



## General Conference of Elders Holds Annual Meeting

by Heidi Braun

CINCINNATI, Ohio—The United Church of God held its annual meeting of the General Conference of Elders (GCE) on May 2-4, 2026. The theme this year was “Enhancing Ministerial Skills,” and attendance reached over 330 elders and wives.

Prior to the meeting, on Friday May 1, an international summit was held to share updates from the international areas and discuss ways to enhance the work in those areas. Elders and their wives enjoyed a welcome reception that evening as they entered into the Sabbath.

Sabbath morning began with a group breakfast, followed by group fellowship opportunities. Each elder and wife was assigned to a discussion group for an opportunity to get to know one another better. Sabbath services were held in the afternoon and included a performance from the Ambassador Bible College chorale and sermons by Gabriel Garcia and John Elliott.

That evening, members of the GCE and home office support staff enjoyed further fellowship over dinner. A ministerial and employee recognition ceremony included introductions for 22 new elders and their wives and featured ministerial recognitions for up to 50 and 60 years of service. Recent retirees were also honored in this special event.

### Introduction and Balloting

Following Sunday morning breakfast, a workshop for the ministerial wives began the



Elders' wives gathered on Sunday morning for an inspiring workshop.

day's events. The official GCE sessions commenced with the approval of last year's minutes and some opening comments from the chairman Tim Pebworth. In his explanation of the theme, Tim Pebworth shared how someone had once told him, “you cannot give your best sermon every week.” However, he presented the view that ministers could take this as a personal challenge to make their best effort every week. The goal of the theme, “Enhancing Ministerial Skills” was that each elder and wife would be able to take home something they didn't have when they came. Following these remarks, secretary Frank Dunkle led the balloting process.

### Financial Report

Treasurer Ted Budge opened the financial report with appreciation for the service of the ministry. Unpaid elders save the Church 2.4 million dollars through their volunteer service, while the paid ministry have also sacrificed well-paying careers to serve the brethren. Ted

Budge explained that money is a tool. It's not something to be afraid of, but rather, an object to help us serve.

After sharing some updates about financial policies and the five-year plan currently under development, Ted Budge took some time to explain the new roles in the finance area. Treasurer and operation manager of financial services are two separate roles now. The treasurer reports to the Council, while the operation manager reports to the president.

Linda Api, operation manager of financial services, presented the next part of this presentation. She explained the responsibilities which are part of her role, including managing the audit, and developing a better expense reporting system.

To conclude this presentation, Ted Budge presented the updated salary ranges for those employed by the Church.

### Address from Ministerial and Member Services

Steve Myers opened his presentation with some statistics



Over 330 elders and wives gathered for a fruitful GCE meeting.

about the ministry. We have a higher number of elders than ever—405 total. Of these, 111 are international and 294 are in the United States. Yet, despite this increase, our manpower challenge remains significant.

The challenges that we face with pastoral coverage are more significant in our international congregations. We have 256 international congregations, which is 58 percent of our congregations. Yet, they are served by only 27 percent of our elders.

Our response has to be strengthening and building healthier congregations. We plan to fuel improvements in message quality and develop future leaders. The strategic plan will give us direction on how to build the kind of congregations that will fill these needs.

Steve Myers opened some discussion questions on the Menti app, asking elders and wives to rank the effectiveness of different fellowship strategies and the importance of various tools in leadership development.

To help address some of the needs of our congrega-

tions, the Council approved two new MMS roles. Ben Light will serve as senior manager for international services. He will be providing focused support for international pastors, national councils, training, translation, budgeting, Feast coordination and global planning. Steven Britt will serve as senior manager of member services. He will provide leadership for initiatives including youth, young adults, camps, festivals, education resources, accessibility services and member engagement.

After discussing some potential barriers that the ministry face in helping fellowship and leadership strategies succeed, Steve Myers opened up the Q&A session. Questions included discussion on the type of training that will be used to help improve messages in our congregations and inquiries on how congregations might better retain and engage ABC students after graduation.

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## Address from Media and Communications Services

With a reminder of the great commission (Mark 16:15), Scott Delamater presented next, giving some updates from media and communication services. It's been a transitional year with the retirement of Peter Eddington and the recent promotion of several leaders in this department to help serve the growing media efforts. Most recently, we have formalized a structure that has been emerging over the decades. Scott Delamater provided an overview of each department within media.

The marketing department is led by senior manager, Kourtney Kovanis. As a Church, we have been reluctant to use the term "marketing" because we're not selling products. However, the skills needed to reach people are found in the area of marketing, which is why this is such a crucial part of preaching the gospel. Kourtney Kovanis has been helping us streamline our efforts. For example, Magnified views went up when we re-tooled some of our ads. Over a 90-day period, we increased our views tremendously without significantly more cost. The team is also working to improve our user journey, mapping out how people engage with our content.

The editorial department is led by senior manager, Clint Porter. This department functions to produce Church publications, such as *Beyond Today* and *United News*. New this year is the creation of two new roles, staff writer (Emma Cortelyou) and senior editor of instructional media (Tom Robinson). Dan Preston serves as senior editor of proclamation media (*Beyond Today* magazine) while Heidi Braun continues to serve as managing editor for *United News*, adding *United News Weekly* this year as a digital addition to the print publication.

The publishing department, led by senior manager, Mitch Moss, is working to improve our publication processes. One of the current projects in motion is that of finding more effective ways to handle new subscriptions. Additionally, *Beyond Today* is moving to a quarterly cadence. This is part of our effort to engage digitally while making our print products more timeless, increasing quality and durability.

The video production department is led by senior manager, Jaime Schreiber. Already,

this team has faced and adjusted to challenges well, as the world conditions leading to the cancellation of an Israel filming project have pushed the team to find creative alternatives. This department has reinvested their time into accelerating the *Beyond Today* screen test process. Finding *Beyond Today* presenters can be challenging, as several parameters must be met: they must be ordained, available and not too close to retirement. Besides production of *Beyond Today*, this team is involved in a wide variety of projects, including Jelly videos and *Magnified*.

For decades, we have had a mail processing department. However, in recent years, the work has become increasingly digital, moving into data analysis rather than handling the previous volume of physical mail. For this reason, the department has been renamed Donations and Development Services. Sarah Howard leads this department, who now focus largely on understanding the data we receive and how we can work with our marketing team to become more effective in our outreach.

The customer service department is led by Terri Eddington. Terri receives questions at [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org), and then works to forward those questions to the people who need to answer them. She is able to see the direct impact God's Church is having on people, whether that is through biblical, counseling or another type of question. We receive over 6,000 messages every year!

Scott Delamater concluded this presentation with a Q&A session about media topics, moderated from Menti and assisted by the managers in the media department.

## Leadership Development and Conflict Resolution

After lunch, we welcomed a guest speaker, Michael Wilkinson, who works as a professional facilitator. He presented training on how to develop leadership and how to approach disagreements—two valuable skillsets for the ministry to use for enhancing their efforts.

During the leadership portion of the training, Wilkinson shared the three levels of leadership development: overseer (task focused), coach (people focused) and visionary (forward focused). He explained how leadership can move from one level to the next and when

each approach is appropriate. He also shared "the five C's of trust," which are: competence, communication, commitment, caring and character.

In the conflict resolution portion of his training, Wilkinson presented the surprising observation that there are only three types of disagreements. The first is based on a lack of information and is easily resolved



The theme this year was "Enhancing Ministerial Skills."

by giving each party an opportunity to explain themselves. Begin with statements like "we seem to agree that . . ." confirm the source of the disagreement and delineate the alternatives. The second level is based in a mismatch of values. To resolve, consider the strengths and weaknesses of each option, then create a new, third option that takes the key strengths of each. A third type of disagreement is based on personality, past history with one another or other factors that have nothing to do with the alternatives being discussed. After recognizing how irrational the disagreement is, and if there is no commitment to finding a solution, resolve it by taking it to a third party or higher authority.

