half traveling from outside Southern California, representing six different states. Fourteen enjoyed their very first Women's Weekend with us.

Many arrived on Friday and settled in to relax and get together with friends. Our event officially began Sabbath morning with church services. After two beautiful special music selections (vocal solos by Ingrid Helge and Sylvia Kennedy), Jim Tuck, who serves the Phoenix and Hawaii congregations, gave the sermon "Are You a Fig-Tree Christian?"

The theme was thoughtfully explored and developed throughout the various presentations. Lacey Hilgen served as our moderator on Saturday, with Rosie Gonzalez moderating on Sunday.

Saturday afternoon began with a warm welcome from Cathy Seigle, followed by three engaging presentations: Joan Tuck spoke on "He Fashions

Our Hearts Individually," Anna Moore addressed "Giving Back" through volunteering, and Kim Budge shared the value of having "sherpas" (Nepalese mountain guides) in our lives, encouraging us to be "sherpas" for each other. The afternoon concluded with an interactive table discussion led by Jennifer Carter, focusing on the different seasons of life we are currently in and the godly fruit God is developing in each of us.

The day's activities concluded with a delicious Mexican buffet followed by free time for chatting with friends and bidding on our many donated and themed baskets for our raffle fundraiser.

Sunday morning began with three shorter presentations by Lelia Reed, Am-

ber Pifer and Emily Dupree, each sharing valuable lessons learned from their own life experiences. Following these was an interactive discussion led by Jean Updegraff that continued the theme of bearing positive fruit through different seasons of life and through times of challenge.

On Sunday afternoon, following a deli sandwich group buffet, the winners of our fundraising raffle were announced. The raffle featured 47 beautiful baskets, and since each person was limited to winning one item, 47 happy ladies were able to take home a basket they had bid on. We were especially grateful to net \$4,205 from raffle proceeds and direct donations, which will be used to fund a Women's Weekend in Mexico.

The afternoon concluded with two presentations: Pam Pinzini shared "Finding Light After Loss" reflecting on widowhood, and Mary Ann Miller presented "Being a Deliberate Christian in All Seasons of Your Life," interspersed with humor and relatable examples. Cindy Neumann then closed the weekend by expressing heartfelt thanks to the many individuals whose efforts made the weekend so enjoyable, meaningful and inspiring.

The ladies left the weekend uplifted and thankful for the opportunity to be together once again, encouraged to move forward and continue growing in bearing fruit in every season of our lives.

Jean Updegraff

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## Ministerial and Member Services



David Riddell



Michael McKinney



Max and Sharon Spigelmyer



Martin and Jenny Kusz



Brent and Kristina Fogelson



Scott and Carrie McKeon



Tim and Connie Sipes



Vincent and Phoebe Wong

We're happy to announce that on Nov. 29, 2025 David Riddell was ordained into the ministry. David serves the Ballymena congregation in Northern Ireland.

On Dec. 11, 2025 Michael McKinney was credentialed as an elder by the United Church of God. He serves in the Los Angeles and Bakersfield, California congregations.

On Dec. 13, 2025 Max Spigelmyer was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Sharon, serve the congregation in Rome, Georgia.

On Dec. 20, 2025 Martin Kusz was ordained into

the ministry. Martin and his wife Jenny serve the Albury/Wodonga congregation in Australia and also assist David Schreiber in the Indo-Asian region.

Brent Fogelson has been hired into the full-time pastoral ministry and will now serve as associate pastor alongside Scott McKeon, who will assume and maintain pastoral oversight of Albuquerque, New Mexico; Phoenix Northwest and Northern Arizona, Arizona. We extend our sincere thanks to David and Laura Meidinger for their many years of faithful service to the

Albuquerque congregation. David will continue to serve as an elder in the congregation and serve as able with Jorge de Campos in the Portuguese work. Additionally, we extend our gratitude to Randy and Kay Schreiber for their service during this transition.

On Jan. 3, 2026 Tim Sipes was ordained into the ministry. Tim and his wife, Connie, serve the Portsmouth, Ohio congregation.

On Jan. 24, 2026, Vincent Wong was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Phoebe, serve the congregations in Sabang, Visayas, Philippines as well as Conalum, Tubod, Tacloban City, Cebu and Samar.

We greatly appreciate your continued prayers that God's Spirit and wisdom guides each of these ministers and their families in their new responsibilities. **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](mailto:steve_myers@ucg.org)



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**Owen Mark Brosius**

Jan. 14, 2026

**Delilah Grace Smith**

Jan. 25, 2026

**Don Gelaude**

Feb. 1944-Jan. 10, 2026

**Cletus Alan Pingel**

April 29, 1953-Nov. 28, 2025

**Nina Fallin**

Dec. 27, 1950-Jan. 29, 2026

## Births

### **Owen Mark Brosius**

Travis and Julia Brosius of the York, Pennsylvania, congregation are happy to announce the birth of their third child. Owen Mark Brosius was born Jan. 14, 2026, at 2:21 p.m. He was 8 pounds 9.5 ounces and 21.25 inches long. Older siblings, Levi and Emma, are delighted with the new addition. We are thankful for a natural birth, and time to cuddle this sweet newborn in the extreme cold and snow.

The happy grandparents are Alan and Christina Weaner of York, Pennsylvania, and Mark and Vanea Brosius of Lewistown, Pennsylvania.

### **Delilah Grace Smith**

Jacob and Katie Smith of the Cincinnati East congregation are overjoyed to announce

the birth of their first child! Delilah Grace was born on Jan. 25, 2026, weighing 5 pounds 2 ounces and measuring 19 inches long. Mother and baby are doing well after some minor complications, but Delilah has been in the NICU going on three weeks after birth due to feeding issues. They look forward to bringing her home soon when she is ready!

## Obituaries

### **Nina Fallin**

Nina Fallin, a member of God's Church, a devoted educator and beloved member of her family died on Jan. 29, 2026, in Arkadelphia, Arkansas at the age of 75. Born on Dec. 27, 1950, Nina spent her life sharing her passion for history with her students. As a history teacher at Arkadelphia High School,

she spent decades inspiring students with her stories and her genuine love for the craft of teaching. To Nina, her classroom was more than a job; it was a calling.

Nina was called into the church of God in 2017 and was baptized by her brother-in-law David Stiffler. Because of the great distance from church, Nina couldn't attend every week, but she was a faithful member who enjoyed watching live streaming services, listening to sermons, and reading Church literature. Her love of world history made her especially interested in learning as much as she could about biblical history. The times she could attend services, brought her close to those she befriended and loved.

Her most cherished legacy is her family. She was the steady hand and the warm smile at every family gather-

ing. She was preceded in death by her husband, Billy Fallin, who died in 2017, as well as her parents Mr. and Mrs. Freeman, and other siblings. Nina's spirit lives on through the family she adored: daughter Shelly Davidson, and husband Chris; and her son, Joey Fallin. Nina had three grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

She will be remembered for her sharp intellect, her enduring kindness, and the way she made her friends and family feel important and loved.

### **Don Gelaude**

Don Gelaude died on Jan. 10, 2026, at his home in Mesick, Michigan at the age of 81.

Don was born in Feb. 1944 in Detroit, Michigan. He lived in the Upper Peninsula for five years where he was a timber logger and then moved to Algonac, Michigan. He was a carpenter/general contractor for most of his life before retiring in Mesick.

Don married his wife Linda in 1965, and they had 61 loving years together. They attended the Gaylord, Michigan congregation. Don and Linda were both baptized in 1970 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Don loved serving in the Church and helped in many different areas. He also loved music, playing guitar, hunting and gardening. He had two children (Cheri and Brian) and four grandchildren (Jacob, Jared, Caleb and Trista). He will be deeply missed!

