



Beyond Today Magazine Reader Survey Results

By Peter Eddington

Our dedicated Media and Communications staff works hard to ensure that our message of the gospel of the Kingdom is as relevant, compelling and motivational as possible.

To help accomplish this goal and to see how our readers and viewers view our flagship publication, the *Beyond Today* magazine, a comprehensive survey was conducted during March and April of 2020. We received responses from 851 people and received their feedback on 27 key questions.

We are pleased to report the survey results with the following statistics and accompanying charts:

Q1. Please tell us how much you agree with the following statements:

• I appreciate being exposed to new points of view or ways of thinking about things — 91%

Strongly Agree or Agree.

• I feel engaged by the content of the magazine — 91% Strongly Agree or Agree.

• The content of the magazine is relevant to our society and the times in which we live — 93% Strongly Agree or Agree.

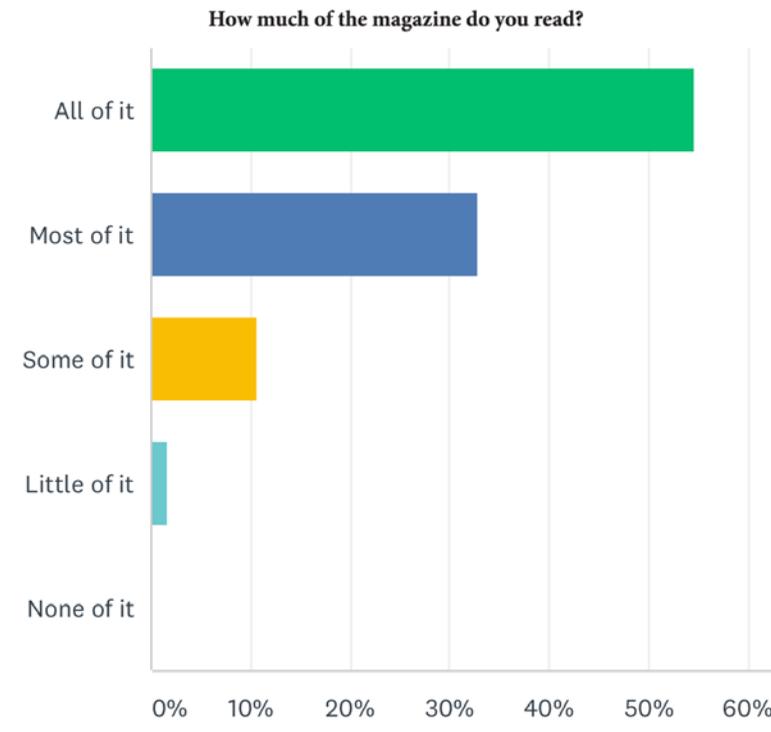
• I like the format and design of the magazine — 89% Strongly Agree or Agree.

• I like the overall content of the magazine — 92% Strongly Agree or Agree.

• I would like to read more articles written by women — 24% Strongly Agree or Agree, 67% Neutral, 9% Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

• I prefer a small number of longer articles be included in each issue of the magazine — 32% Strongly Agree or Agree, 48% Neutral, 19% Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

• I prefer a wide variety of shorter articles be included in



each issue of the magazine — 51% Strongly Agree or Agree, 41% Neutral, 8% Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

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Brethren Weather the Pandemic

In an effort to connect brethren as we all experience the world changing due to the effects of COVID-19, we've compiled in this issue reports from 18 different areas and over eight languages, representing thousands of people who keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days, and hold onto the teachings of Jesus Christ. Thanks to Matt Hernandez for his graphic design work on the countries represented.

By reading about the state of others around the world, perhaps we can better pray for each other and have a broadened perspective of the lives of our brethren in different areas.

Africa

Angola: The COVID-19 pandemic in Angola, specifically in the city of Luanda, has caused misery to the population. All of the brethren are affected. About 90 percent of the Angolan population are poor and living hand-to-mouth, buying from informal food markets on side-streets. The Angolan government has isolated the capital (Luanda) from the rest of the country to prevent the spread of the virus to other cities, and has imposed other limitations in these markets. General poverty and hunger have increased as no one can work. The Church has encouraged all to obey the civil authorities and has established a way to communicate with each other, providing support to those in need when possible. The distribution of the hardcopy *Boa Nova* (Portuguese *Beyond Today*) magazine has been held back in some areas of Angola due to the government-imposed isolation of Luanda. We sent the latest issues to the brethren via Whatsapp from cellphones.

All religious gatherings were prohibited until June 24. The

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General Conference of Elders Annual Meeting

By Ariana Del Signore

The 2020 General Conference of Elders was held via webcast from the home office in Cincinnati on Sunday, May 4.

After greeting those listening online and making some opening comments, Council Secretary Frank Dunkle introduced Council Chairman Dr. Donald Ward. Dr. Ward's prerecorded address covered the Church's *raison d'être*, our reason for being. He noted that this is equivalent to asking, "Why were you born?" He spoke about the purpose of God, to bring sons and daughters into His family. Dr. Ward urged elders to strive to

encourage each member to take his or her ownership of the truth and become a dispenser—one who is ready and willing with his or her feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

UCG President Victor Kubik then welcomed everyone and remarked that the theme of the 2020 GCE meeting, "Moving Forward with Conviction, Commitment and Courage," is a perfect theme for the 25th anniversary of UCG, despite the current health crisis that prevented us from holding it in person this year.

He did not believe it was a mistake—God allowed us to have this kind of meeting for the 25th anniversary for a reason, as we

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Mark Welch delivers his address during the annual meeting of the GCE. Presentations were webcast around the world from the home office.

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Victor Kubik writes about leadership through empathy—pg. 3

Council Letter

Dan Dowd focuses on the odds of God choosing to call you, out of billions of people on earth —pg. 4

Class of 2020

Congratulations to all of the seniors graduating this year!—pp. 9-12

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Unconventional Outreach

One couple's story about sharing God's Sabbath in an unexpected way—pg. 18

ABC Graduation

Read about ABC graduation and one student's reflection after a semester shadowed by COVID-19—pg. 19

The Good News

A New Commandment

(Don Hooser)—pg. 7

Do All Lives Matter?

(Vincent L. Braddock)—pg. 8

What Should I Do When I'm Afraid?

(Katherine Rowland)—pg. 8

A More Excellent Way

(John LaBissoniere)—pg. 13

• I prefer to see more photographs, charts and graphics to help me understand the content of the magazine — 48% Strongly Agree or Agree, 44% Neutral, 8% Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Q2. Please tell us which articles interest you the most:

• I am interested in articles on basic Bible teachings (such as heaven, hell, soul, salvation, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, grace, Sabbath, Holy Days, etc.) — 94% Strongly Agree or Agree.

• I am interested in articles on social issues (such as abortion, abuse, addictions, homosexuality, crime, bullying, etc.) — 68% Strongly Agree or Agree, 26% Neutral.

• I am interested in articles on marriage, parenting and family relations — 65% Strongly Agree or Agree, 29% Neutral.

• I am interested in articles on personal finances/budgeting — 47% Strongly Agree or Agree, 41% Neutral.

• I am interested in articles about how to build good relationships with others — 47% Strongly Agree or Agree, 41% Neutral.

• I am interested in articles on how to better live a Christian life — 80% Strongly Agree or Agree, 18% Neutral.

• I am interested in articles on proofs of the Bible (such as archeology, creation, science and the Bible, astronomy, etc.) — 88% Strongly Agree or Agree, 10% Neutral.

• I am interested in articles on Bible prophecy — 95% Strongly Agree or Agree.

• I am interested in articles on world conditions and events — 88% Strongly Agree or Agree.