After his presentations, Michael Wilkinson opened the session for Q&A, allowing elders to ask questions that might help them implement these suggestions in their congregations.

## Ballot Results

After these presentations, Frank Dunkle reported the results of the morning's balloting.

- Strategic Plan—Passed
- Operation Plan—Passed
- Fiscal Budget—Passed
- Item #4 Approving Peter Eddington to Complete John Elliott's Council Term—Passed
- Amendment to Add Bylaws 5.9 and 11.7—Not Passed

The individuals elected for the international and United States Council positions were:

- Tim Pebworth (International)
- Aaron Dean
- Andy Lee
- Ben Light

After a concluding prayer, Sunday finished with a group dinner and dessert reception.

when humans misuse AI, rather than something inherently wrong with AI itself. Mr. Loucks then gave some examples of how AI could be used to help prepare a message, cautioning elders that AI should never be the final authority on a biblical matter, but rather be used as a tool to help save time. AI is helpful for identifying useful material, giving suggestions on structure and readability, and summarization, to name a few uses. However, it is your responsibility as a writer/speaker to hone the final content and accept full authorship. Followed by a Q&A session, this seminar helped address many of the concerns elders had faced when deciding whether to use AI as a tool in their message preparation.

Chuck Smith shared his experiences with running interactive Bible studies, emphasizing that a Bible study should not just be a second sermon. He emphatically described the benefits of getting people to engage with the process of finding, discussing and pondering answers instead of simply giving them the answers. Techniques to encourage the more taciturn brethren, reign in the more outspoken and handle difficult topics were brought up as applicable advice for those that are interested in running their own interactive Bible studies.

Scott Ashley spoke from his experience, sharing advice on how to augment sermons and other messages with PowerPoint. He presented several principles for slide construction, such as readability and font choices. Beyond this general advice, he listed resources for downloading tools and procuring fair-use images. Among the examples of what to use PowerPoint for, one of his strongest cases was using it to directly quote scripture during a message, saving time that would otherwise add up from waiting on an audience to turn to every verse.

## Final Discussions

After the seminars, the GCE sessions concluded with a hymn and prayer. Later that day, a couple of small groups met separately for international and camp meetings. The 2026 General Conference of Elders was truly an encouraging experience that equipped the ministry with tools for a productive year to come! UN

## Monday Seminars

On Monday morning, after a group breakfast, several seminars were conducted for training. Four topics ran at the same time in different rooms, then shifted rooms for the second batch of seminars. This allowed elders and their wives to participate in two out of the four topics.

Gary Petty presented on expository speaking. Rather than simply going through a topic, expository speaking takes the whole context of a verse or passage into consideration. One has to consider what the message meant to the people at the time it was written. Also important is the use and definition of words, which may have multiple meanings, depending on the use. Giving an expository message requires that the speaker put significant time into study beforehand and that he stays focused so the scope of the message does not become unmanageable or drift off topic. The presentation was followed by a Q&A which addressed questions including where to find good research materials and how to plan one's time in the study phase of the preparation.

Ken Loucks gave a presentation on how to use AI in a wise manner. He helped dispel some of the fears around using AI, reminding listeners that AI is not conscious, but rather that it is software operating on pattern recognition. The real danger is

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## Ministerial and Member Services



Mark Yap



David and Kayla Rains



Junia Marin



Jonathan Litaba

On April 2, 2026, the First Day of Unleavened Bread, Mark Yap was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Julia, serve the congregations in Winnipeg, Manitoba; North Battleford and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; and Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

On April 8, 2026, David Rains was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Kayla, serve the congregations in Nashville, Murfreesboro and Jackson, Tennessee.

On May 7, 2026, Junia Marin was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Veena, serve the

Trinidad & Tobago and Southern Caribbean congregations.

On May 9, 2026, Jonathan Litaba was ordained into the ministry. He will continue to serve the congregations in Zambia.

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](mailto:steve_myers@ucg.org)

## Employee Milestones

Years	Name	Role	Country
10	Nathan Ekama	Church Pastor	United States
10	Rod Foster	Church Pastor	United States
10	Matthew Hernandez	Senior Illustrator/Graphic Designer	United States
10	Chaz Leathers	Video Editor and Producer	United States
10	Jay Ledbetter	Church Pastor	United States
10	Jim Lucas	Church Pastor	Canada
10	Dan Preston	Church Pastor	United States
10	Jeff Richards	Church Pastor	United States
10	David Salek	International Mail Processing Manager	United States
10	Randy Urwiller	Church Pastor	United States
10	Lewis VanAusdle	Church Pastor	United States
10	Iana Winning	Administrative Assistant	Australia
20	Clint Porter	Senior Manager, Editorial	United States
20	Chris Stewart	Information Technology Manager	United States
50	Mario Seiglie	Church Pastor	United States

The following individuals have reached milestones in their service in the ministry or as employees of the Church. Ministers' wives are listed alongside their husbands in appreciation for their part in caring for the congregations.

## Ministerial Milestones

Years	Name	Country
10	Ron and Janet Barker	United States
10	David Hemsley	United States
10	Peter Corrigan	Canada
10	Terry and Linda Johnson	United States
10	Quentin and Marie Rhody	United States
10	Wayne and Diane Topping	United Kingdom
10	Skeets and Brenda Mez	United States
10	Jaime and Lorena Diaz	Chile and Argentina
10	Paul and Coreen Wasilkoff	Canada
10	John and Melanie May	United States
10	Barry and Madhu Lavers	United Kingdom
10	Mabasa and Chisomo Chichaya	Zimbabwe
10	Freeman and Debbie Kuhns	United States
10	Wim and Anne Dekker	Netherlands
10	Dan and Kim Preston	United States
10	Jim and Sue Kocher	United States
10	CJ and Tina Williams	United States
25	Jaime and Maria Gallardo	Chile
25	Melvin and Sadie Parks	United States
25	David and Donna Chornomaz	United States
25	Ken and Joy Vail	United States
25	Kurt Schmitz	Germany
25	Frank and Dot Jarvis	United Kingdom
40	Bruno and Chantal Leclerc	Canada
40	Mark and Barbara Welch	United States
40	Michael and Leonilda Caputo	Italy
40	Ken and Dianne Skorseth	United States
50	Paul and Monica Kieffer	Germany
50	William and Rae Eddington	Australia
50	Robin and Susan Webber	United States
50	Joe and Jackie Horchak	United States
50	Jim and Joan Tuck	United States
50	Leif and Kathryn Anderson	United States
50	Mario and Caty Seiglie	United States
50	John and Merrie Elliott	United States
60	Bob and Dyanne Dick	United States
60	Fred Kellers	United States

## Sabbaths in the Park: Celebrating a 30 Year Tradition

On April 25, 2026, the Orange County congregation hosted its 30th “Sabbath in the Park,” with 99 attendees from the local congregation and other Southern California congregations. In a region of sprawling cities, the opportunity to have church services outdoors was especially meaningful and appreciated. This semiannual event began in 2009 and is typically held in April and November, when the park is less crowded.

Services were held beneath a canopy of large trees in a qui-

et area of Irvine Regional Park, a beautiful spacious park more than 125 years old and nestled in the rolling foothills of the Santa Ana mountains. Surrounded by oak and sycamore trees with open grassy areas, the setting provided a peaceful retreat just minutes from urban life. Our reserved picnic area, with tables accommodating up to 250 people, offered plenty of space for church services, lunch together and fellowship.

Services began at 11:00 a.m., with pastor Mario Seiglie deliv-

ering the sermon—generally focused on a fascinating aspect of God’s creation. Hymns were accompanied by talented guitarists and other instrumentalists, adding to the uplifting atmosphere. Because they don’t allow powerful sound systems in the park, we just use a low-powered battery system that doesn’t disturb others in the park.

Following services, attendees enjoyed a deli-style “make your own sandwich” lunch provided by the congregation, along with a wide variety of salads, side

dishes, and desserts contributed by members. The day offered not only physical nourishment but also spiritual refreshment and warm fellowship.