### **Cletus Alan Pingel**

Cletus Alan Pingel, 72, of Fredericktown died on Nov. 28, 2025. He was born April 29, 1953, in Perryville, Missouri to the late Eldon and JoDeen (Roberts) Pingel. Cletus was a member of the United Church of God of Cape Girardeau for most of his life. He was a deeply spiritual man who loved God and His Church, finding strength and purpose in his faith. A dedicated arborist, he took great pride in his work, especially in caring for trees and tackling the challenges of storm damage with skill and passion. He was an avid reader who enjoyed learning and exploring new ideas, and he had a remarkable gift for fixing just about anything. His steady hands, generous spirit and unwavering faith will be remembered by all who knew and loved him.

In addition to his parents, he was also preceded in death by five siblings: Tonya, Tina, Tracy, John and Clint.

Cletus is survived by his wife, Heidi (Alvord) Pingel; nine children, Alan Pingel, Lisa (Joe) Downing, James Pingel, Richard Pingel, Jason Pingel, April (Jaden) Starkey, Rahkeem Mitchell, Savannah Jones, Janet Jones (Trevor Haas); 33 grandchildren; 24 great-grandchildren; two brothers, Timothy Pingel and Darren (Carrie) Pingel.

Memorial donations may be made to the United Church of God of Cape Girardeau. View obituary and share condolences online at [czboyer.com/obituaries/cletus-pingel](http://czboyer.com/obituaries/cletus-pingel). **UN**

## **Light of Hope Helpline**

Aamir Suhail/Unsplash

If you feel like you're facing challenges alone, please know that we're here to help. We'd like to offer guidance and encouragement. You can contact the Light of Hope Helpline at (888) 241-6211 or email us at [hope@ucg.org](mailto:hope@ucg.org).

This confidential resource, provided by the United Church of God, connects individuals with licensed mental health professionals within the Church who are ready to offer support and help you find constructive, godly ways to address your challenges.

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## Cynthia Collins



Cynthia Collins, 92, died peacefully around 1 a.m. on Jan. 1, 2026, at the home of her son, Martin, in Indian Land, South Carolina. Cynthia was a British citizen who lived in the United States for 70 years, primarily as a resident of Maryland. Her death was the result of respiratory failure following a stroke.

Cynthia Ann Scillitoe was born on April 3, 1933, in Mundford, Thetford, Norfolk, England, to Frederick Scillitoe and Ethel Jones, who both preceded her in death. Her younger brother, Ivor Scillitoe, also preceded her in death.

Cynthia married Raymond Collins on Aug. 29, 1953, in Thorpe, Achurch, Northamptonshire, England. Cynthia and her husband Raymond, who was an elder in God's Church, profoundly enjoyed serving their brethren together. They shared 36 years of marriage until he died in 1989. Cynthia remained a widow for the next 36 years.

She is survived by her children, Martin Collins, Rhonda Diggins and David Collins. Cynthia was also a loving grandmother to Stacey Lemieux, Kristen Col-

lins, Andrew Smith, Brett Diggins, Christopher Collins, and Alyssa Diggins, and a great-grandmother to Jordan and Logan Lemieux. She was preceded in death by her great-grandson, Dylan Lemieux.

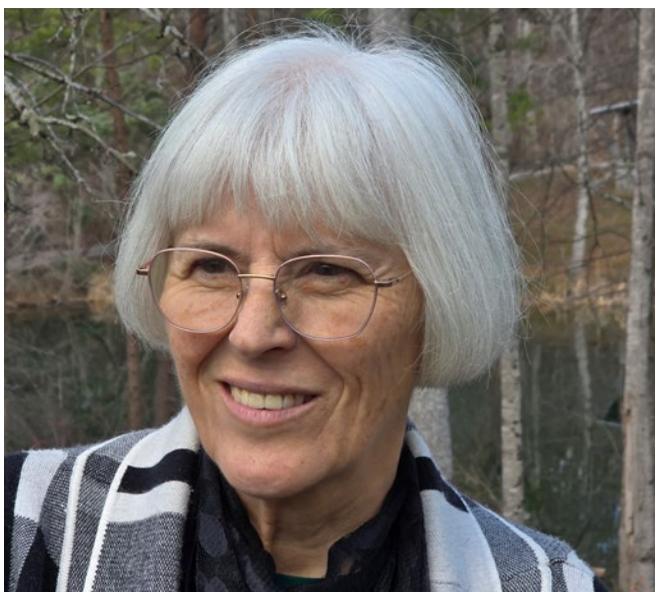
Cynthia was educated in England and worked as a nurse's aide in a hospital before marriage. After starting her family, she devoted herself to her home and to caring for others, always willing to help those in need.

She was outgoing, good natured, and made friends easily. Many people, both young and old, lovingly referred to her as "Grandmum."

Cynthia was a baptized member of God's Church for more than 60 years, and her favorite passage of scripture was Psalm 23.

To those who knew her, Cynthia was warm, kind, and genuinely interested in the lives of others. Her gentle spirit and loving nature left a lasting impression on everyone she met. She will be deeply missed by the many people whose lives she touched.

## Maureen DeLong



Following a tragic accident, Maureen DeLong breathed her last on Dec. 30, 2025, in Knoxville University Hospital in Tennessee, with her loving family by her side. She was 68.

Maureen was born on Feb. 16, 1957, in Victoria, British Columbia. The family moved to Prince George when she was young to take over the family ranch. She loved the ranch, the outdoors and spending hours on horseback tending to the cattle.

God called her when she was 17. However, her walk as a teen was not easy and as a result of life's challenges, she moved to Lethbridge to live with her cousin. Even so, Maureen remained faithful to the truth. Her story proves that God was in her life and guided her to Lethbridge to further her walk with Him. It was in Lethbridge, 50 years ago that Maureen met Larry at church and the rest is history.

Through the very early years of her calling and time in the Church she faced many trials, yet she soldiered on with Jesus Christ at her side with a clear vision of the promises God had given her. Those who knew her well will recognize that this is why she was often fierce about "staying true," "hugging the trunk of the tree" and calling out the "itchy ears."

Along with God, her life centered around loving and serving her family. She loved her children and was so proud of them. And just the mention of her grandchildren's names lit up her life.

God also was very generous to Maureen in giving her gifts and talents. She had unbelievable patience with others. She worked for years in the school system signing for deaf students and teaching life skills to students

with intellectual disabilities. Maureen also cared for senior citizens who faced disadvantages—some she barely knew, but made an instant connection with them.

Maureen was an artist, painting with oil and watercolors, and drawing with ink and pencil. She loved creating with stained glass and cross stitch. She apprenticed for automotive upholstery, working on many cars and hot rods, but her favorite was sewing as a seamstress, making her own cloths, rugs, bed spreads and purses of every imaginable design. It was the creative aspect of sewing that drew her to it.

She was also a certified mountain bike mechanic, working, planning and supporting the annual church bike trip through the Rocky Mountains as well as the UCG summer camp in the Crowsnest Pass, Alberta.

After UCG began, she started singing special music for Sabbath services. For the last eight years she sang special music three to five times a month as she traveled with Larry on their church circuit.

Maureen thrived on planning-making lists and schedules. If there was something to plan like the Feast of Tabernacles or summer camp she was the first one to jump in to start the planning. Her love for the brethren gave her the insatiable desire to serve them.

Maureen loved working in her yard and garden creating a small paradise of her own. In addition to balancing all of these things, she also did the daily bookkeeping for two businesses. She was one busy lady but being busy was what made her happy.

The loss of Maureen had a tremendous impact on the neighborhood. A next-door neighbor came over crying her eyes out with grief. Other neighbors rang the door bell to give Larry hugs. There were people all over town, like bank tellers standing in shock at the news; all of them said, she was a classy lady, such a great role model and the perfect example to everyone that observed.

Maureen leaves behind Larry, her husband of 49 years; their two sons Neil (Amber) and Eric (Angela); grandsons Brogan and Emmett, whom were her pride and joy. She is also survived by: her father, Jim Harris; siblings Pack (Dianne) Harris; sisters Darlene McLeod, Shaun (Doug) Wayland, and Denise (Norbert) Bohnert; many nieces, nephews, great-nieces and nephews; and a mother-in-law, Trudy DeLong. Maureen was predeceased by her mother, Betty Harris; her sister, Janene Harris; her brother-in-law, Rod McLeod; and her father-in-law, George DeLong.