• I am interested in articles on biblical food laws, health, diet, physical fitness, exercise, etc. — 71% Strongly Agree or Agree, 24% Neutral.

Q3. How much of the magazine do you read?

• 54% say they read all of it.

• 33% most of it.

• 11% some of it.

• 2% little of it.

• 0% none of it.

Q4. Are you:

• 56% of respondents were male.

• 44% of respondents were female.

Q5. What is your age group?

• 33% who filled out the survey are age 59 or below.

• 67% who filled out the survey are age 60 or above.

We received individual comments from 468 of the survey respondents. Here are just some of the verbatim comments:

• The magazine content is excellent. Keep on the good work! THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH. WRITERS DO A GREAT JOB.

• I would like to see a permanent Q + A Feature. A beautiful magazine.

• I have been reading *The Good News* and now *Beyond Today* for at least 25 years! I have learned things that have helped me grow in my spiritual walk beyond my expectation, and pray fervently for your continued ministry. God richly bless you all!

• Overall a fantastic Christian publication. Would like to see far more content on Science and the Bible.

• Sometimes I feel the magazine puts too much of its stories on "the law" e.g. Christmas holidays and observance of Passover etc. Although it is necessary to remind people of this and of maybe the "right" way to be a Christian, it would be nice to see more stories on the love, grace, and forgiveness of Christ.

• I really look forward to your magazine. It's the height of my day to read and reread it, and I like to keep each issue. They're so informative.

• Discovering the truth is the best gift I've ever received and I thank God for that awakening and *BT* and *UCG* for their pastors. My next step is to keep every Sabbath Holy and progress with increasing in knowledge and this is the way. Thank you all. "Thy Kingdom come."

• I have developed personally and spiritually since I started reading *Beyond Today* and thank you for your good work.

• Thank you for your very informative magazine and other booklets. They have deepened my understanding of the Bible and "made sense" of many passages which were previously a mystery to me.

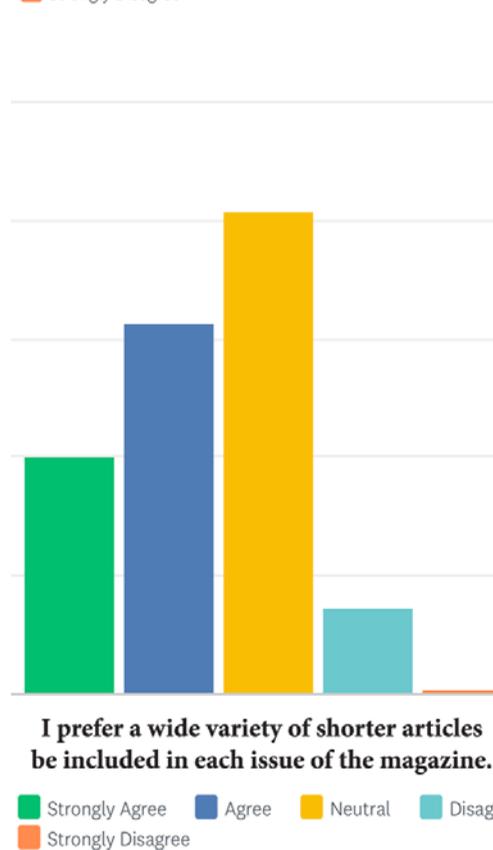
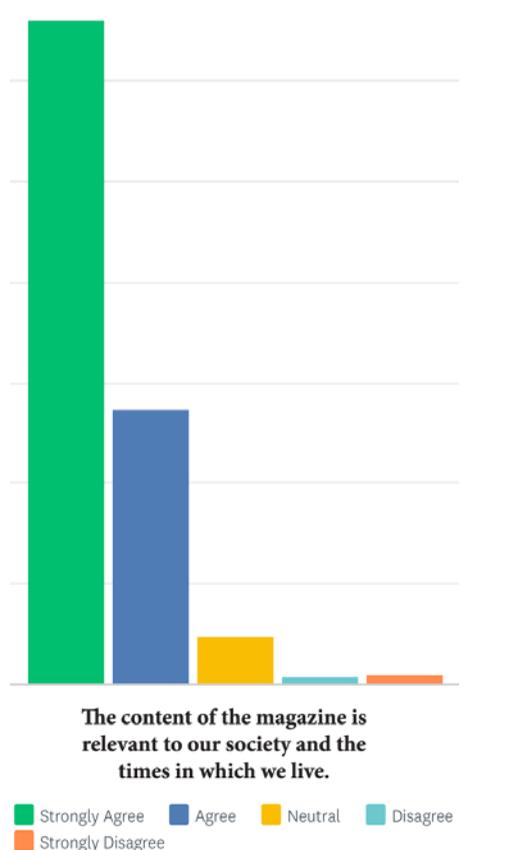
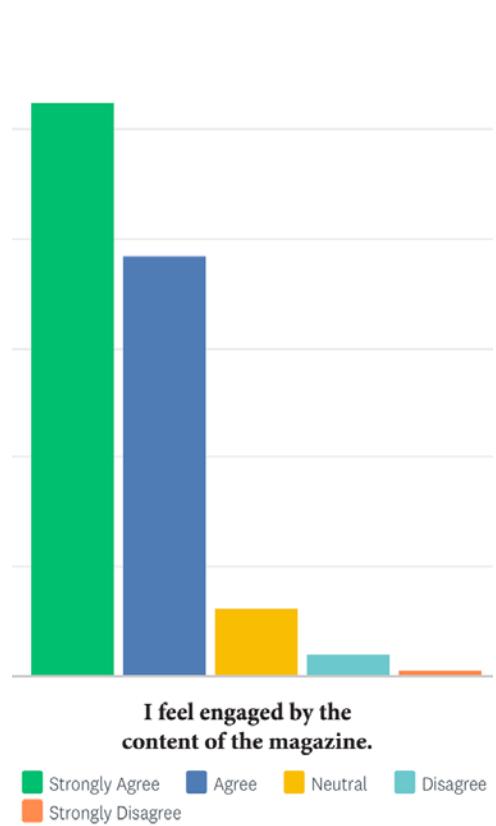
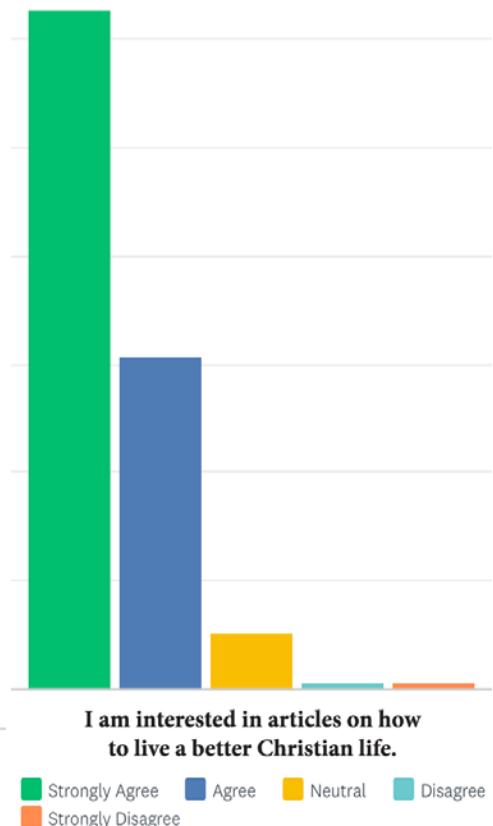
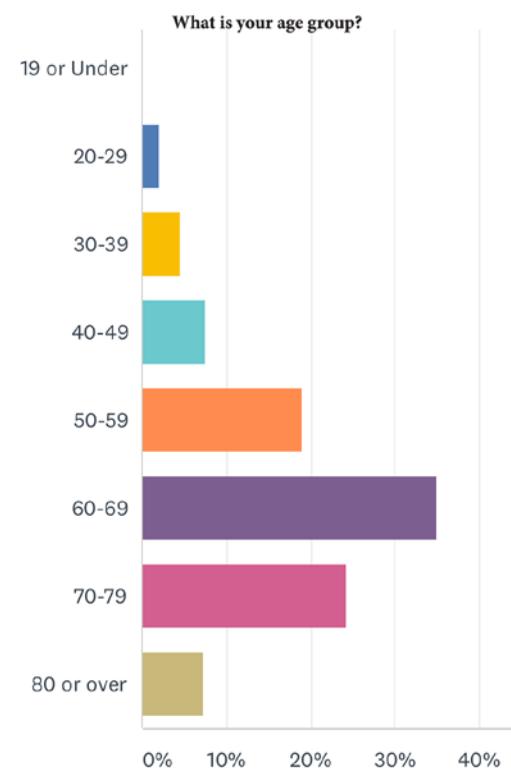
• I have found this magazine to be a wonderful source of biblical prophecy relating to current world events.