Many who regularly serve each Sabbath appreciated the chance to relax and connect more deeply with others in a peaceful outdoor setting.

We look forward to continuing this special tradition—a time to worship in a natural setting, reflect on God’s creation, and share a meal and joyful fellowship.

*Jean Updegraff*



*Mario Seiglie giving a sermon (photo by Enrique Vidal)*

## May Council of Elders Meeting

The Council of Elders held its regularly scheduled meeting from May 5-7, 2026. In May the Council meeting immediately follows the annual meeting of the General Conference of Elders, which adds some unique elements to that meeting. This included expressing appreciation for Council members Dan Dowd and Victor Kubik, who complet-

ed their service. The Council also welcomed new members Andy Lee and Ben Light.

Considerable normal business occupied the Council. This included reviewing and approving ordination recommendations and accepting financial and legal reports. There were also updates from the various Council subcommittees.

During this meeting, Council also conducted annual assessments of the president and of the secretary.

Among new work the Council did in this meeting was final approval of a doctrine paper on the resurrection at the Seventh Trumpet. The Council also approved a new investment policy, recommended by treasurer

Ted Budge. The need for a policy has arisen from several years of positive income for the Church. Of course, the Council always has to deal with some confidential matters in executive session, and this was done with respect and care.

As concluding business, the newly seated Council selected Tim Pebworth to serve

a second term as its chairman and it chose Peter Eddington for the role of deputy chairman. Council members then assigned themselves to the various standing subcommittees. There is much work ahead, but there is satisfaction in a very productive meeting now complete.

*Frank Dunkle*

## Remember What God Has Done



The fifth annual Western Canadian women’s enrichment weekend was held in Fairmont Hot Springs, British Columbia, from April 17-20, 2026. There were 46 ladies from Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick, Washington and Ohio who shared a wonderful time of fellowship, enrichment, fun and relaxation.

There was a snowstorm on the Wednesday and Thursday before the weekend began, and some ladies traveled two days

to get to the event. Despite having to trek across blizzard conditions, the storm did not stop them from coming!

Friday evening began with a lovely welcome reception. Tonya Erickson gave a truly inspiring opening message introducing the theme for the weekend: “Remember What God has Done” (Psalm 105:5; 1 Chronicles 16:12). One comment that stood out was how “remember” is such a common word, yet such a powerful tool that can help us grow

in godly character. The word appears over 230 times in the Bible.

The ladies played “Getting to know you Bingo” and participated in opportunities for extended fellowship each day in the meeting hall, as well as the hot springs pool surrounded by God’s awesome creation in the mountains.

On the Sabbath, we enjoyed several special music pieces including a piano solo by Kim Eckert, a vocal solo by Eve Shaw and a duet by Willetta Ellington and Synnove Teetaert. Guest speaker, Aaron Dean, gave an encouraging and faith-strengthening sermon.

Also that day, Michelle Dean gave a presentation sharing her personal life experiences and how, looking back, she can see God was preparing her for future events in her life through those experiences.

We had several table topics discussing the theme for the weekend and sharing inspiring stories of how God has carried us through our trials. Each lady was able to share in a smaller group at her table of six. This was a very important part of the weekend as it allowed bonding in smaller groups.

On Sunday there was a craft activity in which each lady got to choose a souvenir water bottle and then apply vinyl stickers with a custom design to decorate.

A silent auction held throughout the morning raised over \$2,000 to help sponsor a women’s enrichment weekend for the ladies in Lusaka, Zambia.

Tracy Nyhus-Jongerius, a registered psychologist, presented an informative session on “Post Traumatic Growth.” Ladies were divided into small groups to put into practice engaging as women characters in the Bible and learning how to be more effective and purposeful in our communications with one another. One key takeaway from the presentation was how we need to develop a vocabulary to describe our feelings, which ultimately helps us to express how we are truly feeling when someone asks us, rather than just saying “I’m ok” or “fine, thanks.”

Evelyn Davis presented an inspiring wrap-up speech, and thanked everyone who was involved and reflected over the past five years of Western Canadian Women’s Enrichment weekends

and what God has done in the lives of the women who have been attending and the special bonding that has been happening over the years. Michelle Dean commented how wonderful it was to see how everyone worked so well together to make things happen.

A gathering outdoors with a light lunch and snacks was provided by the local brethren as a grand finale for those who had to leave early.

Several adventurous ladies went on a 20-minute nature hike to a natural hot spring in the area, on what turned out to be a beautiful sunny day with blue skies. In the evening, 29 ladies participated in a group painting activity.

It was wonderful to come together as a group of sisters in Christ to enrich each other spiritually, share our personal experiences, uplift each other, create precious bonds of support and glorify God in all we did.

We look forward to welcoming all who are interested in joining us for next year’s Women’s Enrichment Weekend! Stay tuned for more information.

*Michelle de Campos and Tonya Erickson*

# GN

## The Good News

### Uneven Growth, Enduring Grace, and Life Within an Imperfect Church

How should we respond when we encounter failure within God's Church?

by Lynn Leiby

One of the most difficult realities for believers to face is not opposition from the world, but disappointment within the Church itself. Many have wrestled with questions such as: Why do Christians fail? Why do people who sincerely believe still hurt one another? And what does God expect of us when that happens? Scripture does not avoid these questions. In fact, Jesus Christ addressed them directly through a series of parables that describe both the nature of conversion and the lived experience of God's people.

Two of the most familiar are the Parable of the Ten Virgins and the Parable of the Sower. Together, they provide a sobering picture: not everyone who associates with God's Church is spiritually prepared, and even among those who are genuinely converted, the trials we face, the levels of growth and our fruitfulness vary widely. When we combine these teachings with Christ's instructions on forgiveness and patience, a clearer—and more merciful—framework emerges for understanding what is “wrong” with God's Church.

#### The Parable of the Sower and Uneven Fruitfulness

In Matthew 13, Jesus explains the Parable of the Sower in detail, “But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matthew 13:23).

Much attention is often given to the first three categories—the seed that never takes root or ultimately proves unfruitful. Yet the final category deserves closer examination. The seed that falls on good ground does



Reuben Mcfeeters/Unsplash

*Conversion is not the end of the journey; it is the beginning of a lifelong process of learning, repentance, endurance, and growth.*

bear fruit, but not in equal measure. Some produce a hundredfold, others sixtyfold, and others thirtyfold.

This distinction is striking. Jesus does not describe only one acceptable level of fruitfulness. All three are counted as productive; all three belong to those who hear, understand, and respond to God's Word. Yet their outcomes differ significantly. Why?

Scripture does not provide a precise formula, but the implication is clear: spiritual growth is real, measurable and uneven. Conversion is not the end of the journey; it is the beginning of a lifelong process of learning, repentance, endurance and growth. Even on “good ground,” productivity varies.

#### A Baseball Analogy for Spiritual Growth

To illustrate this idea, consider an analogy from the world of baseball. Every professional baseball player is measured by a batting average—a simple statistic that reflects success over time. If a player gets one hit in one at-bat, he is batting 1.000. If he gets one hit in three at-bats, his average drops to .333. One hit in four at-bats, and we are down to .250.

A player who maintains a batting average above .300 over an entire season is considered exceptional. Such a player fails to get a hit roughly 70 percent of the time—and yet he is a highly valued member of the team. Even the best players do not succeed most of the time.

When we apply this concept to spiritual life, the parallel becomes illuminating. Jesus Christ is the only one who ever lived a spiritually perfect life. If we were to borrow baseball's language, He alone “batted a thousand.” Everyone else, even among the converted, falls short with regularity.

The parable of the sower does not assign exact percentages to spiritual success or failure. Yet it clearly shows that even among those who bear fruit, there are meaningful differences in consistency, depth and output. Some demonstrate spiritual maturity more steadily, while others struggle more frequently, yet all are counted as fruitful. All are genuine contributors.

A “thirtyfold” Christian, may not bear as much fruit as a “hundredfold” Christian. But Jesus still includes him among those who bear fruit. He is not cast aside. He is not rejected. He is not labeled unconverted.