Maureen's love of God and Jesus Christ and for serving the brethren was utmost in her life. She is going to be missed by many. A memorial service in her honor was held in North Battleford, Saskatchewan on Jan. 31 and another in Coaldale, Alberta on May 15, 2026.

## Gordon Hannaway



Gordon Hannaway of the Tampa, Florida congregation died on Jan. 17, 2026, at age 80.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1945, he was the oldest of three siblings and grew up in New Jersey. He attended Tusculum College in Tennessee, where he met his wife, Holly. They were married for 57 years until her death on Aug. 7, 2024, and had three children—Darrell, Sheila, and Randy—and seven grandchildren.

After earning his bachelor's degree, Gordon completed a master's degree at East Tennessee State University and worked for over 50 years as an insurance and benefits consultant.

He first heard the World Tomorrow radio broadcast while commuting between work and school. Gordon and Holly received their first *Plain Truth* magazine in Jan. 1969 and were baptized on April 17, 1970.

Gordon was ordained a deacon in the late 1980s and an elder on June 4, 2006. In the Tampa congregation, he served as Assistant YOU Coordinator and coach, managed church finances with Holly, contributed to the Feast Business Office, and coordinated the local Feast Satellite site for many years.

Gordon was a steadfast pillar of the Church through many trials. He and Holly were devoted servants of God, His Church and His people. His generosity, wise counsel, and dedication to living God's way of life will be deeply missed.

## Join the Feast of Tabernacles Choir! Who, Me?

by Randy Schmidt and John LaBissoniere

Yes, you! You are needed to offer your service in honor of your heavenly Father and to inspire and encourage your fellow brethren. You don't have to be a professional musician or singer to offer your musical ability to serve others.

Each Sabbath day the United Church of God holds services in local congregations to worship our great Creator. It is also a time for members and visitors to fellowship and learn more about God's way of life. In addition, the Sabbath is a day to serve one another. It may be through speaking, setting up chairs, handling the sound system or performing other responsibilities.

One form of participation that greatly enhances worship is the inspiration derived from music. Everyone sings hymns as an integral part of Sabbath services. In doing so, we are serving! We express our love for God, His Church and our spiritual brothers and sisters. Plus, all of us sincerely appreciate the delightful service of brethren who periodically provide special music—which is not only a blessing and inspiration but an added opportunity for us to honor our heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

### A Biblical Precedent

Many scriptures offer important models for us to follow. For instance, Psalm 95:1-2 says, "Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song" (New International Version). Also, Colossians 3:16 declares, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

Worshipping God through congregational hymns and special music certainly includes the highlight of the spiritual year, the Feast of Tabernacles, which pictures the breathtaking time when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will return to earth to begin His millennial reign of global peace and harmony. As we learn about this future era during the Feast and the Eighth Day, we raise our voices in joyous hymns of praise! Moreover, we treasure the beautiful special music brought to us



A festival choir at the Feast of Tabernacles 2025 in Gatlinburg, Tennessee

by choirs, instrumental ensembles and vocal solos—which further enhances our worshipful praise toward Almighty God while inspiring and encouraging everyone in attendance!

### Participating in the Festival Choir

With this in mind, Ministerial and Member Services has recently observed a lessening in the number of brethren participating in the Festival choirs. This may be the result of older brethren who, after having served faithfully for many years, are no longer taking part due to health concerns or other reasons. Therefore, to continue providing the optimum level of involvement in Feast choirs we need you—including adults, young adults and older teens—to offer your loving service to God and His people.

Even so, you may say, "Who me? I can't sing." But wait! Why not consider participating? You don't have to be a professional musician or singer to offer your musical talents to honor God and serve others. Could it be time to leave your "comfort zone" and serve in a wonderful, new way?

Let's illustrate this with an example. Tanya Winger of the Ambassador Bible College Class of 2023 wrote an

article in the May-June 2023 issue of *United News*, titled "The Stories We Tell Ourselves." There she revealed her personal belief that she didn't have singing talent and was therefore very reluctant to join the ABC choir. Nevertheless, when she finally tried out, she learned that she was well-qualified which resulted in rewarding and enjoyable participation throughout the school year. Perhaps you have undiscovered talent that you could exercise in much needed and fulfilling service to God and His people in the Feast choir and even in your local congregation's choir or vocal group!

Finally, for some who serve musically in their local congregations all year round, it's tempting to consider the Feast as a time to take a break and not participate. But being willing to serve at the Feast whenever possible is very important because it contributes to the overall success and quality of the Feast. Your service does matter!

Remember, you are needed! So please consider jumping in and signing up! You'll be glad you did! The easiest way to volunteer is when you register. Most registration forms have a dedicated section for "Volunteer Opportunities" where you can check the box for the areas you are willing to serve. Don't miss this opportunity to help with music at the Feast!

## How You Can Make a Difference in Your Local Congregation

by Randy Schmidt and John LaBissoniere

As noted in the accompanying article, local congregations benefit greatly by offering special music at Sabbath services. However, many have little to no special music on a regular basis. Some congregations do not even have a piano player to accompany hymns. However, if you are in a church area that rarely has special music and you are in a position to do something about it, why not discuss it with your pastor? This may be a wonderful opportunity for you to personally serve while also encouraging others to participate with you in a duet, a trio, a quartet or other vocal group!

Furthermore, if you play a musical instrument or did so when you were growing up, why not consider accompanying hymns with your instrument? Hymns are made even more special when musical instru-

ments are utilized! Also, how about finding others in your congregation who would be willing to serve with you in an ensemble?

There is no requirement to be a highly skilled musician or vocalist to offer your musical talents to serve your Creator and your fellow brethren. Volunteering to participate in a musical capacity is a very important service because it sets a great example of service to children and young people who often respond positively to music. Likewise, it's important to understand that music provides a different form of connection with Sabbath services than does speaking since it adds emotion that may not always be the focus of the spoken messages.

So, are you willing to make a difference? Your readiness to step forward is an opportunity for you to serve your heavenly Father and your fellow brethren! Why not take up the challenge? You will be pleased with the results.





*Feast of*  
**Tabernacles**

— 2026

Festival Planning Guide

September 26<sup>th</sup> - October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2026

*Opening Night Sept. 25th. Eighth Day Oct. 3rd.*

# 2026 Feast of Tabernacles Sites

## Australia

### Albury, New South Wales

Director: Tony Edge (tonyedge@ucg.org.au)

### Rockingham, Western Australia

Director: Matthew Sieff (mattsieff@ucg.org.au)

### Sunshine Coast, Queensland

Director: Joe Rivers (joerivers@ucg.org.au)

## Ouidah, Bénin

Director: Pierre Ogoudélé  
(pierreamer92@gmail.com)

## Porto Seguro, Brazil

Director: Jorge de Campos  
(jorge\_decampos@ucg.org)

## Aviemore, Scotland, British Isles

Director: Jason Godfrey (jason.godfrey@ucg.org.uk)

## Burundi

Director: Monte Knudson (monte\_knudson@ucg.org)

## Douala and Yagoua, Cameroon

Director: Moïse Mabout (moise\_mabout@ucg.org)

## Canada

### Calgary, Alberta

Director: Michael Erickson  
(michael\_erickson@ucg.org)

### Midland, Ontario

Director: Anthony Wasilkoff  
(anthony\_wasilkoff@ucg.org)

### St. John's, Newfoundland

## Licán Ray, Chile

Director: Marcelo Saavedra  
(marcelo\_saavedra@ucg.org)

## Colombia

Director: Jaime Salek (jaime\_salek@ucg.org)

## Blolé, Côte d'Ivoire

Director: Maadou Tokpa  
(edu.mamadou.tokpa@gmail.com)

## Lubumbashi, DR Congo

Director: Moïse Mabout (moise\_mabout@ucg.org)  
Details: CLOSED for international registration

## Club Miléade La Gaillarde Beach, France

Director: Clint Porter (clint\_porter@ucg.org)

