



## United Church of God an International Association

### eNews from Ministerial and Member Services

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#### Personal From the President...

Dear fellow servants of God,

Two major year-end family events dominated United Church of God news in the past few weeks. One was the Winter Family Weekend in the Cincinnati area while the other was the Northwest Weekend in Portland, Oregon.

The 2018 Winter Family Weekend is the largest annual UCG event, and thanks to the work of many dedicated volunteers, one of the smoothest-running ever. The event began with a Friday evening Bible study that encouraged youth to take God's calling seriously right now. 1,217 brethren attended Sabbath services, with 61 watching via webcast at the home office, along with more than 500 other web connections. My sermon and a variety of seminars directed at different age groups addressed the theme "Iron that Sharpens Iron."

The conference center hosted the usual mix of seminars, dances, performances and other activities, which were all very well attended. The sports program featured 47 volleyball teams (3 more than last year) and 14 basketball teams (one more than last year).



Preteen basketball at Winter Family Weekend.

The continued growth of this event has us considering larger venues for future years, but in 2019 the Winter Family Weekend will take place at the same location. It's not too soon to plan to join us!

Then in the Northwest with the spectacular Columbia River as the backdrop, approximately 320 of God's people gathered to celebrate the 54th annual Northwest Family Weekend December 21-24 in Portland, Oregon. It started Friday evening with a Bible study by Paul Moody titled "Steadfast to the End," which was the theme for the event. Many stayed afterwards to catch up with old friends and sing hymns. Sabbath morning opened with a teen/young adult Bible study presented by Rex Sexton and a speakers workshop led by Howard Davis. Services were held after lunch with a sermonette by ABC graduate Derrick Slocum followed by a sermon from Ben Light. There was a nice ensemble to back up the hymns, and the combined area choir sang a beautiful rendition of "God of Angel Armies." The rest of the evening consisted of Ballroom Dance Lessons, a Family Dance

(themed "Imperial Gardens") and a Teen Dance (themed "Moonlit Forest"), with both dances decorated in stunning fashion.



Choir performs at Northwest Family Weekend.

Seminars were the order of the day on Sunday. Presentations included: Bob Dick - "Steadfast to the End", Tanya Winger - "Resumes, Interviews and Careers, Oh My!", Fred Reeves - "Approval Addiction", Roc Corbett - "Caregiving; helping others remain steadfast", Paul Moody - "The African Work", Rex Sexton - "The Dispersion of the Apostles", Ben Light - "Youth Corps Projects and Opportunities." Sunday evening brought a young adult buffet dinner and a "Minute to Win It" social mixer. Monday included a sports skills clinic followed by volleyball and basketball games for the young and young at heart. The day ended with a game night and pizza feed hosted by Rex and Patty Sexton. Tuesday wrapped up the event with a group ski outing on beautiful and snowy Mt. Hood.

Many positive comments were shared by those who attended. We had attendees from six non-UCG congregations in the area. It truly is an event that binds people together and is a real spiritual booster during the long winter months.

On December 25, Bob Dick and Rex Sexton hosted a ministerial training day. All of the full-time pastors came (Roc Corbett, Paul Moody, Ben Light, Jeff Richards) plus Rob Slocum and Fred Reeves. The ladies met at the Slocums' place. Bob Dick and Rex Sexton split the time discussing everything from the ministerial code of ethics to visiting. We also talked about the calendar of events for the next year. It was a very valuable day of practical training. All want to make it a permanent part of the Northwest Weekend schedule.

That's how last year ended. We're now in 2019. I'd like share some thoughts about our mindset for the coming year.

### **Do you believe?**

The gospel of Mark holds a powerful story of Jesus that can be a challenge for us.

In the 9th chapter of Mark, we find Jesus having just gone through the transfiguration, an indescribable miracle. On top of a mountain, the disciples Peter, James and John openly witnessed Jesus speaking directly with Elijah and Moses, legendary and powerful leaders in the history of God's people.

Afterwards, as the biblical account continues, Jesus "came to the disciples" (Mark 9:14). What did He find? There was a "great multitude" assembled around the disciples, and a number of scholars were hotly debating with them.

Jesus asked one about what was going on. A voice from the assembled crowd rang out in answer.

A father had brought his afflicted son to the disciples for healing. The son suffered agonizing convulsions and was thought to be possessed. The father told the disciples about this terrible condition, expecting the disciples to set things right, but disappointingly, "they could not" (verse 18).

Saddened at the apparent lack of faith, Jesus instructed the father to bring the child forward. As it turns out, the child was indeed possessed, as the evil spirit suddenly recognized Jesus. It knew better than all present who Jesus was. It cast the boy into terrible convulsions.

Doubtless this was most unsettling and disturbing to the assembled crowd. They apparently didn't know who Jesus was. Things seemed to be getting worse in a hurry. What could be done?

In contrast, Jesus was the model of tranquility. "How long has this been happening?" Jesus calmly asked the boy's agitated father (Mark 19:21, New Living Translation). "Since he was a little boy," the father sadly answered. In other words, probably years.

Now the story takes a remarkable turn. The father briefly described the grueling trial that his son (and he) had been going through for apparently quite a long time. The father was exhausted. He was out of options. Even these amazing disciples of Jesus were apparently powerless to do anything.

So, perhaps inadvertently, the father directly put a challenge to Jesus. Not expecting much, he tiredly said to the Son of God: "Have mercy on us and help us, *if you can*" (verse 22, NLT, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus wasn't having any of that! He instantly declared: "What do you mean, 'If I can'?" (verse 23).

Jesus response to the challenge? "*Anything* is possible if a person believes."