• I am really glad that I found *Beyond Today*! It has given me back my close relationship with my Creator and my Christ Jesus. I have learned more with all of your publications, booklets and videos. Thank you so much United Church of God. You all teach the true gospel and the coming Kingdom of God. God Bless you all.

• I appreciate the magazine and its content very much! It addresses world issues from a biblical point of view and gives believers valuable insights applicable to daily living.

• I very much enjoy reading this magazine. I have learned much and have gathered strength in helping me to understand more in GOD's ways and HIS Bible. Thank you.

• Best Christian magazine I've ever read. I've learned a lot and like the Current Events and Trends section best. Some of your articles are a little too technical or detailed for me.



Conclusion

All of this will help our writers, editors, designers and other editorial staff focus on how to best serve our readers. We believe the results of this reader survey have been rather positive overall. The level of support and agreement from our readers has been very encouraging. And we know the vast majority of those who filled out the survey were not UCG members.

This also applies in many ways to our *Beyond Today* television viewers. Each month when we record new material we try to reach our viewers with compelling, helpful and inspiring content. It's always a learning curve and we pray that God will bless our efforts as we diligently seek His will.

Thank you for your continuing support of our busy team of magazine writers and editors. They are doing a wonderful job in bringing the good news of the Kingdom of God to our world.

Peter Eddington

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Leadership Through Empathy

What more can we learn through hardship and setbacks beyond reliance on God and survival? In the midst of a trial, we can easily lament: *Why is this happening to me?* or *I wish I wasn't going through this!* or *What's the point of this pain?*

The trial could be related to health, finance, relationships, death of a loved one, marriage and children or persistent failure to overcome personal weaknesses. It could be due to matters involving our spiritual journey in fulfilling God's will.

The apostle Paul related his horrific hardships to the Corinthian brethren while evangelizing in what is today Turkey. He told his story in such a way that this narrative has become a notable go-to scripture to understand why and how we must live through difficult trials. Note Paul's story:

“We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us” (2



To be true leaders, we must step outside of ourselves and show ourselves exposed and humbled. Jesus Christ left us a sterling example of going through painful ordeals for the purpose of encouraging us.

Corinthians 1:8-10, NLT).

Through direct experience, Paul clearly relates how he learned to trust God for deliverance from mortal danger. His key point? God brought him through challenging trials again and again. Today, most of us have not even come close to facing such life and death situations. But we can certainly apply what Paul learned to the rocky road of life that we may be traveling on.

In this same chapter, Paul goes further to explain that life as a disciple of Jesus Christ isn't just about mere survival. Our trials elevate us to a higher level of thinking and conduct. Our trial is not just about us. Trials give us an opportunity to learn how to reach out to others. God's rescue is a big part of the story—but not the only part. In the narra-

tive quoted here in 2 Corinthians, the more complete story is revealed by Paul:

“All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can pa-

Victor Kubik is the president of United Church of God. He and his wife, Beverly, have served in pastoral and administrative roles for over five decades. He can be reached at victor_kubik@ucg.org.



Beyond Today Survey

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• I enjoy the magazine but I would like to see more content on how the scriptures address current events, social and moral decline and government failure.
• I feel at home with your Hosts on TV and appreciate that you teach the Truth of the Bible. Many evangelists are deceived as well as most Christians it seems. I feel alone sometimes during the different “holidays” because I leave myself out of the “traditions of men.” They mean well and love God but I also like that you align today with the prophecy of God's Word. I see panic about the world ending on

FB posts but trust God's Word and what needs to take place first and that brings me comfort. Your programs have added to my faith. Thank you and God Bless you all at Beyond Today!
• I am a Zoroastrian, but find your magazine very interesting.
• One of or perhaps the finest news coverage of any magazine out there and once it arrives I read it without stopping. You are doing us a great service by giving us the truth.
• I love the magazine. I like most the articles on prophecy and how they relate to us today, particular-

ly the books of Daniel and Revelation. Thank you ALL for all your hard work.
• Articles on apologetics would greatly be appreciated and beneficial to readers on how to further defend our faith.
• I was raised without any form of religion. I am learning about Christ/God and the Bible for the first time. I really enjoy reading your newsletters, magazine and booklets. Thank you for helping to open my eyes.
• If an article is too long you sometimes have to set the magazine down to do something, thus losing

your train of thought when picking it back up to finish it. Would like to read more on bible prophecy explaining meaning of verses.
• Your history is the best on any subject. However your constant put down of the mainstream Christian Church has gotten very tiresome and you are completely wrong on most of it. You are throwing out a blanket including us as a group of fools who don't know the Bible. Well! We are going to rule with the Triune God forever!
• I enjoy the magazine as well as BT Daily on YouTube! Thank you for what you do. UN

What Are The Odds That God Chose You?

Have you ever felt lost in the sea of humanity on planet Earth? The world population stands at more than 7.8 billion people, and it is easy to feel insignificant with no value or purpose in such a large crowd.

But you are unique—just like everyone else! While you are one out of 7.8 billion, the odds of you being here—of even existing—are phenomenal! What I mean by that is that the possibility of you existing—not just a random human—is truly amazing. In spite of that, one of the saddest realities of Western cultures is the number of suicides committed. Almost 1 million people around the

world die by suicide each year. A big factor in suicidal depression is the feeling of worthlessness—thoughts like: “I don’t matter to others;” “no one would miss me;” or, “I am just one worthless speck in a sea of humanity.”

God doesn’t see you that way. In Isaiah 44:2, a very personal and intimate statement is recorded for us from God himself. God said that He formed and made Israel. He made the same statement to the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5). Many read verses such as this and think that God only specifically formed a few individuals. But what if God took an interest in the forming of each one of us?

To get to the heart of what I am talking about, let’s first talk about the probability of your parents meeting. If your parents met one new person of the

opposite sex every day from age 15 to 40, they would meet about 10,000 people. If we confine the pool of possible people they could meet to 1/10th of the world’s population 20 years ago that would give us a number of 400 million (1/10th of 4 billion = 400 million). Half of those people will be of the opposite sex. So, let’s say the probability of your parents meeting, ever, is 10,000 divided into 200 million, or one in 20,000. To add to this, a fertile woman has about 100,000 viable eggs on average. Your dad would have produced about 4 trillion sperm over the course of your mother’s reproductive lifetime. So the probability of that one sperm with half your name on it fertilizing that one egg with the other half of your name on it is one in 400 quadrillion!