## Titisee, Germany

Director: Wim Dekker (wim@dekker-net.nl)

## Grenada

Director: Chuck Smith (chuck\_smith@ucg.org)

## Panajachel, Guatemala

Director: Jose Israel Robledo  
(jisrael.robledo@gmail.com)

## Hévíz, Hungary

Director: James Ginn (james\_ginn@ucg.org)

## New Delhi, India

Director: David Schreiber (david\_schreiber@ucg.org)

## Sabaudia, Italy

Director: Vincenzo Alfieri (feast@ucgitaly.org)

## Montego Bay, Jamaica

Director: Daniel Hines (danhines1970@gmail.com)

## Nakuru, Kenya

Director: Monte Knudson (monte\_knudson@ucg.org)

## Madagascar

Director: Tim Pebworth (tim\_pebworth@ucg.org)

## Blantyre, Malawi

Director: Gracious Mpilangwe  
(gracious\_mpilangwe@ucg.org)

## Nkhwazi, Malawi

Director: Cephas Chapamba  
(cephaschapambajumpha@gmail.com)

## Taupo, New Zealand

Director: Michael Fike (michael\_fike@ucg.org)

## Ilesha, Nigeria

Director: Paul Moody (paul\_moody@ucg.org)

## Chosica, Peru

Director: Marcelo Saavedra  
(marcelo\_saavedra@ucg.org)

## Philippines

### Baguio City

Director: Rey Evasco (rey.evasco@gmail.com)

### Bukidnon

Director: Noel Roy Gilos (nrgilos@gmail.com)

### Visayas

Director: Jose Campos (campos\_jt@yahoo.com)

## Rwanda

Director: Monte Knudson  
(monte\_knudson@ucg.org)

## Mossel Bay, South Africa

Director: Vivien Botha (vivien\_botha@ucg.org)

## Habarana, Sri Lanka

Director: David Schreiber  
(david\_schreiber@ucg.org)

## Chiang Mai, Thailand

Director: Steve Myers (steve\_myers@ucg.org)

## Momé, Hagou Togo

Director: Kossi Fiaboe (fiaboekossi@yahoo.fr)

## Turkey

Director: Charles Melear (charles\_melear@ucg.org)

## United States

### Aransas Pass, Texas

### Branson, Missouri

### Cincinnati, Ohio

### Daytona Beach, Florida (contract not finalized)

### Glacier Country, Montana

### Lake Junaluska, North Carolina

### Lancaster, Pennsylvania

### Morehead City, North Carolina

### Panama City Beach, Florida

### Redmond, Oregon

### Temecula, California

### Walnut Creek, Ohio

### Wisconsin area site (contract not finalized)

## Zambia

Director: Victor Kubik (victor\_kubik@ucg.org)

## Zimbabwe

Director: Lewis VanAusdle  
(lewis\_vanausdle@ucg.org)

Registration for **U.S./Canadian sites** opens at 12 p.m. EDT on April 19, 2026.  
Check [feast.ucg.org](http://feast.ucg.org) to determine if a site is open for registration.  
**IMPORTANT:** More sites are being finalized and will be posted on [feast.ucg.org](http://feast.ucg.org) when more information is available.

Visit [feast.ucg.org](http://feast.ucg.org) or scan the QR code for more information about each site



## How to Register for the Feast

(including those not able to attend)

All United States, Canadian and Caribbean head-of-household members should register either directly online or through your congregation festival advisor. Even members who are not able to attend are requested to register so the Church can serve your needs better. Register under the Feast site “Not Able to Attend.”

### Applying to a Feast Site Outside the United States, Canada, Caribbean or Australia

If you are registering for a Feast site outside of the United States, Canada, Caribbean or Australia, please go to that site first for registration instructions. After that, go back to the registration page, [feast.ucg.org](http://feast.ucg.org), with the listing of all the sites, scroll to the bottom and click on “International Sites.” This will provide the international coordinator the needed details of all attendees.

### Applying to a United States, Canadian, Caribbean or Australian Feast Site From Other Areas

Members outside of the United States, Canada, or Caribbean can apply online or contact their pastor to register.

### Online Registration (Two Options)

- Registering online takes about 10 minutes.
- Heads of household can register their entire family.

#### Option One Early Registration

- For those who must attend their closest site (guaranteed approval if registration is on time)
- Begins on April 19 (Sunday) at 12 p.m. EDT.

#### Option Two General Registration

- Registration is open for all United States, Canadian and Caribbean Feast sites (except if a site has reached capacity).
- Begins on April 26 (Sunday) at 12 p.m. EDT.

To register, go to [feast.ucg.org](http://feast.ucg.org) and click on the site you would like to register for. Then click on “Register.” You’ll be directed to a site called RegFox to register for the Feast.

If you registered for the Feast in 2022, 2023, 2024 or 2025 or if you registered for the Winter Family Weekend, your account is already active. Therefore, you do not need to create a new account with RegFox to register for the Feast. If you need to make changes later or purchase tickets for an activity, you will need to create a RegFox account after you’ve registered. Therefore, it is highly recommended that you create an account when you register for the Feast.

Please email [festival@ucg.org](mailto:festival@ucg.org) if you have any questions about registering or call (970) 484-5878.

### Registration Assistance

Members who do not have computers or access to the Internet or who need help can register at services. Please contact your local festival advisor or pastor by April 17, who will provide you with a form to fill out. They will register online for you starting April 19.

## Registration for Satellite Sites

Satellite sites (local congregational sites) are established and designed for a local congregation where a number of members cannot travel to a regular site. Satellite sites will primarily connect via the Internet to another Feast site for daily church services. Two Feast sites (each one in a different time zone) will webcast daily services.

If you will attend your congregational satellite site, please register online. Register for the site listed as “Satellite Site” and fill out the information. Your congregation or city will not be listed so look for “Satellite Site.”

## Reserving Housing from Feast Website or Finding Your Own

Some have asked if they are required to use the housing options the Church provides. For some sites it is mandatory while for others it is not. It is important for you to know the needs of the site you will be attending. Some of our meeting halls are mandatorily linked to housing in order to receive free or discounted meeting space. These festival sites require members to use the housing options listed on [feast.ucg.org](http://feast.ucg.org). To do otherwise can jeopardize the use and cost of the meeting hall with the possibility of not being able to keep the Feast there.

Some Feast sites are not mandatorily linked to the housing so using alternate housing does not affect negotiations with the meeting facility. Nevertheless, those approved motels and hotels listed on [feast.ucg.org](http://feast.ucg.org) are providing group discount rates unless otherwise noted. There are always special needs and exceptions, but member cooperation results in better future negotiations and can save thousands of dollars. For Feast sites listed with an asterisk (\*), those attending the sites should not book outside of the approved housing without permission. For other sites you can make your own housing arrangements, but the listed properties provide discounts unless otherwise noted.

If you are not able to use the approved housing at a site where it is required, please consider an alternate site or contact us by phone at (970) 484-5878 or email [Festival@ucg.org](mailto:Festival@ucg.org).

## Key Dates for United States and Canadian Feast Attendees

### April 19:

Preliminary registration begins at 12 p.m. EDT at some designated sites.

### April 26:

Main registration begins at 12 p.m. EDT for all sites.

## Holy Day Offering Procedure for U.S. Members Traveling to International Sites

For members who will be traveling to international Feast sites this year (including those in Canada and the Caribbean) questions have arisen regarding where to submit their Holy Day offerings: to the home office or directly at the Feast site they are attending.

Under United States law, contributions made to the Church within the United States are tax-deductible. However, contributions made to foreign church organizations are not tax-deductible for U.S. tax purposes, and donation receipts cannot be issued for offerings given outside the United States.

U.S. members who would like their Holy Day offerings to be reflected on their year-end contribution statement are encouraged to donate online at [ucg.org/give](http://ucg.org/give) or to mail their offerings directly to the home office. Doing so ensures that contributions are properly receipted and eligible for applicable tax deductions.