#### When Failure Becomes Personal

This distinction matters because spiritual failure is rarely abstract. It is usually personal.

Many who leave the Church do not do so because they reject doctrine, prophecy or theology. They leave because they were hurt—sometimes deeply—by someone within the congregation. A harsh word, an impatient correction, a moment of hypocrisy or a failure to show compassion can linger for years.

In such cases, the offense may indeed be real. Sin may have occurred. The person who caused harm may have acted without kindness, wisdom or love.

But what if that person was not unconverted? What if he or she was a genuine believer—someone who will ultimately be in God's Kingdom—who simply failed in that moment? What if, like even the best players, they are not consistent in every at-bat, and you encountered them in a moment of weakness rather than strength?

This is not an excuse for sin. Scripture never minimizes wrongdoing. But it does place failure within a broader context of growth, endurance, and grace.

#### Christ's Direct Teaching on Forgiveness

Jesus anticipated this problem. In Matthew 18, Peter asks a pointed and practical question: “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” (Matthew 18:21).

Peter is not asking about strangers or unbelievers. He is asking about brothers—fellow members of the

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and Life Within an Imperfect Church*  
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community of faith. Jesus' response is direct and unmistakable, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (verse 22).

Christ's answer assumes repeated failure. It assumes ongoing friction. It assumes that even among believers, offenses will occur—not once, but many times.

Jesus then reinforces this principle with the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, describing everyday disputes and personal grievances. The lesson is clear: those who expect mercy from God must be prepared to extend mercy to others.

If God is willing to accept a believer who produces thirtyfold fruit, can we justify rejecting that same person over a single—or even repeated—failure?

### The Presence of the Unconverted

The challenge becomes even more complex when we recognize that not everyone in God's Church is converted. Jesus made this plain in multiple parables.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins shows that half were unprepared. The Parable of the Sower explains why some never develop lasting roots. The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares adds another sobering dimension: some individuals within the community were not placed there by God at all.

In that parable, Jesus explains that tares were sown among the wheat by an enemy. When the servants ask if they should remove them, the master replies that uprooting the tares prematurely would damage the wheat. The separation must wait until the harvest.

## Water Baptism and the Laying on of Hands

We believe in the ordinance of water baptism by immersion after repentance. Through the laying on of hands, with prayer, the believer receives the Holy Spirit and becomes a part of the spiritual Body of Jesus Christ

*from Fundamental Beliefs  
of the United Church of God*

After repentance and faith in Hebrews 6:1, verse 2 lists "the doctrine of baptisms" and "laying on of hands" as two of the elementary principles of Christ.

John the Baptist introduced a baptism of repentance, tied to the concept of forgiveness of sins (Matthew 3:1-6; Mark 1:4-5). Jesus Himself was baptized by John (Matthew 3:13-17), not because He needed to

Jesus also taught, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). This instruction does not contradict the parable of the wheat and the tares but complements it. Christians are called to recognize patterns of behavior over time—whether a life is generally producing good fruit or harmful fruit. Yet recognizing patterns is not the same as rendering final judgment. A struggling believer, a spiritually immature member, a discouraged Christian, and a deliberate deceiver may at times appear similar. We may observe fruit, but we do not determine ultimate standing before God.

This is a crucial instruction. Jesus explicitly tells His followers that they do not possess the discernment required to make final judgments about others' spiritual status. The responsibility for separation belongs to Christ—not to us.

### Responding to Imperfection in the Church

If these things are true, how should we respond when we encounter failure within God's Church?

First, we should pause before making final judgments. What we may be witnessing is not a settled pattern, but a moment in a person's ongoing growth.

Second, we should follow Christ's instruction in Matthew 18. Rather than withdrawing or harboring resentment, we are to address offenses directly, humbly and with a goal of reconciliation.

Third, we must extend the same patience we hope to receive. Every believer is in the process of overcoming, and none does so perfectly.

Finally, we should resist the temptation to make permanent decisions based on temporary failures. Leaving the Church over the shortcomings of others may ultimately place us at odds with the very work God is carrying out.

repent of sin or be forgiven, but as an example for His disciples throughout all ages.

The English word baptize is derived from the Greek word *baptizo*, which means "to immerse." By definition, then, the only biblical form of baptism is a complete immersion in water. John the Baptist chose a particular location in the Jordan River for baptizing because sufficient water was available there to completely submerge individuals (John 3:23).

For the Christian, the ordinance of baptism is profoundly important. In one action, Christ's death, burial and resurrection are called to mind for the believer and linked to his or her own symbolic "death" and "resurrection" from the "watery grave" to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-6; Colossians 2:12-13).

Also inherent in the symbolism is the promise of the believer's future resurrection into the Kingdom of God. The forgiven sinner emerges from the waters of baptism to live a new life in Christ, free from the death penalty incurred by sin. The waters of baptism have symbolically washed away all sins. In this regard, baptism is an outward acknowledgment of the believer's inward intent to yield and submit his or her life to God and His way (Ephesians 4:20-24).

Baptism, which is commanded in Scripture, must be preceded by faith and repentance (Acts 2:37-38; Mark 16:16). The very symbolism of baptism itself shows a willingness to "bury" the old sinful life (Romans 6:11). Our acknowledgment of guilt and the need for Jesus Christ to save us from the consequences of sin is of paramount importance. This repentance is characterized by a change of heart and action and is based on personal faith in, and a total commitment to, Jesus Christ and God the Father (Luke 14:25-33; Colossians 2:12).

### Living With Realistic Faith

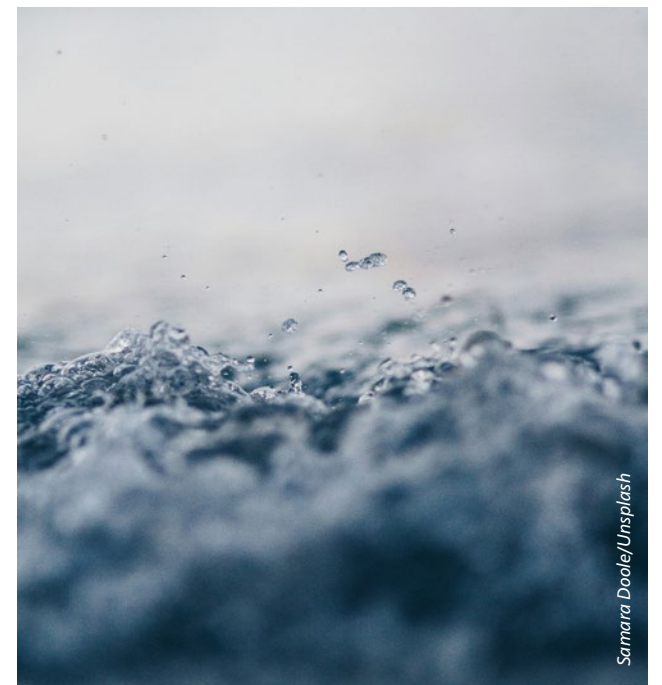
Taken together, these teachings form a coherent and challenging message. God's Church contains genuine believers at different stages of growth. Some are consistently fruitful. Others struggle more visibly. Failures will occur. Offenses will happen. Disappointments are inevitable.

The question is not whether we will encounter imperfection—but how we will respond to it.

Will we demand perfection from others while relying on mercy for ourselves? Or will we accept Christ's assessment of His Church and live accordingly—with patience, humility, forgiveness and endurance?

Jesus Christ knows the condition of His Church. He has accounted for human weakness. He has provided instruction for dealing with sin, conflict and failure. And He has promised that, at His return, He will set everything right.

Until then, we are called not to abandon the field, but to remain faithful within it—trusting the Master of the harvest to do His work in His time. **GN**



*Baptism must be preceded by faith and repentance.*

Baptism should be entered into only by someone who is mature enough to fully grasp and appreciate the lifelong commitment required. The Bible gives no indication that baptism is appropriate for children.