The possibility of each of us existing should give us pause to consider the amazing gift of life we have been given. We can’t really comprehend 400 quadrillion, and scientists don’t really understand the process of how that egg cell and sperm cell combine to make another person (Ecclesiastes 11:5).

While we can ponder the possibility of one particular thing happening, God has made everything we know to exist in the first place! Every good gift comes from God (James 1:17). While it can be easy to focus on the bad things that happen in

our lives, we should be careful not to lose sight of the good things God does for us—and His plans that give us hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).

Our obedience to God is paramount if we want to become like Him—if we want to have eternal life. That is His desire—that is why He created us. The question for us is this: Do we see His purpose for us and desire the same thing as God? I encourage you to stop and consider that God not only created the world and universe, but He shaped you, and He has a purpose for you.

What are the odds? **UN**



Dan Dowd, ordained an elder in 1997 and hired full time into the ministry in 2004, currently pastors three congregations in Wisconsin. He can be reached at dan_dowd@ucg.org.

GCE Report Continued from front page

commemorate our commitment, convictions and the ability to show courage to the world. He noted that going forward, while we may be redefining and re-inventing ourselves, certain things will not change. Doctrinal integrity will always be vital. Mr. Kubik also covered the strategic plan for 2020-2021, spending time on each of the three sections: congregational care, organizational stewardship and public proclamation.

Ministerial and Member Services Operation Manager Mark Welch then gave his address. He thanked the ministers and their wives for their cooperation and wonderful service, hard work and being willing to adapt and be flexible during these difficult times. With Sabbath services temporarily moving to an on-line format, pastors and elders in various areas have had to adjust to this change while leading their congregations. Mr. Welch mentioned the average U.S. attendance, which was hovering around 6,800 so far in 2020 at the time of the meeting. He noted 36 baptisms so far in 2020, two new ordinations since the February Council meeting and one new recredited elder, with two full-time ministerial trainees. He also gave updates to the nine goals presented at the GCE meeting last year.

Media and Communication Services Operation Manager Peter Eddington gave the next ad-

dress, in which he began with updates on the employees involved with mail processing, print, web and video. He mentioned that responses from programs recorded in the new studio continue to be above what we received with the old studio—we had a record high of 690 total responses to the TV program, “Easter: The Rest of the Story,” which ran April 12-18, 2020. Plans for 2020-2021 include increasing subscribers to *Beyond Today*, increasing ads in print and digital domains, and ensuring that our message of the gospel is always relevant, compelling and motivational. He also covered results from the recent *Beyond Today* survey. He asked for prayers that we will be truly effective going into all the world to preach the gospel and that we will be about our Father’s business, preaching the gospel and making disciples.

We have negotiated a price cut with WGN-America, which will take effect on July 5 and drive down the cost-per-response considerably, although it does put us at risk of being replaced. Mr. Eddington also covered Roku app results, which showed an increase in channel installs, videos watched and average minutes on a channel since last April. The *Beyond Today* YouTube channel has had 12.34 million video views since launching the channel, with 55,300 subscribers and hosting 2,195 videos.

Our UCG.org website received



Victor Kubik is recorded live delivering his address during the annual meeting of the General Conference of Elders.

over 12.65 million unique visitors last year, which is a 20% increase from the year before. Visits were mostly from non-UCG members.

Treasurer Rick Shabi’s address was pre-recorded from Florida. He noted that the current health crisis became a financial crisis very quickly for much of the world. Yet we continue to rely on God to provide. Mr. Shabi addressed a few anticipated questions about the annual budget in

light of the crisis, including the effect it could have on our finances. As February (the 8th month of our fiscal year) drew to a close, we were running 3-4% above budget and the same amount above the prior year. We submitted the budget that we did based on these results.

March was very strong financially with general contributions, and we finished the month over both the budget and prior year. As the crisis begins

to tighten its grip on America, we recognized that April may have been different. We knew to trust God whether the income was good or poor, and by the morning of Mr. Shabi’s recording (April 27) we had surpassed our budget for April in virtually every category of income.

Mr. Shabi also gave a brief history of UCG’s income over the past 20 fiscal years and presented

General Conference of Elders 2020

ANNUAL MEETING

Moving Forward with Conviction,
Commitment and Courage

a slide explaining cash balances as of April 27, 2020. He noted the balanced budget presented to the Council, the external audit, publication of the audit in the January-February 2020 issue of *United News* and discussed salary ranges of UCG employees.

Following Mr. Shabi's address, Greg Thomas gave a tribute presentation to the elders and wives who have died in the faith in the past year. Dr. Dunkle then presented the ballot results. He noted that we have had more ballot participation this year than in past years.

The ballot results, which are tabulated by the accounting firm of Clark, Shafer and Hackett, can be found in the table on the top right corner of this page.

The results of the general balloting by the GCE are as follows:

- John Elliott, *International representative on the Council*
- Aaron Dean, Dan Dowd, and John Miller, *U.S. representatives on the Council*

Dan Dowd and Aaron Dean were reelected to the Council. John Elliott and John Miller were added. John Elliott pastors congregations in southern British Columbia, Canada and Sedro-Woolley, Washington. He also assists with the Church's operations in East Africa. John Miller is an elder serving in North Canton, Ohio. He pastored the North Canton congregation and has served in the German work of the Church, both at Ambassador University and in Germany during the formation of UCG.

Women's Discussion

The annual women's discussion for the elders' wives present at the GCE meeting was also held virtually this year.

In an updated online format, the seminars were split into three separate events that were held over Zoom over the course of three non-consecutive days. The first began on the evening of May 3 with a seminar given by Carol Szymkowiak titled,

"Commitment to Our Faith."

Each discussion began with opening comments from Barb Welch and an introduction of the speaker. The second discussion was on May 11 and delivered by Joy Jones, titled, "Courage to Face Our Doubts." After the seminar, the Zoom call was broken up into smaller groups for a discussion.

On May 18, Whitney Creech spoke about the "Conviction to Forgive," followed by another fruitful small group discussion. This format, although different in nature from past GCE weekend workshops, enabled the women to still engage in breakout sessions to brainstorm and discuss before coming back together for some closing remarks from the speaker.

Special thanks to the women's discussion planning team and Matt Hernandez for designing the discussion sheets.

Council of Elders Meeting: Monday, May 4

Chairman Donald Ward called the session to order and welcomed new Council members John Elliott and John Miller. Council minutes from February were approved, as well as the agenda for this week's meeting. The president's report from Victor Kubik covered UCG's response to coronavirus, noting that we need to be prepared for economic consequences in the future and other scenarios that may occur. There were updates from the Education, Ethics, Roles and Rules, Doctrine, Strategic Planning and Finance committees. Rainer Salomaa presented the Review of Current Council Guidelines, Criteria to be an International Nominee or Representative for the Council and Amendment Committee vacancies. Mario Seigle led the Doctrine Committee update and Chris Rowland gave an update on Human Resources Policy 2.14.

Ballot Results

2020-2021 Strategic Plan	Yes 248	No 13	Approved
2020-2021 Operation Plan	Yes 241	No 19	Approved
2020-2021 Budget	Yes 231	No 29	Approved
Proposed Amendment to Constitution 4.7	Yes 227	No 27	Approved
Proposed Amendment to Bylaws 8.4.1	Yes 109	No 150	Rejected
Proposed Manner of Approving Mergers with Other Religious Organizations	Yes 216	No 41	Approved
Proposed Amendment to Constitution 4.1 (6); and Amendment to Bylaws 7.5.3; and Amendment to Bylaws 8.7.2 (7)	Yes 222	No 36	Approved
Council of Elders Nomination Process; Election Process for the Council of Elders of the United Church of God, <i>An International Association</i> ; and Absentee Balloting Procedure	Yes 237	No 20	Approved

Tuesday, May 5

Chairman Don Ward called the session to order, followed by an executive session with legal updates from Larry Darden. Coming into open session, a presentation facilitated by Bob Dick honored outgoing Council member Rainer Salomaa and outgoing chairman Don Ward for their service while in office. After the presentation to the outgoing elders, the new Council was called to order with John Elliott and John Miller added to the roster. The Council Chairman who has been selected for 2020-2022 is Len Martin. The Deputy Chairman for 2020-2022 is Aaron Dean.