As a courtesy to the host nation, members should consider contributing a portion of their offering at the site they attend, preferably in the local currency.



## Registration vs. Reservations

Sometimes there is confusion over these two terms. Here is the difference:

**Registration**—Registering online or through your festival advisor informs the Church of your intentions for planning purposes. It is separate from housing reservations. A person can be registered and not have any housing reservations yet.

**Reservations**—This refers to housing arrangements. A person might make housing reservations before registration, although this is not advised since sometimes sites can close due to capacity.

## U.S. Citizens Planning to Travel Internationally Need a Passport

All persons, including U.S. citizens, traveling to another country are required to present a valid passport to reenter the United States. A driver’s license is no longer sufficient for reentry documentation.

U.S. citizens planning to travel out of the country should apply for a new passport or ensure their current passport is still valid. It can take six weeks or longer to process a new one, so plan ahead.

For more information, visit the U.S. State Department website at: [bit.ly/travelstate](http://bit.ly/travelstate).

## Avis Rent-a-Car Discount

**(800) 331-1600 | AWD # Z594487**

Avis is offering special meeting rates at all United States festival sites and rates for roundtrip travel anywhere in the United States. This number can also be used year round for discounts and earn points for you and the Church.

Or you can book online at [avis.com](http://avis.com) and enter the AWD listed above. Look for the box that reads “Discount Codes” then click on the box that reads AWD #. Enter the AWD (Avis Worldwide Discount)—Z594487. If you are already a member of Avis you will earn your points, plus the Church will earn points. If you have questions, you can call (800) 577-6883 Ext. 2564.

## Delta Airlines

**US954529758**

The United Church of God can accumulate frequent flyer points through Delta that do not take away from your personal Skymiles.

If you book online with Delta, enter the code **US954529758** along with your Skymiles number. Look for the box to check that reads “My company is a Delta SkyBonus program member.” This option is available year round for any Delta flight.

## 2026 Family Education Festival Resources

The United Church of God education team has again developed resources for families to help in discussions about God and how His Holy Days detail His plan for mankind.

*My Festival Activity Booklets* are divided into three categories: K-1 (kindergarten and first grade), 2-3 (second and third

grade) and 4-6 (fourth through sixth grades). These booklets are designed to help children learn about God's plan of salvation. They contain activities and articles as well as family discussion points, which provide questions with scriptural references. We hope this will encourage family discussions at the Feast.

These booklets will be handed out during the Feast. To ensure that your children will receive copies, please register online for the Feast site you will be attending. Find your site at [feast.ucg.org](http://feast.ucg.org) and click "Register" to begin the registration process. The number of booklets printed will be based on the number

of children registered on the website with their families. The booklets will also be posted online as PDFs so parents can print extra copies.

Two festival youth classes for preteens will also be offered at many sites. Each lesson will have a specific topic and activity relating to the Feast. These

classes are separate from the *My Festival Activity Booklet*.

We hope that the booklet and festival youth instruction classes, along with family Bible studies at the Feast sites, will provide an opportunity for God's Word to grow even deeper into the hearts and minds of our children.

*The Education Team*

## 2026 FESTIVAL BUDGET PLANNER

	Estimate	Actual
<b>Total funds available</b>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Pre-Feast	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Festival fund	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Other Holy Days	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Housing deposit	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Personal car prep	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Supplies and clothing	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Travel to and from the Feast</b>		
Air/train/bus fare	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Car rental	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Gasoline/oil/other	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Lodging	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Meals	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Activities	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Emergency fund	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Festival expenses</b>		
Lodging (subtract deposit)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Meals/food/drinks	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Entertainment	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Other (gifts, etc.)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Total expenses</b>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Balance</b>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

## Fragrance Free/ Allergy Free Room

The United Church of God is aware of the increasing sensitivities to allergens and fragrances affecting our members and society in general. For the Feast of Tabernacles it is nearly impossible to offer a completely allergy-free room or even a room that eliminates all fragrances. However, most of our United States Feast sites attempt to provide some relief by either reserving a room prohibiting anyone to enter that is wearing perfumes, etc., or designating a section of the meeting hall as a fragrance-free area.

While these are not full solutions, they do aid somewhat those who experience allergic reactions.

Festival registration has a category for those with allergy sensitivities to alert the Feast coordinator of the situation. As much of a cultural shift as it might be, we ask members not to attend church services and activities with perfumes and colognes so that we all can fellowship and worship together.

If you need more details as to what the specific site that you want to attend offers, please contact the Feast coordinator or email [USFestival@ucg.org](mailto:USFestival@ucg.org) or call (970) 484-5878.

## Guidelines for Tipping

One expense that is easy to forget about when making a Feast budget is tipping. It is sometimes difficult for us to know how much should be tipped and to whom. Below are some guidelines in North America—note they may not be the norm in other parts of the world. Research tipping practices in the area you are planning to visit before you leave.

**Hotel maid service:** about \$2-10 per night. It is important to tip daily since there will be turnover in those cleaning the room.

**Restaurant servers:** 15-20 percent of the total bill before taxes.

**Bartenders:** about \$1-2 per drink.

**Food delivered to your room:** 15-20 percent. A "service charge" does not go to the server, while a "gratuity" charge does. If you request food delivery, the delivery person should receive \$2-4 or about 15 percent of the food cost.

**Valet parking attendant:** \$2-10.

**Airport personnel:** \$1-3 per bag, \$3-5 for drivers.

**Drivers:** 15-20 percent of the fare.

**Hairdressers and nail stylists:** 15-20 percent.

Many websites provide guidelines for tipping. In the end, it is about being respectful to those who are serving us in these capacities, knowing that for some, it is expected that they will receive tips to offset low wages.

*Linda Wasilkoff*

## 2026 Festival Fund

To help meet festival expenses throughout the world, United States members are asked to send in a 10 percent donation from their expected second tithe total (a tithe of the tithe). Canadian members may make a similar donation to the Canadian office. You may use this form, or make your donation online at [ucg.org/give](http://ucg.org/give) using the provided QR code.

- Please indicate the amount you are sending in the space below.
- Make your check payable to United Church of God and label it "Festival Fund."
- Clip out and enclose the completed form, along with your check, in a labeled envelope from the home office.
- Affix postage and mail.



Your PIN number from your *United News* or *Beyond Today*: U \_\_\_\_\_

Donation Amount Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State/Province \_\_\_\_\_

Zip/Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

For Feast of Tabernacles updates, check [feast.ucg.org](http://feast.ucg.org) and stay tuned for announcements in *United News Weekly*.

Most housing details can be found on each Feast site's page under the "Housing" tab. For other questions, please call (970) 484-5878 or send an email to [Festival@ucg.org](mailto:Festival@ucg.org).

# GN

## The Good News

### Godliness: A Lifelong Quest

Seeking personal devotion to God and taking on His character is a disciple's responsibility and calling.

by David Fenney

Simon Peter was personally selected by Jesus Christ to follow Him, becoming one of His earliest disciples. Years later, writing to scattered Church members, Peter asked a rhetorical question the context of which was the Day of the Lord when the present age ends.

This was Peter's question: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" (2 Peter 3:11). How would we answer that question? This is a challenging thought on which all should ponder periodically.

Godliness, both the word and characteristic, is today much diminished in everyday use. Its essence encapsulates those who walk with and please God and are devoted to Him, reflecting godly character in their conduct.

Godliness is not simply a synonym for Christian character. It is far deeper than that, it addresses the totality of a disciple's life, and provides the foundation upon which Christian character is built. The Greek noun from which the word is translated means "reverence, respect, piety towards God."

#### A Time for Training

The New Testament records that Paul the apostle mentored Timothy, a young follower of the Christian way, encouraging him to be a good minister or servant of Jesus Christ. Paul told him: "But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:7-8). By the words "exercise yourself toward godliness" Paul intended Timothy to train himself, work at it and persevere with it. Paul added that this characteristic is profitable for



God gives His children everything they need for a life that pleases Him.

all things—those things of the life that now is, and those of the life which is to come.