The commission Jesus gave His disciples includes the authority to baptize believers (Matthew 28:18-20). Baptism is followed by prayer and the laying on of hands by one or more of God's duly ordained servants. This demonstrates that God acts through human servants and that we are to cooperate with the faithful ministry He has established in His Church.

This is all part of the process by which we receive the gift of God's Spirit (Acts 2:38, 8:14-18; 2 Timothy 1:6; Hebrews 6:1-2). It is through the indwelling Holy Spirit that Christ lives within the Christian (John 14:16-17, 23; Galatians 2:20). And through this process, the believer is placed into the spiritual Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), bringing rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:7).

Again, those who have come to repentance through the calling of God (John 6:44) are to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, following the example and instruction of Jesus Christ. And with the laying on of hands, they will receive the Holy Spirit, empowering them to start living a transformed life led by that Spirit. **GN**

# A Biblical Call to Ongoing Self-Examination

Most people either excuse themselves too easily or condemn themselves too harshly. Scripture calls us to something far rarer: seeing ourselves clearly.

by Don Hooser

We need regular introspection year-round if we seek continued spiritual and personal growth. Human nature tends either to blind people to their faults, or cause them to view themselves as hopeless failures. We need God to help us see ourselves objectively, and to appreciate His merciful forgiveness.

## Much More Than Self

Many of you are aware of the Scottish poem, “To a Louse,” by Robert Burns. The famous line says (in modern English): “Oh for the gift to see ourselves as others see us!” Much more important is the gift to increasingly see ourselves as God sees us! Thankfully, studying the Bible serves as a mirror to enable us to accurately see ourselves! (James 1:22-24). See also Romans 7:7; Hebrews 4:11-12; Revelation 3:17-18.

Our human nature is very prejudiced. In Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus warned that we tend to have a strict standard in judging others and a lenient standard in judging ourselves. Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 say, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Jeremiah 17:9 says “The heart is deceitful... Who can know it?”

We need lots of help to “see” ourselves accurately! We can’t see physical things inside of us without the help of machines like x-rays. We certainly need God and knowledge of the Bible to “see” ourselves spiritually.

Begin self-examination by examining the Bible. God’s revelation serves as the standard by which we can examine ourselves. As we read the Bible, we should be asking ourselves, “Is my mind in harmony with these scriptures?”

To “see” ourselves more clearly, we also need the indwelling presence of God’s Holy Spirit! The second chapter of 1 Corinthians teaches us that we can understand things on the human level because we have within us the “spirit of man,” also called the “human spirit.” It also teaches us that we can only understand spiritual things when we have the gift of God’s Holy Spirit. Those who have the Holy Spirit are greatly blessed with spiritual “eyes” and “ears” to have spiritual understanding! (Matthew 13:16-17).

Therefore, we must rely primarily on God to give us the ability to see ourselves as we really are. Pray, like Jeremiah did, for direction from God: “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O Lord, correct me...” (Jeremiah 10:23-24).

A personal trial can be a disciplinary “chastening” by God. We must never “despise the chastening of the Lord” because it is always out of love as a Father to His

child (Proverbs 3:11-12). God is extremely loving, merciful and forgiving! (Psalm 103:8-18).

However, maybe more often than a chastening, many trials are tests that will enable God and us to better see our strengths and our weaknesses.

Ask God to examine you and then reveal to you what He sees! Remember Psalm 26:2-3, “Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my mind and my heart. For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth.”

Similarly, in Psalm 139:23-24 we read an example of the attitude we should have towards God’s guidance, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” God knows everything about us, so our trials are more for our enlightenment than for God’s (Psalm 139:1-7).

## The Best Time for Self-Examination

The Bible does not teach a special time of year for self-examination and humiliation. However, the approach each year of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are important reminders of our need for self-examination with the goals of purifying our lives and growing spiritually. If a Church member has been neglecting year-round self-examination, it is especially valuable to restore that habit before the Passover.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is writing about how ashamed he was to hear of the bad attitudes and awful actions during the recent Passover service of the Corinthian church. That included a lack of reverent attitudes and respectful actions as they partook of the Passover bread and wine.

Paul wrote: “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Corinthians 11:27-28; see also the context). Every human is unworthy of Christ’s sacrifice and God’s love! Paul is referring to any “unworthy manner” and attitude during the Passover service.

Sadly, there were many members of the Corinthian church that had such poor attitudes and conduct that it seemed likely that they were spiritually unconverted (had never received God’s Holy Spirit). These are the ones Paul was addressing in 2 Corinthians 13:5. He wrote: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.”

The Passover reminds us of how supremely blessed we are to have such a merciful Savior who suffered and died to pay the penalty for our sins. And we are reminded of God’s amazing love, mercy and grace as He continues to forgive us over and over and over again!

Ideally, these are thoughts we should have all year! However, many people tend to neglect self-examination, partly because it is uncomfortable.

One might use the analogy of skipping a medical check-up. If a patient feels that the outcome might be discouraging health news, they might prefer not to know the truth. However, just as seeking appropriate care is important for our physical health, seeking righteousness is important for our spiritual health—it’s more important than simply choosing what feels more comfortable!

## Staying Teachable

God wants us to be very teachable and forever hungry for a lifetime of learning. Some people neglect reading and ongoing education because they associate it with the forced and boring assignments when they were in school. Please notice that there are many scriptures, especially in the book of Proverbs, that

exhort us to seek knowledge, understanding and wisdom! It’s good to review those scriptures!

God uses many means of teaching us. Have the humility and gratitude to appreciate the many “teachers” you have had in your life! Appreciate what you’ve learned and are being taught from the Bible, the Church, ministers, teachers, family, spiritual brothers and sisters and from your own experiences.

However, we should not automatically accept the accuracy of everyone’s judgment of us but we should humbly consider them. Then, “if the shoe fits, wear it.”

When we examine ourselves, we should be looking for successes in avoiding sins as well as our sins and failures, and for times of spiritual growth as well as times of no growth.

Then our self-evaluation should lead us to sincerely repent of our sins and mistakes, and also to be encouraged by remembering the times of spiritual overcoming and progress.

## Repentance Versus Penance

How should you respond to what you learn in your self-examination? Some common religious practices teach penance as a way to make up for past sins.

One example of doing penance is the observance of Lent, which often includes sacrificing something personal, at least during those 40 days.

However, the Bible teaches repentance, rather than penance. True repentance is a combination of recognizing a sin as sin, having “godly sorrow” over our guilt, and turning from disobedience to obedience (2 Corinthians 7:8-10).

Judaism teaches that the period between Rosh Hashana (Feast of Trumpets) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is a mandatory time for self-examination, humbling oneself, doing penance and asking God for forgiveness. Many Jews believe that God then forgives all their sins of the past year on Yom Kippur! On the other hand, we in God’s Church clearly know that God forgives us immediately after we have sincerely repented of a sin.

You may be familiar with the statue of the blind “Lady Justice” holding up a balance scale. The idea is that if your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, God accepts you and regards you as righteous! Not true! God forgives as soon as He sees a person is truly repentant and is resolving to try to never again repeat the sins of his past!

About the only practice of self-denial taught in the Bible (besides denying ourselves of sinful actions!) is fasting on the Day of Atonement and occasional fasting at other times—doing without food and water for a period of time if one’s health permits it. During a fast is an ideal time to examine oneself. Fasting is a valuable spiritual tool that can help us with self-examination and becoming humbler. (See our study aid, *Tools for Spiritual Growth*.)

## An Ongoing Process

When God calls and draws someone into His Church, He expects ongoing purification and progress, spiritual growth and right action! God expects us to be overcomers (Revelation 2 and 3).

For continued spiritual growth, one must have humility and ongoing self-examination, also called introspection. Honestly assess your spiritual state including strengths and weaknesses, progress and lack of progress. Ask: “Where have I grown and where do I need to grow?”

Our thoughts and our ways are not naturally like God’s thoughts and ways, so we are exhorted to “forsake” them and become more and more like God (Isaiah 55:7-9).