Presentation To the Outgoing Council Members—Bob Dick began and moderated the presentation to the outgoing Council members, Rainer Salomaa and Chairman Donald Ward. He noted that as the international representative, some on the Council may not know Rainer Salomaa as well as Dr. Ward, so he gave a short bio on Mr. Salomaa's calling and background. He noted that Mr. Salomaa has pastored many churches in Canada, served as a camp coordinator for four years in British Columbia and has spent over 20 years as a festival coordinator in various sites around Canada.

He was also the first editor of what became the *United News—Canada* at the beginning of UCG. He has been on the National Council since its formation in January 1996 and also served as chairman of the National Council from December 1999 until 2019. He has continued as a Festival coordinator and church pastor. He currently

coordinates the Canadian ministerial services team and is coming up with new ideas to better serve the Canadian ministry and members. He has also been the go-to member for Roles and Rules while on the Council of Elders. Diane Bailey, on behalf of the Council of Elders, sent Rainer and Claudia Salomaa a gift card to assist them in enjoying recreational outdoor activities in their retirement.

Mr. Dick noted that normally during this portion of the GCE meeting, the presenter would stand up in front of the hall and present the gift. But with the extraordinary circumstances, via this Zoom call all of the Council members were able to make a comment in more of a conversational style. The men reminisced on some of their experiences with Rainer Salomaa and thanked him for his hard work and service to the Church for so many years.

Mr. Dick then began the presentation to outgoing chairman Dr. Don Ward. He noted that when studying nonprofit boards, a healthy board of directors or administration for nonprofit organizations all have a strong president and a strong chairman.

Those strengths aren't ones that they pit against each other, but strengths they use in

the spirit of iron sharpening iron. He noted that Dr. Ward brought strength to the chairmanship, and the weekly phone call conversation between Dr. Ward and President Victor Kubik has contributed greatly to the spirit and attitude of the Council this year. Dr. Ward's experience, wisdom and depth of passion will be missed on the Council of Elders. Diane Bailey, on behalf of the Council, commissioned the creation of crystal bookends engraved with the UCG seal as a gift honoring Dr. Ward and his wife, Wanda, for their years of service.

Dr. Ward thanked Mr. Dick and the Council, and commented, "As was mentioned yesterday, the Church, the Council and whole administration has matured quite a bit in many aspects, but we still have a long ways to go and are in the midst of a great trial at this present time. We'll need all hands on deck and strong leadership from the home office president, ministerial and member services and all down through the various offices that people fulfill."

Others thanked Dr. Ward for his service, leadership and example over the years, noting that he's had an impact on them individually as a mentor, and collectively in other aspects of the Church. **UN**

Updates from Ministerial and Member Services

On May 30, 2020, Brent Baker was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Rebecca, serve in the East Texas congregation.

On Pentecost, May 31, Kerby Burton was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Ellen, serve in the Lexington, Kentucky, congregation. On the same date, Sheldon Sitter was ordained into the ministry. Mr. Sitter will be assisting in a number of pastorates in western Canada from his home congregation of Edmonton, Alberta.

Chris Rowland



Above, left: Chairman of the Council of Elders Len Martin delivers an introductory speech during the June 8 focus meeting.



Above, right: The employees honored on June 8 who were present in-person along with Len Martin: Victor Kubik, Kathy de Campos, Beverly Kubik, Barb and Mark Welch and Rudy Rangel (Jamie Schreiber not pictured).

Due to the virtual nature of the General Conference of Elders this year, we were not able to recognize those employees who achieved milestone employment anniversaries. On June 8 during the home office weekly focus meeting, a slideshow was presented and employees serving both in the U.S. and internationally were recognized. The employees who retired this year include Tom and Lisa Damour, who retired July 1, 2019 and Ken and Susan Graham, who retired January 1, 2020. Both couples are settling into retirement, and a feature article will be printed honoring them for their service.

50-Year Service Anniversaries

This past year, two men reached the 50-year milestone of employed service—Tony and Linda Wasilkoff and Victor and Beverly Kubik. They received engraved pocket watches, employee service pins, cards and gift cards. Their wives received flowers in special appreciation for their support and contributions.

Tony & Linda Wasilkoff

Director of Operations, Canada
Tony was recognized earlier during the Canadian Regional Conference on May 24 by Victor Kubik and Rainer Salomaa. At that time, Victor Kubik noted that Tony has been a sound-minded, stable, positive leader who always looked at people and situations in the best light. He has worked as an administrator with essential support from his wife Linda both in administration and pastoral work, as well.

Mr. Wasilkoff has been serving as the Director of Operations for UCG-CA for 20 years.

During his 50 years in the Church, he has served on the Council of Elders as well as on the Canadian National Council, both as a member and as chairman. He has been the editor of *United News—Canada* for over a decade and has coordinated Feast sites in Penticton, Quebec, Newfoundland, Midland and Prince Edward Island. After earning a B.A. from Ambassador College in 1970, Mr. Wasilkoff completed courses in grief and dying as well as marriage and family counseling. He noted that “some of the highs [of his work experience] are counseling individuals for baptism or marriage—seeing growth.” He also enjoyed baptizing his own two children and teaching for Ambassador Bible College. He commented that the work of the ministry has enriched his life and family. It has been challenging and wearing, but also very rewarding.

Victor & Beverly Kubik *UCG President, United States*

Len Martin noted that Victor and Beverly have left an extensive legacy of service and accomplishments these past 50 years. On a personal note, he reflected back to 1994 when he came across an email address owned by Victor Kubik and wrote to him. He was impressed when Mr. Kubik wrote back, offering encouragement in a difficult time.

Years later, Mr. Martin’s daughter, Naomi, who had cerebral palsy, needed expensive hyperbaric oxygen therapy. Victor and Beverly Kubik (along with several others and LifeNets) put together a fundraiser to purchase a hyperbaric chamber for

their family. These stories reflect how the Kubiks have always had a heart of service, a big heart for caring for people, and reaching out in ways of service. Len Martin thanked them on behalf of the Council and the Church for their living example, and deeds that are more than just words.

Peter Eddington said he has appreciated Mr. Kubik’s support, not only for him personally but for the work of the Church, the media department and the home office. Mr. Eddington thanked him for all his efforts beginning at the very formation of the United Church of God.

Richard Kennebeck reminisced about their common connections and building the Church from the ground up in Arcadia, California, plus Mr. Kubik’s humanitarian spirit and care for others in addition to his willingness to try new things.

Mark Welch concluded by mentioning how much he appreciated both Victor and Beverly for their work with LifeNets and within the community. Mr. Kubik has served in Church administration for years, and has shown good leadership and mentorship.

Employment Anniversaries

The meeting was then handed over to Victor Kubik, who expressed his appreciation for all Church employees. He noted that our employees are not just employees; they are friends and family. All have contributed to serving the Church and the preaching of the gospel, which is very much needed in this world.

40-Year Employment Anniversary: Robin & Susan Webber (Church Pastor, California).