Other English translations of the Bible have "train yourself to be godly," a wording which highlights and encourages personal responsibility.

***Godliness addresses the totality of a disciple's life, and provides the foundation upon which Christian character is built.***

Notice also how Paul began his epistle to Titus, another young minister who was responsible for congregations on the island of Crete. Paul wrote, "the acknowledgement of the truth which accords with godliness . . ." (Titus 1:1). That those he mentored sought this vital component was uppermost in the apostle's thinking.

#### Examples for Today

Continuing to address Titus, Paul encouraged him to teach that Christians must resist worldly lusts, living soberly and righteously instead, whilst they await the glorious second coming of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-15).

Paul's intention was to highlight the transition between two worlds or two ages, in order to stir up God's people to live holy and godly lives, whatever the challenges. This way of living isn't some optional extra; it is required.

Simon Peter acknowledged that he was a bondservant and an apostle of Jesus Christ; he confirmed that God's divine power affords disciples all that pertains to a godly life, with the result that they become partakers of the divine nature required for entrance into Christ's Kingdom at His return (2 Peter 1:1-4).

Imagine that: God gives His children everything they need for a life that pleases Him, because they have been called by His own glory and by His grace.

#### A Disciple's Pursuit

Those called by God should appreciate that it is both a privilege and a duty to pursue godliness, to train themselves for it and to practice it, becoming expert at it. We do not require special talent or equipment for this task—although, in addition to God's divine power, His Holy Spirit, we do need personal motivation, and we will benefit from the encouragement and guidance of other followers of the Christian way.

To illustrate the foundation on which godly character is built, consider the example of Enoch, the father of Methuselah. The Bible records that in the days before the Flood he walked with God (Genesis 5:21-24). In Hebrews 11:5 we learn that he pleased God. Walking with God and pleasing God are the essence of godliness. Enoch's life was focused on God, the One who figured uppermost in his thinking.

Godly devotion is important because it implies a personal attitude towards the Almighty that results in behavior that is pleasing to Him. Devotion is not an activity, in the sense of "doing our daily devotions." Our devotion should encompass the fear of God, love for Him and the desire for Him, doing all to His glory and impacting all aspects of our lives (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Another way of putting that is found in Colossians 3:17. Paul advises that in everything we do, from our innermost thoughts to our external behavior, we are to do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Nothing should be excluded. It must not leave gaps, or have hidden or secret recesses or voids.

Is this a challenge? Yes! But that is the thrust of the first great commandment which, as stated in Matthew 22:37-38, is to love God with all our being: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment." GN

# The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ

Christ is our Savior and the ultimate sacrifice for sin.

*from Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*

Jesus Christ is the focal point of Christianity. As Acts 4:12 states, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Forgiveness of sin and ultimately the gift of eternal life are available only through His sacrifice. We are reconciled to God by Christ’s death but saved by His life (Romans 5:9-10).

The Scriptures refer to Jesus Christ with several distinctive titles, including the Word of God (John 1:1, 14; Revelation 19:13), our Savior (1 John 4:14), our High Priest (Hebrews 9:11), our Lord (Revelation 22:21), the Son of God (Revelation 2:18; 1 John 5:5), our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), the Son of Man (Revelation 14:14), and King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16).

Christ is our Savior and the ultimate sacrifice for sin. Even though He was divine, Jesus became a human being to suffer and die for the sins of mankind (Philippians 2:5-7; Hebrews 2:9). As the Son of Man, He was human in the fullest sense, able to experience the trials of human life (Hebrews 4:15) to better empathize with us as our merciful High Priest (Hebrews 2:17).

Christ as our Savior gave His life that we might live. He died a horrible death, as our Passover (foreshadowed in the sacrificed Passover lamb in the Old Testament), that we might understand the magnitude of sin and the monumental significance of His sacrifice, which was made for every human being. He was “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29; compare Revelation 5:6, 12; 7:14; 12:11).

Sin, the transgression of God’s law (1 John 3:4), is truly horrible. Disobedience to God’s law has brought untold pain and misery as well as its ultimate penalty, death (Romans 6:23).

Jesus lived a perfect life and therefore did not deserve the excruciating agony He experienced or the death penalty inflicted on Him. However, He was preordained from the foundation of the world to suffer and die for the sins of humanity. Even though Christ was accused of violating God’s law on more than one occasion, He, as the perfect sacrifice for sin, never broke God’s law.

We accept Christ’s sacrifice as essential to our salvation. As we model our lives after His, we figuratively “take up our cross” and follow Him (Luke 14:27), which includes a willingness to suffer and be persecuted as He set the example (1 Peter 2:19-23). We thank God the Father for giving up His Son Jesus Christ to be that perfect sacrifice for all mankind (John 3:16; Romans 8:32).

All sin is forgiven upon repentance and the acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice. Forgiveness of sin requires the supreme sacrifice—the death of Jesus Christ. His crucifixion almost 2,000 years ago was essential to God’s plan of redemption and salvation.

Through His sacrifice, Jesus took the ultimate penalty of sin—death—upon Himself, freeing us, if we



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We believe God so loved the world of helpless sinners that He gave His only begotten Son, who, though in all points tempted as we are, lived without sin in the human flesh. That Son, Jesus Christ, died as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. His life, because He is the creator of all humanity, is of greater value than the sum total of all human life. His death is, therefore, sufficient to pay the penalty for every human being’s sins. In paying this penalty He has made it possible, according to God’s plan for each person and for humanity as a whole, for us to have our sins forgiven and to be released from the death penalty (Hebrews 4:15; 9:15; 10:12; John 1:18; 3:16; Colossians 1:16-17, 22; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Ephesians 1:11; Revelation 13:8).

accept His sacrifice in continuing repentance, from death being our final fate (Hebrews 2:9; 9:15). And by giving of Himself in life to care for others and finally through the agonizing torment He experienced at the end, Jesus also bore the other consequences of sin—pain and suffering.

As Isaiah 53:4 begins, “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” Matthew 8:17 renders this, “He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.” And Isaiah 53:5 concludes, “The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” So, Jesus endured brutality and misery as the basis for our release from suffering, including through healing.

While God does not remove all suffering now, just as He has not yet removed death from us, at times He will alleviate some of it now if we faithfully rely on Him—such as being physically healed of illness through anointing (James 5:13-16). And we have God’s promise that one day both death and suffering will be no more (1 Corinthians 15:54; Romans 8:18; Revelation 21:4).

By understanding and accepting Jesus Christ’s sacrifice in repentance and faith, we can be assured that our sins are blotted out. We can go forward in our Christian lives with confidence, knowing that through that sacrifice we can be reconciled to the Father.

As a result of this reconciliation, we can develop a relationship with our Father that provides hope and assurance for our future. We can experience healing today. We can also look forward to eternal life in the Kingdom of God as a gift of God’s grace because of this tremendous sacrifice that Jesus and the Father willingly gave for every one of us. **GN**

## Acquainted with Grief

Living a godly life in our world is not easy. Jesus guaranteed His disciples they would have trouble.

*by Andy Diemer*

Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). He told His disciples this on the night of His last Passover. He knew full well what He would soon endure. Nevertheless, He encouraged them. He wanted them to continue in the faith, no matter the difficulties they would face.

There is a profound lesson for us in Christ’s words. The Bible says He was “A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). He knew the heavy burdens of this life, yet clearly, He did not choose to despair in the face of death. On the contrary, He chose to hope.

This is a tremendous example because we experience much trouble throughout our lives. Life can wear us down, and we can feel despair. Sometimes, we will wonder why God is putting us through a particular trial. But neither Christ nor any Bible hero was exempt from knowing the sorrows of this life. King David was “acquainted with grief” like Christ but believed in God to bring him through all of it. That is why he wrote, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19).

Paul endured epic troubles for the gospel’s sake. Despite this, he wrote to the Romans, “I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). The apostle Peter likewise knew the sorrows of life. He tells us to cast “all our care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

If we endure all things patiently, we will know the presence of God in our lives, even in our deepest trials. Christ and all the Bible’s heroes knew this, too. **GN**

# Three Days and Three Nights

What does the Bible say about Jesus' resurrection?