Continue to regularly examine yourself. The purpose of self-examination is not self-condemnation, but transformation, so we can become more like God! **GN**

by Terri Eddington

## 50 Years in the Ministry

“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

The following individuals were honored at the 2026 General Conference of Elders for their many years of ministerial service. Wives of those serving were included in this recognition for their service alongside their husbands. Included is a synopsis of the personal reflections shared with their fellow elders and wives.



**William and Rae Eddington**  
Church Elder, Australia

“Fifty years is a long time, but the time seems to have passed in a short time, and it’s the last 30 that have been the most memorable. The challenges since the apostasy of 1995, changed my involvement, attitude and actions almost beyond comparison with earlier years.

“We all understand the responsibility of everyone called to the truth and who has become a member of the household of God to ‘grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.’ But there is one lesson I have learned that’s been one of the most important: the importance of building God-centered personal relationships with each other. Through all our trials and tribulations, it seems the breakdown of relationships have been the cause of so many issues.

“Although I pastored for quite a few years, I have never been an employee of the Church, so I speak as a ‘non-salaried elder.’ In this context, the foundation built within a congregation over many years, enables an elder to be a key influence in building strong God-centered personal relationships within that congregation, provide support to the pastor, and a bulwark against members drifting away through lack of positive relationships.”



**Joe and Jackie Horchak**  
Church Elder, United States

Joe and Jackie have served in various capacities over the years both as a Church employee and a non-Church employed elder. Currently retired, they help in the Tucson, Arizona area.

Joe shares, “I really believe that Romans 8:28 is a powerful scripture in the Bible. Virtually everything that I have done has provided me with the skills, experience and opportunities that have helped to become a servant of God. Whatever His will is for me I pray that I will have the strength and faith to move forward in His service. But, I will say that as I get older it is more of a challenge, but still enjoyable.”



**Robin and Susan Webber**  
Church Elder, United States

“We have been serving in Southern California and Las Vegas for the last 47 years. This is an anomaly and some people ask, ‘How did you do that?’ Well, we never asked to stay or to leave. Challenges and circumstances on the ground made it imperative for us to remain here. Two blessings have come from this:

“1) In some cases, we know four generations of Church family members which creates security and comfort for members.



**Paul and Monica Kieffer**  
Church Elder, Germany

Recently retired, for many years Paul has served as Regional Director for several regions around the world, most recently in the European German-language areas.

“Our most memorable experiences were the warmth and loyalty of spirit-led brethren in cultures and environments far different from the ones I grew up in.

“Three important principles we have learned over our years:

- “Look for the positive in every situation, as God tells us that all things work together for good for those who love Him.
- “Jesus came as a servant. We should be too.
- “Ask God to help you see people as He sees them, since you will sometimes encounter challenging personalities in your service to God’s people.”

“2) We have the rare ongoing blessing of enjoying our three daughters and their families, all also living in Southern California.

“Future elders: remember to always put God first, family second, and then give your all to serving our fellow believers. In so doing, give yourselves permission to rest and call ‘time out’ sometimes, for we serve and exist in a rewarding but demanding calling. Remember to listen to our wives! Everyone else knows you as ‘Mr. Pastor,’ but she knows you best and loves you, and desires you to succeed not merely as a pastor but as a disciple of Christ.

“Last but not least: Never underestimate what God can do, and will do, through you as you ‘grow in grace and knowledge’ and surrender in faith to His perfect will for you and yours.”



**Leif and Kathryn Anderson**  
Church Elder, United States

“I know I can speak for others when I say it’s difficult to wrap my mind around the figure 50. It’s been an incredible honor to serve God’s people during that five-decade run.

“After graduating from Ambassador College Big Sandy, I was sent to Canada to serve. I married the love of my life—Kathryn—and we served in the full-time ministry for three years.

“Then, due to unusual circumstances we took up a position in our currently fourth generation family business. I then served as a unsalaried elder in the Little Falls, Minnesota congregation—

mostly of widows and those of the ‘mature set.’ What a blessing it was! This became our spiritual ‘base camp.’ Business can be a rough and tumble world and it’s always good to have a group of widows and seniors to bring you back to reality. Every Sabbath we had the privilege of spending concentrated time before, during and after services together. What a treat—serious discussion and laughter that still rings in my ears.

“Another highlight was assisting by conducting Passover services in Fargo, North Dakota for over a decade. Words fail to describe what a privilege it is to

be in front of God’s saints on the most important evening of the year.

“Having been a trainee, an assistant, a full-time pastor and then a non-salaried elder, I perhaps have an unusual perspective. My respect for those men and their wives who serve God’s people full time continues to grow as our world becomes more challenging. Our Heavenly Father and Elder Brother have been most gracious sustaining us through the years—through the valleys and the peaks. We look forward to the time when genuine unity will become the shining reality.”



**Jim and Joan Tuck**  
Church Elder, United States

Jim shares: “I shake my head and wonder where the last half century went; it flew by so quickly! One thing we set our minds to do from the start was to not neglect our marriage or fam-

ily for the sake of the work of the ministry. We set aside Monday as family day, and we did things as a family. It kept us all together as our sons were growing up, but I wish I had done more.

“An important element which made the ministry a remarkable journey for Joan and me, has been all the love and friendship both with each other as well as with neighboring pastors and their wives. Friendships within the ministry are a critical social glue. They help hold the Church together tightly, as does the Holy Spirit within us. It is my encouragement for the ministry to prize and cultivate your friendships. After all, not only are we to be friends, but we are family.

“We have been privileged to travel to a variety of international places in the world over the last five decades, but a highlight was conducting leadership

training classes for our elders, deacons and their wives in Zambia and Malawi. We loved the brethren and made lasting friendships. Africa is a special place, and it is like no other place on earth. If you ever get a chance to go, seize the opportunity!

Joan says: “I was 21 when we married. I learned early on the importance of encouraging him and being careful to be a good and ‘righteous influence’ in the various scenarios that came upon us. Our 50-year trek took us across the United States. It was not an easy path going to areas where we knew no one. I look back on all the labors, all the circuits on the Sabbath, the Bible studies, youth activities, men’s clubs, ladies’ clubs, activities. Most meaningful of all were the bonds built in the process with God’s people.

“Proverbs 14:1 says, ‘The wise wom-

an builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands.’ This principle works in a congregation as well! A pastor’s wife can ‘build’ in a congregation by focusing on serving, encouraging and loving God’s people. Building also means having a carefulness in what is said and done—to promote peace. It means keeping confidences and being flexible to the variables the pastor faces working with people and situations. I’ve observed that our choices in how we help our husbands can have a positive impact on an entire congregation. In addition, a pastor’s wife can add a certain ‘soft touch’ to her husband’s ministry.

“We learned to ‘bear all things,’ and what it means to be ‘a living sacrifice.’ 1 Corinthians 15:58 encouraged me often, ‘...your labor is not in vain in the Lord.’”



**John and Merrie Elliott**  
Church Elder, United States

John writes: “Half a century of eldership has overflowed with people, places

and events all in constant motion. When Merrie and I stop and ask, ‘What was it all about?’ One word summarizes it all. We have become Family. Together, we have a father, a husband, brothers, sisters and mothers. The relationships we grow are the Family’s treasures that await bright futures, together! Success is obtained by being family with all of God’s Family, including your own. God’s faithful children comprise a hundred-fold larger spiritual Family with which to share and to love, both today and forever.

“In our home hangs a plaque that reads, ‘The love of a Family is life’s greatest blessing.’ Its noun, ‘Family’ is capitalized, which we attribute to refer to God’s entire Family. Of the blessings we have

received in our 50 years as an elder and wife, the greatest have been family, and God’s Family. It’s hard to be one without also being the other. Truly, ‘the love of a Family is life’s greatest blessing.’ Thank you for being our Family.”