30-Year Employment Anniversary: Mark & Barbara Welch (Operation Manager, Ministerial and Member Services).

20-Year Employment Anniversary: Jesmina Allooua (Executive Assistant, Germany), David and Ghyslaine Palmer (Church Pastor, Canada), Jan Schroeder (Executive Secretary, United Kingdom), Paul & Coreen Wasilkoff (Church Pastor, Canada).

10-Year Employment Anniversary: Kathy de Campos (ABC Administrative Assistant, United States), Dan & Val Deininger (Church Pastor, Montana, United States), Rudy Rangel (Production Supervisor, United States), Jamie Schreiber (Associate Video Producer, United States), Brian & ReNae Shaw (Church Pastor, United States).

To conclude the meeting, Len Martin then delivered a short icebreaker to the home office staff to introduce himself and help get to know him better as he begins his role as Chairman.

Mr. Kubik then conducted a podcast with Mr. Martin, who shared a little about himself as well as his thoughts and plans moving forward. You can listen to this podcast at: <https://www.ucg.org/inside-united-podcast/inside-united-podcast-165-len-martin-council-of-elders>. Mr. Kubik said, “While I will miss working with Dr. Ward, the outgoing Council of Elders Chairman for the past four years, I welcome my future relationship with Len Martin, the incoming Chairman.

“Len Martin along with his wife Julie are highly regarded by our brethren. They have championed multiple family-based events such as teen and preteen

camp programs as well as the Feast of Tabernacles.

He has effectively pastored congregations in New England as well as Ohio and has a strong background in information technology and finance.

“We speak at least weekly by phone. I find that we have strong agreement on the policy-making roles of the Council of Elders working with the functions of the Administration.

Len Martin is very committed to the Church’s Mission and I envision God blessing our Work for His Glory.”

New Hires at the Home Office

During the months of May and June, home office staff also had virtual going-away recognitions for Stella Helterbrand and Josh Raudenbush. During the weekly focus meeting, various employees and administration expressed their appreciation for all of the service both of these individuals contributed during their time working here, both in their respective positions and as supportive friends to their coworkers.

Caroline Boise began training for the international mail processing clerk position with Josh Raudenbush a few weeks prior to ABC graduation this year, in anticipation of his departure. In her new position, Caroline makes sure international addresses are formatted correctly and outgoing international mail is sent out.

She began volunteering in the mail room in January of 2019, before being hired as an intern during ABC. After ABC graduation on May 17, she began working full-time the very next day. She enjoys playing an important part in the work of spreading the gospel, and looks forward to learning more about the different countries and languages to which UCG sends mail.

Micah Gunn was recently hired as the food service manager for ABC. He looks forward to serving ABC and the home office staff, both from the kitchen and anywhere that might be helpful. As an ABC graduate of 2019, Micah understands the ABC experience and the close interaction the food service manager has with students and others in the office. He looks forward to developing relationships with the students and his coworkers at the home office, and is excited for the opportunity to serve the Church in this capacity. **UN**

GN

The Good News

The Ten Commandments Series

A New Commandment

By Don Hooser

During Jesus' last Passover observance with His disciples, He made a profound announcement that is misinterpreted by many and not well appreciated by many others. In reality, it was revolutionary. Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35, New International Version).

A *new* commandment? An Eleventh Commandment? No, no need to add to the Perfect Ten.

A commandment to *replace* the Ten Commandments? No, very early in Jesus' ministry, He emphasized that He would not "abolish... even the smallest detail of God's law" (Matthew 5:17-20, NLT).

Jesus emphasized the two Great Commandments about love but Jesus was quoting the Old Testament (Mark 12:28-31). Deuteronomy 30:6 commands each of us "to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Leviticus 19:18 says "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." So what was new about the love Jesus taught and exemplified?

In every discussion about love in the Bible, keep in mind that the emphasis is on action, not feelings. In the Bible, in general, to "love" a person means to treat him or her well.

Following are the three major lessons revealed in John 13:34-35.

A new commandment: Christ's disciples should have a special love for one another

God and Jesus Christ love everyone (John 3:16). While They do have a special relationship with some because of their obedience, godly character, love for God and other people, etc., They are never influenced by partiality or favoritism (Romans 2:11.)

Lazarus, Mary and Martha were apparently Jesus' best friends. Clearly Jesus regarded Peter, James and John as His three closest companions (Mark 9:2). And John was the disciple whom Jesus loved the most (John 13:23).

Jesus had a special love for His disciples (John 13:1). Likewise, His modern day disciples, the saints, should have a special love for one another. Jesus said His disciples were His "friends" with whom He openly confided (John 15:13-15). Likewise, we should cultivate true friendships with our fellow Church members.



A new commandment: Christ's disciples should have a special love for one another.

Peter wrote: "You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart" (1 Peter 1:22, NLT). "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'" (1 Peter 4:8). To "cover sins" means to forgive them. Only God can give absolute forgiveness, but when you truly love someone, you are willing to forgive the hurts done to you.

Having the indwelling gift of God's Holy Spirit enables us to have an intimate relationship with God and Jesus Christ. And when two people both have the Holy Spirit, they can and should have a very close and loving spiritual relationship.

In one sense, all human beings are God's children. In a more powerful sense, converted Christians are God's "sons and daughters" (2 Corinthians 6:18). One of the most important ways to love God is by loving His other children, our spiritual siblings (1 John 3:14, 17; 4:20-21).

Paul emphasizes this brotherly love for one another in Romans 12:10 and 13:8; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 3:12 and 4:9. John repeatedly urges God's people to "love one another" (1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12, 20-21).

Galatians 6:10 gives a practical overview of this subject. It says: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

A new love: Love people in the humble, self-sacrificing ways Jesus demonstrated

Jesus said, "I'm giving you a new commandment: Love each other in the same way that I have loved you" (John 13:34, God's Word. Jesus repeated this in John 15:12 and 15:17).

This is the highest possible standard of love—the Christ-like standard! Therefore, we need to study the life and teachings of Jesus Christ to learn how He loved people and then imitate those ways. Paul profoundly described godly love in the inspiring 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians.

As stated previously, love is taught in the Old Testament—the word "love" is in the New King James Version 147 times. Leviticus 19:18 tells us to "love your neighbor" but Jesus taught that we should regard everyone as our neighbor, such as through His parable of the good Samaritan. Regarding love, Jesus expounded on many things that are not specifically explained in the Old Testament.

Jesus taught the Golden Rule: "Treat others as you want them to treat you" (Matthew 7:12, CEV).

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). John wrote: "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). To "lay down one's life" can mean dying for someone, suffering for someone, or simply sacrificing one's time to serve someone.

Jesus astounded the people of His day by regularly showing compassion, empathy and love for those who were neglected and rejected.

Jesus' love extended well beyond "friends" and "brethren." Jesus astounded the people of His day by regularly showing compassion, empathy and love for the "little" people who were neglected and rejected. He touched the "untouchables." He respected those who were deemed less important or looked down upon in that society—foreigners, women, children, the sick and handicapped (even those afflicted with leprosy), the poor, people with bad reputations from their past, etc.! His ministry was a continual labor of love.

Philippians 2:1-8 refers to how our Savior sacrificed His incredible glory and power to come to earth to suffer humiliation, torture and death out of His love for every single human being. Verse 5 tells us the main

Please see next page

A New Commandment
Continued from previous page

lesson: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Likewise, for God the Father to sacrifice His Son brought Him suffering beyond our comprehension.

Jesus taught that a “great” person is a voluntary servant of others (Mark 10:42-45). “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (verse 45). After washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus said, “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you (John 13:15). True love is humble, generous in giving and self-sacrificing.