The father of the boy suddenly sensed that the person standing before him wasn't any ordinary human being. Dare he believe that after all this time, there might actually be *hope*? Starting to comprehend the powerful nature of who he was dealing with, "Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; *help my unbelief!*'" (verse 24, New King James Version).

As the crowd rushed together to see what was happening, Jesus openly healed the young boy, who collapsed unconscious. Many thought that the boy had perished from the experience. As many witnesses looked on in astonishment, "Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose" (verse 27).

How many times have you and I been here? How many times have we read a promise God makes in the Bible, but we don't think that it applies to us? How many times have you and I thought, "Yes, I read that. Yes, that's a promise. But that probably doesn't apply or work for me. That applies to someone else who is truly deserving."

In effect, when we do this, we can take the place of the child's father. We can inadvertently be asking God in our prayers, "Have mercy on us and help us, *if you can.*"

And, like the child's father in this true story, we can cognitively believe, we can superficially believe with our minds, but our hearts aren't convinced. We don't have hope. We may not think of ourselves as worthy.

Does that mean that we're lost, never to find help or relief? The good news is: of course not!

Let's read this promise and believe it with our whole being! "This High Priest of ours [Jesus] *understands our weaknesses*, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15, NLT).

What do we do when anxious or afraid? "Let us come *boldly* to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us *when we need it most*" (verse 16, NLT).

We can *boldly* ask for faith, for the courage to apply that faith by actively trusting God to fight our battles, to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We can even ask for help to believe when we don't believe!

And God *will* answer those prayers!

Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother and King, declares to us today, "*Anything* is possible if a person believes" (Mark 9:23, NLT). So, let us ask for, receive and *act* on the very faith of Jesus Christ, that--despite the trials of living in this world--we may receive this promise: "*Blessed are those who believe*" (John 20:29).

### Finally...

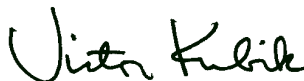
My next two Inside United podcasts will feature Scott Ashley, managing editor of *Beyond Today* magazine and pastor of Denver, Colorado Springs and Frisco, Colorado. He just attended the annual meeting of the Biblical Archaeological Society and the Evangelical Theological Society in Denver. These meetings attracted scholars from all over the world, though most were from the United States with a few from Europe, Israel and Asia. They covered a range of topics with literally hundreds of sessions, but the lectures Scott attended focused mostly on recent archaeological discoveries relating to the Bible.

Most of the speakers were either archaeologists working in the Holy Land, biblical researchers or published authors on biblical subjects. Most had PhDs in biblically related fields. Several have published multiple books. So these were the cream of the crop when it comes to biblical research and biblical archaeology.

Be sure to listen to the coming two podcasts in which Scott discusses some of his impressions of the meetings and how some of the archaeological findings confirm the veracity of the Bible.

Off to a good start for 2019!

In Christ's service,



Victor Kubik

## From Ministerial and Member Services...

### Recent Ordination



Jonathan and Carol Hill

On December 29, 2018, Jonathan Hill was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Carol, serve in the San Jose, California, congregation.

### Pastoral Changes

We appreciate the service that retired pastor Steve Shafer has provided to four Michigan congregations as their pastor since 2016. On January 1, he transferred responsibility for Ann Arbor, Flint and Detroit to Mike Phelps,



who has been named pastor for those congregations. Craig Clark has been named the pastor for the congregation in Gaylord, Michigan, in addition to his assignment as pastor for Freeland, Michigan.

## Report from Winter Camp



Winter Camp was a great success this year. We concluded camp yesterday, January 2nd. We ended up with 96 campers and 47 staff for a week filled with fun activities and plenty of opportunities to build friendships. This was a record number of campers (96) for Winter Camp, going back to the first Winter Camp in 1995.



Many campers have commented that this has been one of the best years of camp they have had. They said the Christian Living classes as well as the Bible Class were very helpful to them as they continue to grow in their relationship with God and understand God's vision for them. The campers showed a high interest in the Question and Answer sessions with thought-provoking questions as well as insightful answers in the group discussion. Overall there was a wonderful amount of participation and a great sense of positivity.



We didn't have the best weather for winter camp as we only had a little snow and had to change some activities to handle the weather, but the campers and staff took it all in stride. We had a wonderful group growing together and building our relationship with God.

-- Aaron Creech, camp director

## Family Study Guide Available

The latest Family Study Guide, *God's Fruit of the Spirit, Goodness*, has been completed and is ready for use. We define godly goodness as thinking, standing up for, and actively doing God's way. It is living our lives in the excellent, fitting and morally right way. We discuss why and how it is important to express the godly trait of goodness towards others by reviewing how Jesus lived a life of "goodness" while on the earth. We also study biblical examples of how others expressed Godly goodness.

Pastors, as you review this Study Guide you may find the material useful for sermons or adult Bible studies. In addition to the spiritual content, many of the questions and activities in the lesson can help adults understand the issues our teens and young children are dealing with on a daily basis as they strive to live God's way of life. Please feel free to share with all others in the congregation, not just your parents or youth leaders.

You can find the Guide on the [Family Study Guides webpage](#) or in the [Family Guides Dropbox](#). Please let us know if you have difficulty locating them.

We hope that your families continue to find value in the UCG's Youth Instruction Family Study Guides.

-- Randy and Kay Schreiber, Youth Instruction Coordinators


## Inside United Podcast

### Scott Ashley - Archaeology, Part 1

Scott Ashley joins Victor Kubik in this "tel"-all on modern archaeology and how it supports Biblical history. <https://www.ucg.org/members/united-news/inside-united/inside-united-podcast-102-scott-ashley-archaeology-part-1>

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