Merrie: “This milestone invites contemplation on both the calling to ministry and the role God assigns within it. If I may offer encouragement to the ladies, the role of a minister’s wife involves striving daily to be godly, marked by submission to authority and to her own husband. Her primary responsibility is to her husband and children. When she faithfully fulfills this role, her husband can fully devote himself to the work to which he has been ordained. Wives are

not ordained to the ministry, but we are called to serve alongside our husbands.

“Be thankful to God for where He has placed you. I once resisted being married to a minister; yet, when I surrendered my expectations, I found blessing and contentment and have since learned to give thanks for this calling.

“Over these past 50 years, we have experienced both joy and trial. In difficult times, learning to be still and wait on the Lord, as Psalm 37:7 says, has been essential: ‘Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him’ (English Standard Version). Looking back, I thank God not only for the blessings but also for the trials that strengthened our faith.”



**Mario and Caty Seiglie**  
Church Elder, United States

Mario shares: “First, being in the ministry is an undeserved honor and it has been a great pleasure to serve God and His people in this way. In my 50 ministerial years, Romans 8:28 is a key scripture in this regard. In the direst moments, when the Bride of Christ was severely tested, God was there to rescue and show us how those trials were so vital in shaping our godly spiritual character. Namely, what is so precious

in His sight. As Christ said, if you choose self-sacrifice and lose your lives for His glory, you will continually discover true life. But if you choose to keep your lives for yourselves, you will forfeit what you try to keep. Self-sacrifice includes putting Ecclesiastes 9:10 into action.

“One of the toughest tests for many was in 1995. My wife and I adopted the words of Joshua 24:14-15 and I repeated them to the congregations in my care, ‘...But as for me and my house, we will serve the Eternal.’

“God gets all the honor and glory for the privilege to serve in employed service for 50 years! My most memorable and fulfilling years were serving and pastoring the Chilean congregations with my wife, Caty, for 21 years, and the Orange County, California congregation for 25 years.

“The three years we served in the Spanish region under President Denny Luker, until his death, left a deep impression of outstanding godly servant leadership. Also, the 22 years I served in the Council of Elders with the help of

my wife, Caty, were quite profitable. We also can’t leave out the rewarding experience of raising four wonderful daughters, loving their husbands, and being blessed with eleven grandchildren.”

Caty shares: “Over these 50 years we have lived in and served in multiple countries: the USA, Colombia, and Chile (my homeland). While living in Chile we served five other countries in the Southern Cone, so we’ve had the privilege of knowing all the congregations in the Spanish area.

“We’ve learned that regardless of culture, language or customs, the needs of those God calls are the same: they want to be part of the Body of Christ, to be fed wholesome and doctrinally sound spiritual food, and to feel that the Church cares about them as God’s children.

“Through the hard times we have experienced as a church, many times God has shown us that when things seem humanly impossible to solve, He is always there to guide us.

“Advice for younger elder’s wives:

“1. Make time for the sick, the shut-ins, the elderly, the children, the young people and those who are going through trials of all kinds.

“2. Make a point of personally greeting and acknowledging the visitors and new people every Sabbath.

“3. If possible, always go to a funeral or memorial service, even if your husband is not the one officiating it. It means the world to the grieving families.

“4. Be approachable at church services and available by phone, texts and emails. Return the calls and messages ASAP.

“5. Help your husband so he can concentrate on his ministerial duties.

“6. When things feel overwhelming, especially with young children or health issues, or when experiencing your own trials, give yourself some grace and delegate. I’m always in awe of the many talented brethren in our congregations with a huge disposition to help and contribute.”

## 60 Years in the Ministry



**Bob and Dyanne Dick**  
Church Elder, United States

In reflecting back on 60 years. Mr. Dick says: “I must start with a salute to the wisdom of my father, Raymond Dick. During the Feast in 1960, my high school senior year, Dad said while driving to lunch, ‘Bob, I found you a wife.’ I replied, ‘I am not interested.’ The discussion ended there. Four years later, approaching my senior year in England, Dad wrote to me:

‘There’s a left-handed blonde here in Pasadena you might be interested in writing to.’ I found her picture in the Envoy and in August, 1964 I wrote a letter to her. We met in July, 1965 and married in October, 1965. I have been thanking dad for 60 years.

“Of great delight: nothing equals the thrill of sharing first love with those newly called out of this world—helping them learn and face the challenge of transforming their lives. Another delight has been working with teens.

Lessons learned:

- “Members aren’t required to share their secrets with you—they do so voluntarily. It takes courage to do that, so treat them with great compassion and respect.
- “Lead members in finding their own solutions. Everyone treasures what they own. You own your advice; they own solutions they found with your help, and will remember them far longer.
- “One of the greatest mistakes a ministerial couple can make is sacrificing

their children on the ladder of service. Top keys to UCG’s success:

- “Remember a phrase that’s now part of our culture: ‘In order to do a work we must first become a work.’
- “UCG came into being for one reason—to preserve cherished doctrines. But there is more to it, captured in one phrase: ‘If we don’t hold fast our doctrines we have nothing. If all we have are our doctrines we still have nothing.’”

Dyanne shares: “We were just out of college and newly married when we were sent to serve in congregations. I knew I was inexperienced so my goal was to serve alongside my husband as best I could. I was his visiting partner, which was a wonderful way to get to know the people we were serving. My focus has always been to support my husband in his role in the ministry.

“My second focus was to serve the ladies wherever we lived, and to let them know how valuable their service was to the Church. That was the be-

ginning of having afternoon teas and women’s gatherings, which enabled women to get to know one another better in each congregation.

“There are so many lessons learned in our 60 years. We both learned that we could be of help to people with their problems, but we couldn’t solve their problems for them. To give people time to talk with you before and after church, they need your attention, but this makes it impossible to speak with everyone. I had to learn to this, as my desire was to chat with everyone.

“Serving in the Church is a busy and hectic lifestyle. All the while you are also a wife, mother, grandmother and eventually perhaps also caring for aging parents. Set priorities. Make time to date your mate, attend your children’s school events and spend time with your grandchildren. Once you retire and life slows, you’ll reflect on the life you’ve lived. It is then that you can see the very precious opportunity God has given each of us to serve the people He has called.”



**Fred Kellers**  
Church Elder, United States

“Early in our ministry, my wife Lucretia and I were transferred to Oregon. A gracious couple—the Dickinsons—owned a very successful jam company, but what stayed with me most was the example of servant leadership shown by Mr. Dickinson, a local elder. I watched him sweep floors, set up chairs, and even scrape gum off the church hall floor with his pocketknife. Despite his standing in the world, he was never afraid to do the humblest tasks. I’ve told my children many times what an example that was—not only for me, but for all the brethren.

“I remember many relationships built through anointing and baptizing. In 1997, there was a request for someone to help pastor in Nigeria.

Likely because of the turmoil there, no one had volunteered. Lucretia and I had previously served at summer camps in South Africa, so after prayer and discussion, we stepped forward. Little did we know how many years we would spend in West Africa, including Nigeria, Ghana and Togo. Along the way, we formed lasting friendships with brethren who became more like family and what a blessing they were to us.

“Because Lucretia is not here to receive this honor of 60 years of service, I want to speak of her faithfulness. Many times she cared for our four children while I was busy serving. She was often the listening ear for those who needed comfort. She didn’t like ‘roughing it’—yet she willingly trav-

eled to Africa, used a bucket for a toilet, and slept on sheets stained with snail trails. What an example she was. I know she will rise to meet her true Husband, Jesus Christ.

“One of the greatest responsibilities we have as pastors is to lead others into service. Where pastors were once often first-generation believers, now most are second to fifth generation in the faith. The examples they grow up seeing, leaves a lasting mark and shapes the leaders they become.

“I have made many mistakes over the years, but my Father and my elder Brother, Jesus Christ, have helped me time and again. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve Their children.”

## Honoring Service on the Council of Elders



**Dan Dowd**

On May 5, 2026 the Council of Elders thanked Dan Dowd for his nine years of service on the Council of Elders. Tim Pebworth, Council chairman, presented Mr. Dowd with a thank you card signed by each Council member, along with a gift.