What Jesus taught about love went even further! He said: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-44).

Jesus’ enemies managed to get Him killed but godly love is very forgiving. As He was dying, He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

A new sign: “By this all will know that you are My disciples...

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

This is a distinguishing mark of Christ’s followers! (1 John 3:11,14-18, 23; 4:7-8, 11-12, 19-21). This is a major way that God’s people should be “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14-16). Being “religious” is not a distinguishing mark—there are many religious people who are selfish, self-righteous and despise others.

This point is remarkable! There have been many viewpoints regarding what are the main signs—the main beliefs, practices or characteristics—that identify the people of God who comprise the true Church of God. Sabbath observance is a sign. Jesus Himself told us another identifying sign!

This is certainly logical as well as biblical. Think of the factors that turn people off when they are contemplating attending a church. Newcomers probably know what are the main doctrines of the Church and are largely in agreement with them. But what are their first impressions when they first attend? Negative impressions result from a lack of being welcomed by several members, a lack of warm friendliness, being ignored, or being treated impolitely.

And after the newcomers have attended a few times, what are they experiencing? Do they see cliques and huddles of members who are not inviting others to join their conversations? Are they being subtly treated as outsiders? Do they see carnal gossiping? These observations show a serious lack of “love for one another.”

When Jesus said “love for one another,” He didn’t mean just “love for family members, close friends, and longtime members.” He meant for us to welcome, adopt, and embrace everyone as “part of the family.”

He meant for us to live by Romans 12 including: “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another (verse 10), distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality (verse 13), Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (verse 15).

When people experience a congregation of Christians like that, they become convinced they are seeing part of the true Church of God.

In summary, let’s reflect on, deeply appreciate and live by the critically important instructions Jesus gave His disciples as recorded in John 13:34-35! He taught a new commandment, a significantly higher standard of love, and a primary sign that identifies Christ’s disciples! **GN**

Do All Lives Matter?

All lives matter—poor, rich, famous, obscure, forgotten, disrespected, unrepresented or out of mind. Those treated unjustly matter just as much as the privileged.

By Vincent L. Braddock

Do all lives matter? God says yes! We are all created in His image (Genesis 1:26). He gave His Son to all—every single one of us (John 3:16). We all have value to God (Matthew 6:26, Luke 12:24). All lives matter—poor, rich, famous, obscure, forgotten, disrespected, unrepresented or out of mind. Those treated unjustly matter just as much as the privileged.

In today’s world—just as much as it has been in the past—there are those who feel and act as if some lives don’t matter as much as others do.

Do all lives matter to us in the Church of God?

In our hearts and in our actions, do we value those who are different with the proper concern and acknowledgement? As human beings we all have natural bias toward those who are similar to ourselves and often not favorable to those who are different. It takes conscientious effort to overcome these tendencies and to actually love all of our brothers as ourselves (Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31). Favoritism, which produces unjust treatment, is a sin (James 2:8-9).

I once heard a story about two men who were walking and talking:

The first man said, “Do you consider us good friends?”

The second man replied: “Yes, I consider you to be just like a brother.”

“Do you love me?”

“Yes, brother, I love you.”

“Do you know my pain?”

There was a pause.

“Well...no.”

“Then how can you truly love me?”

We in the Church of God must show love for one another by sympathizing, caring for, and even trying to walk a mile in another’s shoes so that we demonstrate real compassion (2 Peter 1:10). In recent weeks I have seen both authorities in positions of power as well as common citizens engage in acts producing loss of life and violent reactions in the streets.

I have personally observed and felt the pain of horrible injustice that, unfortunately once again, I and others express with tears, sadness and sorrow. We must pray for and seek to understand and comfort those who are suffering, physically or emotionally from pain and heavy hearts. We need the loving kindness of the Good Samaritan who aided a Jew (Luke 10:25-37). We must not hide behind our privileged status and distances, ignoring the elephant in the room (James 4:17).

God desires that there be righteousness (Hebrew *tsedaquah*) and justice (Hebrew *misphat*). *Tsedaquah* means having a right relationship with God and a right relationship with people, having equity despite social differences. *Misphat* means actions taken to correct injustice (Amos 5:24).

Appreciate and cherish everyone

So, let not God’s people be found wanting—through the absence of love and understanding, or with moral neglect or lack of compassion for others who are in some way different. Pray for, talk to and comfort one another (1 Peter 3:8). We should appreciate and cherish everyone. All are God’s children, all lives matter; none more than any others.

May God who gives this patience and encouragement help us live in complete harmony with each other as is fitting for followers of Jesus Christ (Roman 15:5). **GN**



We in the Church of God must try to sympathize, care for and even try to walk a mile in another’s shoes so that we demonstrate real compassion.

What Should I Do When I’m Afraid?

God has given us our emotions, whether joy, sadness or even fear. The key is to consider how we ought to respond to those emotions.

By Katherine Rowland

I remember it as if it had happened just yesterday: while hiking in Utah with my husband, a heavy rain-storm came up. There was no lightning, and the trail we had been hiking was quickly becoming slippery with mud, so we decided to wait out the storm beneath an overhang along the trail. I was already nervous about being in the open during the storm, so you can imagine how I felt when I saw small pieces of rock being washed down from the cliff above us. I had just told my husband that I thought we should try descending the trail anyway when a sizable chunk of rock tumbled down only inches from his head!

We hurriedly scrambled down the trail, trying not to look at the steep edges along it as our feet slid in the mud. By the time we reached the bottom of the hill, we were soaked and muddy. As we rejoiced in having safely made it to level ground, the sun came out and the storm was gone. It seemed incredible that we had just minutes before been afraid.

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Kiersten Benson



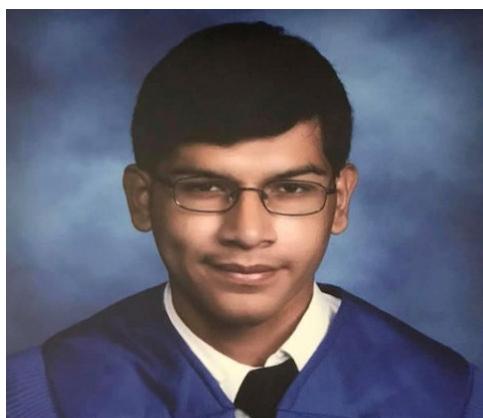
Izaak Garner Buck



Kailah Adela Castro



Jared Denno



Spencer Ellithorpe



Bryce Fogelson



Maria Karen Ford



Ashley Foster

High School

Kiersten Benson

The daughter of Tom and Julia Benson of the La Cross, Wisconsin congregation, Kiersten graduated from Decorah High School in Decorah, Iowa. While in school, she has been working at a day care in the school-age room and loves her job! She will be attending the University of Northern Iowa and majoring in Spanish teaching.

Advice: Never be afraid to try something new! It could literally change your life. Always make the most out of your day, and you will make the most out of your life.

Izaak Garner Buck

The son of Tony and Julie Buck of the Coos Bay, Oregon (Salem, Oregon by webcast), Izaak graduated from K12 Oregon Virtual Academy. While in school, Izaak took EOP classes in welding for college credits. Izaak is interested in mysteries, science, math, storywriting, books, electrical work, construction projects, 3D modeling and role-playing games. For the past three years he has volunteered at UYC preteen camps and teen staff. After graduation he will be looking for an electrician apprenticeship. Shortly thereafter Izaak plans to attend ABC.