*from Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*

One of the most dramatic, encouraging and gracious events of all time was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God the Father resurrected His Son Jesus, who had been killed and placed in the tomb outside Jerusalem's walls. His death, allowed by the Father and willingly submitted to by Jesus (John 10:17-18), paid the penalty for all the sins of all human beings who will have ever lived, on the condition that they truly repent of those sins. His death was preordained by the Father and Himself from the foundation of the world as a necessary part of the salvation of mankind (1 Peter 1:20).

God, in His sovereign justice, mercy and love, thus made it possible for all human beings to have their sins forgiven (upon repentance and faith) and to be reconciled to Him by the blood of Christ as the Lamb of God (Matthew 26:28; Revelation 12:11). But the death of Jesus was not the end of the matter. We are reconciled to God by His death, but we are saved by His life (Romans 5:10).

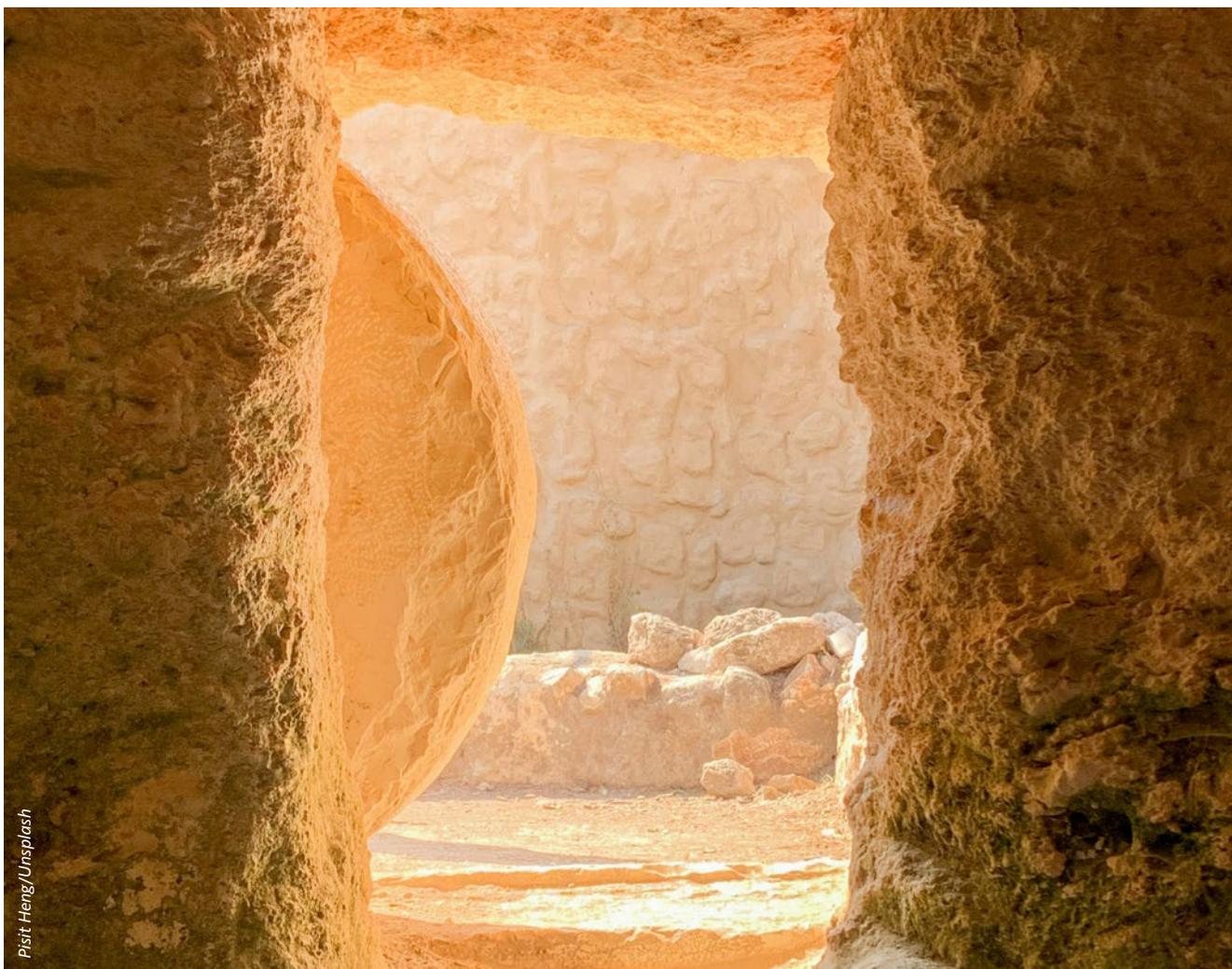
Only through Christ's resurrection to immortality could we have a living Savior who, as High Priest, intercedes for us with the Father (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:15-16; Romans 8:26-27). And the fact that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead gives human beings a very compelling reason to believe in the gospel of the Kingdom of God and to believe that they also can be brought back from death (1 Corinthians 15:14-19). Christ's resurrection provides for human beings a solid basis for living in hope that they, too, may inherit eternal life (1 Peter 1:3).

Jesus offered the fact that the grave would hold Him for only a short period as the only divine sign to His generation that He was "greater than Jonah" and "greater than Solomon" and that His message should lead its hearers to repentance (Matthew 12:39-42). He said that He would be three days and three nights—a period of 72 hours (John 11:9-10; Genesis 1:5)—in the heart of the earth (the grave), just as the prophet Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish (Jonah 1:17). Elsewhere, Jesus said that He would "be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31).

A major problem with the commonly accepted belief regarding the timing of the crucifixion and resurrection is that there are not three days and three nights between Good Friday afternoon and Easter Sunday morning.

- The weight of scriptural and historical evidence leads us to conclude:
- That Jesus died on Wednesday afternoon;
- That His body was hurriedly placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea shortly before sunset that same afternoon—the eve of an annual Sabbath (a holy rest day), the first day of Unleavened Bread (John 19:30-31, 42; Mark 15:42-46);
- And that Jesus was resurrected by the Father near sunset on Saturday (the end of the weekly Sabbath), three days and three nights after being placed in the tomb, exactly as He had said.

We believe that the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead after His body lay three days and three nights in the grave, thus making immortality possible for mortal man. He thereafter ascended into heaven, where He now sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate (1 Peter 1:17-21; 3:22; Matthew 12:40; 1 Corinthians 15:53; 2 Timothy 1:10; John 20:17; Hebrews 8:1; Hebrews 12:2).



*Jesus Christ was entombed for three days and three nights.*

This explanation is consistent with the details found in Scripture. It does not require a strained fitting of three days and three nights between Friday evening and Sunday morning at sunrise by speculating about parts of days and nights. It also reconciles the accounts of the women and the burial spices found in Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56. In the first account, the women obediently rested on a Sabbath day before procuring the spices. In the second account, they prepared the already-procured spices and afterward rested on a Sabbath day.

These accounts are reconciled by understanding that there were two Sabbath days during the week in question. Jesus was crucified on the Passover (Matthew 26:18-20; 1 Corinthians 5:7), which was the preparation day for a Sabbath that was a "high day" (Mark 15:42; John 19:31). This high day was the first annual Holy Day on the Jewish calendar, the First Day of Unleavened Bread, which always fell on the day after the Passover (Leviticus 23:5-7). It was an annual Sabbath, not a weekly Sabbath. Annual Holy Days are also called "Sabbaths" since work was not to be done on them (Leviticus 23:7, 24, 32).

The women waited until this day, the annual Sabbath, was over; then they bought and prepared the spices; then they rested again on God's weekly Sabbath day; and then they proceeded to the tomb to apply the spices to Jesus' body early on Sunday morning.