Mr. Dowd served three, three-year terms, from 2017 through 2026. One of his biggest areas of service was as chairman of the Roles and Rules Committee, which can be a rather demanding and time-consuming role.



**Victor Kubik**

On May 7, the Council of Elders thanked Victor Kubik for his most recent three years of service on the Council of Elders. Tim Pebworth, Council chairman, presented Mr. Kubik with a thank you card signed by each Council member, along with a gift.

Mr. Kubik served most recently from 2023 through 2026, but he has been on the Council periodically throughout the history of UCG. One of his biggest areas of service was as chairman of the Ethics Committee.



**Autumn Grace Meidinger**

March 8, 2026

## Births

### Autumn Grace Meidinger

Aaron and Chelsea Meidinger of the Cincinnati East, Ohio congregation are thrilled to announce the birth of their first child, Autumn Grace. She very punctually arrived on her due date of March 8, 2026, weighing 7 lbs 13 oz and measuring 20.5 inches long. The happy grandparents are David and Laura



**Marion River Rains**

April 20, 2026

Meidinger of Rio Rancho, New Mexico and David and Cathy Salek of Milford, Ohio.

### Marion River Rains

Matthew and Ariella Rains of the Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania congregation are excited to announce the arrival of their first child, Marion River Rains. She was born on April 20, 2026 at 5:22 a.m., weighing 8 lbs 14 oz and was 20.5 inches long.

Proud grandparents are Michael and Aimee McNally from



**Al and Vicki Scheck**

50<sup>th</sup> anniversary

San Jose, California, and Roger and Erica Rains of Worcester, Massachusetts.

## Anniversaries

### Al and Vicki Scheck

Vicki and Al Scheck celebrated 50 years of marriage on March 7, 2026. In keeping with the “eat dessert first” philosophy, they commemorated their 50th year of marriage by taking

some special trips in 2025. But the most joyous celebration came when the UCG Tulsa congregation honored them with a beautiful cake-and-punch anniversary reception after services.

Vicki started attending the Radio Church of God with her mother and siblings in Nashville, Tennessee in 1965. Al’s first Sabbath attendance was as an AC student in 1970. (He had read a lot of literature and knew most of the doctrines, but hadn’t attended services before that.)

Both Al and Vicki went on to attend Ambassador College, Pasadena—and graduated in the class of 1973. Dr. Herman Hoeh performed their wedding in the grand lobby of Ambassador Auditorium and then loaned them his credit card as a wedding gift!

Over the years, the Schecks both held positions of employ-

ment for the Church and college. Vicki served as the executive assistant to Ronald Dart and, subsequently, Roderick Meredith, each of whom was over pastoral/Church administration at the time. Al’s final position was as purchasing manager for the Church until his resignation in 1995.

A new job took the Scheck family to Long Island, New York, where Al was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets in 2000. After 10 years on the East Coast, they returned to the Pasadena, California area and then started a travel business that continues to keep them busy.

Three years ago, the couple moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma in order to be closer to daughter Ashley Newman in Kansas, and Vicki’s sister Debbie Wood in Texas. **UN**

Announcements for *United News* can be sent by email (preferred) to [un@ucg.org](mailto: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.

## Local Church News

### Facing Life with Strength and Laughter

Putting together a women’s weekend is no small task. There’s always so much to do and many hands involved in making it all work. It’s really a marvel how a small group can come together and do all that needs to be done and the Southwest Missouri Women’s Weekend was no different.

Held from March 13-15 in Ozark, Missouri, the weekend’s theme was “Facing Life With Strength and Laughter.” From 11 states, the furthest of which was Arizona, 40 ladies attended this event. There were 62 in attendance for Sabbath services. Sabbath special speakers were Hansel New and Tom Robinson.

After services we all enjoyed a scrumptious meal. We never want to leave our male family members to be sitting around in hotels or at home alone, so once everyone’s bellies were satisfied from lunch, 13 of the men headed out to Warren and Joan Ott’s farm for a chili fellowship.

Our charming moderator Jamie Bettes welcomed us to the weekend. Opening remarks were given by Merna

Leisure-Eppick, who went over the history of United’s women’s weekends and noted that 14,000 women worldwide have attended these weekends.

Wanda Cook had to stay home due to her health but soldiered on and recorded a beautiful piano solo of “Hallelujah” by Leonard Cohen for us to enjoy. This was followed by a get acquainted activity, “Are You A Lion, Otter, Golden Retriever, or Beaver?” led by Laurie Cogle. The activity had us all thinking about what qualities we either had or didn’t have and comparing notes with one another.

Our keynote speaker from the St. Louis area was Donna Robinson. Her speech titled, “There are Blessings Even in Despair” centered around her aunt and mother who both died of ALS and how her mother did not let ALS defeat her and retained her humor through it all.

The next speech was titled, “Strength Rooted in Joyful Service” given by Emily New. She spoke of joy and being a light. A few takeaways were: “Joy is deeper than happiness,” “Joy



can overflow into generosity” and “There is strength in community.” We continued with table discussions led by Cristal Curtis and then began the silent auction.

On Sunday, while the men went off to breakfast together, we heard a speech from speaker Cheryl Carlson called, “Never Give Up!” She explained how she came into the Church, ended up marrying two different men with the last name Carlson, and how she survived being a widow twice with the love of God.

Our next speaker Rachelle New, asked the difficult question, what five books of the Bible would you keep if you could have only five? She then gave us a wonderful iron

sharpening iron 31-day wisdom challenge. Another group activity was led by Rhonda Lopez. Each table was handed a kit of supplies to create a snowman. As the weekend was cold, it seemed an appropriate craft. It was a fun project, and we all ended up laughing and trying to show off our crafty prowess.

Jamie Bettes was our next speaker. She told us about two toxic relationships she had with her dad and ex-husband and how that affected her. She also spoke of how God had worked with her before she was led to the Church and her current husband. Our final speaker was Linda Boswell whose topic was “Overcoming Nothing.” She explained how she had been tar-

geted by a scammer, and how she finally came through it with God’s help.

As the day wound down our silent auction ended. Overall, with donations, we raised \$2,000. The funds will be split between the women of Zambia and LifeNets for whatever use is most urgent at the time. The ladies also signed cards that will be given to LifeNets to be distributed to the Zambian ladies.

The remainder of the day was spent enjoying some rambunctious minute-to-win it games and hearing closing remarks by Donna Robinson and Linda Martens. What a fun and wonderful weekend it was! We all look forward to welcoming even more ladies next year!

*Lorelei Nettles*



This year, UCG is featuring a series of paintings by David Teague, an artist and member of the Cincinnati East congregation. His paintings depict the Holy Days and are on display at the home office.

In this video series, David Teague speaks about some of the highlights of his artwork, indicating how he chose to depict certain concepts and include personal details that add meaning to each work.

The first three videos have already been posted: Passover, Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost.

Learn more at: [ucg.org/members/holy-day-paintings](https://ucg.org/members/holy-day-paintings)

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# CALLING ALL GRADUATES!



We plan to feature the high school and university graduates of 2026 in the July issue of *United News*! Please take a few minutes to answer the questions below and send a photograph.

Please include your phone number or email address in case we need to confirm spellings, etc. (they will not be printed). Send with a recent, appropriate photo of the graduate. Digital photos should be at least 800 pixels in their smallest dimension to print sharply.

Send by email to [un@ucg.org](mailto:un@ucg.org), or send by mail to *United News*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027. We may edit for clarity and/or length to meet the 250-word maximum length.

#### New this year:

You can also submit your announcement online using the included QR code. You will still need to submit your photo by email to [un@ucg.org](mailto:un@ucg.org).



#### Here's what to include:

1. Graduate's name
2. Parents' names (if high school grad)
3. Congregation
4. School, work, internship, co-op, other accomplishments
5. Interests, interesting facts about yourself, Church activities you're involved in, hobbies, unusual skills, favorite scripture, etc.
6. Plans after graduation

Congratulations!