They visited the tomb after the holy "Sabbaths" (plural) of that week (Matthew 28:1, Green's Literal

Translation). The annual Sabbath that year lasted from sunset Wednesday to sunset Thursday, and the weekly Sabbath, as always, lasted from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. When they arrived at the tomb early Sunday morning, they found it empty and heard the announcement from the angel that Jesus was alive and was not there (Mark 16:6).

There is historical and scriptural evidence that points to A.D. 31 as the year of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Among the indicators of the crucifixion year are the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of the coming of the Messiah (with a specified count of years in Daniel 9:24-26 evidently commencing with the decree of the Persian king Artaxerxes in Ezra 7), and a careful consideration of three milestones—the likely date of Jesus' birth, His age when He began His ministry and the duration of His ministry.

The Passover of the year Christ died fell on the fourth day of the week (sunset Tuesday to sunset Wednesday), and Jesus Christ's death on that day fulfilled His role as the true Passover Lamb of God (1 Corinthians 5:7). The next day, from sunset Wednesday to sunset Thursday, was a holy annual Sabbath.

In summary, we believe that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, died for our sins on the Passover, was entombed for three days and three nights (72 hours) and then was resurrected and, after a period of further contact with the disciples, ascended to heaven to sit at the Father's right hand, far above all others in power, glory and honor (Ephesians 1:19-23). **GN**

## Ghana

The 2025 United Youth Camp in Ghana came with a lot of joy and eagerness to learn and grow in Christ, while also having fun. Held from Dec. 21-28, 2025, on the campus of Valley View University in Accra, we had a total of 22 youth campers and 22 volunteer staff coming from six different congregations in the country and also including four visiting staff—two from Nigeria and two from the United States.

This year's main theme—

Building On The Foundation—served as a reminder that much like any building requires a strong foundation to stand the test of time and adverse weather conditions, we as Christians must have a firm foundation in Jesus Christ; the model from which to learn, grow and fashion our lifestyle and choices, ensuring that we are rooted firmly in God's word and His ways, so as not to be swayed by trials, doubts, temptations or the evil of this world.

Each day of activity began with early morning, low intensity calisthenics to prepare for the rest of the day. Activities this year included: archery, chess, crafts, swimming, team challenge, volleyball and Christian living classes at the beginning of each day. For the entire week, campers engaged in activities tailored to not only develop their individual strengths but to also encourage teamwork and contribute to their spiritu-

al growth by prompting certain Christ-like characteristics.

Unusual rains during this period threatened to mar what had been a seamless camp experience, but thankfully, the joint effort of campers and staff was more than enough to mitigate any disruptions and ensure that activities went on as scheduled.

Members of the Accra congregation joined the Sabbath service at camp as we were treated to melodious special

music by the campers and split sermons from Mr. Carl Koester and Mr. Paul Moody. Services were followed later that evening by a banquet and an awards ceremony to acknowledge and encourage exemplary campers.

Overall, camp was a wholesome and spiritually enriching exercise for both campers and staff, as well as a timely escape from the bright lights of the Accra Christmas season.

*Paa Kow Ferguson-Aikins*

## Kenya

Camp began on Sunday, Dec. 7, 2025, with a green environment, as it rains year-round in this region. The youth stayed in tents, as did some of the staff, while others dwelt in bandas (eco-friendly cottages). We had 22 campers and nine staff members.

The theme was "Building On The Foundation." All Christian living lessons were based on this theme. The youths were taught on how to pray, the Ten Commandments, career choice, mental health, making decisions, developing discipline, God's character, purity, self-control, integrity, godly

fear and others like Bible study, campus chat, question and answers. There were outdoor and indoor games.

Delicious breakfast, lunch and supper were served each day. The camp ended after seven days and all campers arrived home safely. We thank God for giving us that wonderful opportunity, protection and a conducive environment. We also thank the parents for sending their children for this special occasion.

We want to appreciate everybody who supported this function to be successful.

*Mark M. Nyakwara*



## Peru

Camp was held in Lima, Peru, for the very first time, and it was a joyful and memorable success, clearly blessed by God. From across Latin America, 21 young people attended—three from Argentina, one from Colombia, three from Mexico, three from Chile, and eleven from Peru—reflecting the growing unity of our youth throughout the region. They were supported by nine dedicated staff members whose service and care helped make the camp both meaningful and inspiring.

The young people expressed heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity to participate, and throughout the camp there was a strong spirit of unity, learning, encouragement and joy. We are deeply thankful to God for His many blessings and to everyone who contributed to making this first UYC in Peru such a positive and uplifting experience for the youth of the Church in South America.

*Marcelo Saavedra*

## South Africa

The South African youth camp was held in December 2025 at the Moolmanshoek Leadership Development Centre in Free State Province. Located on a game reserve, it offered truly unique and unforgettable experiences.

Despite being significantly down in numbers (16 campers compared to last year's 27), we were blessed with good weather when we needed it, no injuries or serious illness, a new activities to enjoy, and much enthusiasm from our youth. We were once again blessed to have international staff, provided through

Good Works, who always bring a unique flavor and fresh perspective to our camps; a great reminder to our kids that we're a part of something much bigger.

The Christian living theme—Building On The Foundation—was supplemented by an Excellence in Living class—How to Build a Stable Life, introduced last year by Mr. Ken Loucks at Northwest camp, Oregon.

Many lessons were learned and memories made. We look forward to the next opportunity to learn God's way in the inspiring environment of the Zone.

*Vivien Botha*



## Winter

Winter Camp 2025 wrapped up its ninth year in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. A total of 185 campers and staff gathered together with an abundance of winter weather. The day before campers arrived brought about five inches of snow accumulation and almost daily flurries. This added to the wintery atmosphere and encouraged lots of fun in the snow followed by fellowship and time to bond in the warm indoors.

Camp activities this year included arts and crafts, bas-

ketball, Bible class, broomball, dance, escape room, field sports, and volleyball, and a ski/snowboard trip for our oldest dorms. The theme, "Building on the Foundation" was woven into the daily compass checks to start the day, and then brought to a conclusion in the evening Christian living class before dinner. Real life examples were brought out to reinforce the daily themes. Concepts that might not be familiar to teenagers, like blueprints, foundations, and other

technical building terms, were explained in concrete ways that were easy to remember and related to our spiritual "house" or life that we are building.

God's blessing over the camp was evident with His protection from sickness, which can sometimes prove to be a challenge for winter camp, safety from accidents or mishaps, while allowing us to fully enjoy a very wintery camp week. Hot chocolate and great conversations were abundant this week

as new friendships were formed and longtime bonds were reinforced. The slower pace of the winter camp schedule allows for ample fellowship time, which the campers and staff both enjoy. With sunset being before 5 p.m., activities move indoors much earlier than summer camps, which helps add to the close-knit winter camp environment.

We are very thankful for the wonderful support of the staff who sacrifice their time and

effort to help serve the campers. We also appreciate the parents, who entrust us with the campers for a week, and who put in the work at home to help the teens build the foundation for their life. Winter Camp is a wonderful experience in the middle of the winter, helping to bridge the gap of fellowship time with friends at the Feast of Tabernacles until they are able to see each other again at summer camps.

*Aaron Creech*



**Camp Ghana**



**Camp Peru**



**Camp Peru**



**Winter Camp**





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## United Youth Camps 2026 Dates



### Preteen Camps

Florida	May 25-29, 2026
Gilmont (TX)	May 31-June 3, 2026
Colorado	June 21-24, 2026
Ironwood (MN)	July 12-15, 2026
Ochoco (OR)	July 12-15, 2026
Buckeye (OH)	July 26-29, 2026
Seven Mountains (PA)	July 26-29, 2026

### Teen Camps

Cotubic (OH)	June 21-28, 2026
Pinecrest (MS)	June 28-July 5, 2026
Southwest (AZ)	July 5-12, 2026
Camp (OR)	July 19-26, 2026
Woodland (GA)	July 19-26, 2026
Winter Camp (WI)	Dec. 28, 2026-Jan.3, 2027

For international camp dates, please visit: [ucg.org/members/uyc/international](http://ucg.org/members/uyc/international)

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