Favorite scripture: Matthew 5:16

Kailah Adela Castro

The daughter of Adela Melo-Diaz and stepfather Juan Melo of the Bakersfield, California congregation, Kailah graduated from Mount Whitney High School in Visalia, California. Kailah is an amazing, respectful and loving young lady, and her family is proud of her and her accomplishments. She joined the Academy of Health

and Science at MWHS and remained in it for the four years. She also played basketball her sophomore and junior years. Kailah volunteered as a SCICON counselor her junior year and was extremely excited and ready to do it again, although it was not possible due to some of the changes this year. She has been trying to remain positive and make the best out of the remainder of her senior year. Kailah will be attending Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon this fall where she will be pursuing a teaching degree.

Favorite scripture: Hebrews 4:16

Jared Denno

The son of Michelle Denno of the Roanoke, Virginia congregation, Jared recently graduated from Staunton River High School with an advance diploma. While in school, he participated in cross country and swim team. He has attended Cotubic and Pinecrest camps and helps with setting up and taking down the sound system at church. Jared also achieved his Eagle Scout rank on January 7, 2020 from Boy Scout Troop 540 in Moneta, Virginia. He also earned Eagle Palms in gold, silver and bronze for completing merit badges beyond the 21 required to become an Eagle Scout. Jared enjoys drawing, painting and listening to music. After graduation, he plans to attend ABC in August and then will attend Virginia Western Community College in the fall of 2021 to pursue a career in biotechnology.

Favorite scripture: Proverbs 27:1

Spencer Ellithorpe

The son of Kirk and Ronnee Ellithorpe of the Nashville, Tennessee congregation, Spencer graduated from White House High School in White House, Tennessee. He was awarded the Tennessee Hope and

Tennessee Promise Scholarships and was recognized for a 3.5+ GPA. Spencer's interests include meteorology, piano, YouTube, working out, American football, astronomy and music. After graduation, Spencer plans on attending Vol State Community College for two years before going to ABC. After ABC, he plans to transfer to Western Kentucky University to study meteorology.

Favorite scripture: 2 Timothy 3:1-7

Favorite song: "No Ordinary Love" by Memphis May Fire

Favorite quote: "You just have to decide what kind of man you want to grow up to be... Whoever that man is, he's going to change the world."—Jonathan Kent (Man of Steel)

Bryce Fogelson

The son of Brent and Kristina Fogelson of the Phoenix Northwest, Arizona congregation, Bryce graduated from Cactus Shadows High School in Cave Creek, Arizona. He was treasurer of Key Club, a community service club sponsored by the Kiwanis Club. Bryce also participated in DECA, a business entrepreneurship club. Bryce enjoys music and playing guitar. He often shares his talents with the congregation by playing hymns and special music, as well as singing in small groups and choirs. Bryce has been an annual member of the band at Camp Hye Sierra. Bryce plans to attend Arizona State University and pursue a major in engineering. Many thanks to our Great God and to all our family, physical and spiritual, who have been part of Bryce's journey to this milestone.

Favorite scripture: Matthew 6:33

Maria Karen Ford

The daughter of Peter and Dixie Ford of the Albuquerque, New Mexico congregation, Maria graduated from Estancia

Valley Classical Academy, where she was the Student Government President, salutatorian, a member of National Honor Society, a Robotics Club coach and a guitar teacher for several years. Maria loves playing guitar and ukulele for hymns and special music at church with the brethren! As of late she has particularly enjoyed hiking, mountain biking, working out and playing pickleball with friends. After graduation, she plans to attend the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology to study mechanical engineering. She hopes to blast off into a focus of aerospace and some research and development! But beyond that, Maria wishes to build a godly family and live as He directs her to.

Favorite scripture: Colossians 2:6-7

Ashley Foster

The daughter of Rod and Tammy Foster of the San Antonio and Austin, Texas congregations, Ashley is graduating with honors from Foster Academy Homeschool with a GPA of 3.85. She is enrolled in the Art Institute of San Antonio's College Bound Program where she has completed college-level coursework in acting and movement for animation. At 15 years old, Ashley placed in the top 10 percent of the "Groom" category in an international professional wedding photography competition. Her photo of Matanuska Glacier in Alaska was featured on the 2019 UCG *Festival Planning Brochure*. She was also the top female archer at UYC Pinecrest 2018 with a score of 47 out of 50 points. Ashley loves digital art, drawing, and animation. She is proficient in Procreate and Photoshop, and is currently studying Autodesk

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Congratulations Class of 2020!



Ariah Helseth



Aidan McGuire



Audrey McGuire



Nathan R. McClain



Collin McKeon



Brenden Robert Merring



Kira Grace Montgomery

Graduation Announcements continued from previous page

Maya for animation. She also loves photography, archery, Starbucks and cats! After graduation, Ashley will continue the Art Institute's College Bound Program this summer and plans to pursue a bachelor of fine arts degree in media arts and animation.

Favorite Scripture: Matthew 6:28b –29

Ariah Helseth

The daughter of Daniel Helseth and Hollie "Torkelsen" Helseth of the Sioux Falls, South Dakota congregation, Ariah attended Brandon Valley High School. In December 2018, during her junior year, she became a Lynx Way Leader for her teacher. In January 2020, Ariah was also named Legendary Employee of the Month at Brandon Pizza Ranch, where she has worked as a Buffet Coordinator and Prep Worker for three years. Ariah enjoys roller skating, swimming, spending time with family, playing piano, horseback riding, playing ukulele and painting. She serves in the choir at church, and has attended Ironwood, Hye Sierra and Northwest UYC programs. After graduation, she plans on attending Ambassador Bible College and then Lake Area Tech for photography.

Favorite scripture: Matthew 17:20

Favorite quotes: "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."—Dr. Seuss; "All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them."—Walt Disney
Favorite poems: "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost and "O Captain! My Captain!" by Walt Whitman.

Aidan McGuire

The son of Brian and Laurie McGuire of the Flint, Michigan congregation, Aidan was a member of the National Honor Society and graduated summa cum laude. He also was on the state champions team for robotics. During high school, he played basketball and was a member of UCG Teen Speech Club. After graduation, Aidan plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Michigan State University.

Favorite scripture: Ezra 7:10

Audrey McGuire

The daughter of Brian and Laurie McGuire of the Flint, Michigan congregation, Audrey was homeschooled and graduated two years early. She was part of the National Society of Leadership and Success and Vice President of the Michigan Teen Speech Club. Her interests include writing, painting and reading. Church activities include UCG camps and Michigan Teen Speech Club. After graduation, Audrey plans to enter the Occupational Therapy Assistant Program at Mott Community College, with plans to pursue a Masters in Occupational Therapy afterward.

Favorite quote: "I know you're sad, so I won't tell you to have a good day. Instead, I advise you to simply have a day. Stay alive, feed yourself well, wear comfortable clothes, and don't give up on yourself just yet. It'll get better. Until then, have a day."—Robin Williams

Nathan R. McClain

The son of Andy and Cynthia McClain of the Indianapolis, Indiana congregation, Nathan graduated from Pike High School within the top 30 of his class, achieving

an academic honors diploma. While in high school, Nathan had the opportunity to intern his senior year at Corteva Agriscience, an agricultural chemical company, through the Work-Based Learning program at his school. During his junior and senior years, Nathan was also a member of National Honor Society, which focuses on promoting leadership, service and character. During his sophomore, junior and senior years, he participated in Business Professionals of America (BPA). At the BPA Indiana State Conference this year, he placed 9th in payroll accounting and 6th in the financial analysis open competition. He also participated in Hoosier Boys state in which he and other participants spent a week running a mock state government. He was elected county and city clerk. Nathan has served on the set-up and take-down crew in his local congregation since 2014. In addition, he had the opportunity to give a life lesson during the sermonette time this past year on Youth Day. In his free time, Nathan enjoys photography, computer graphics (Adobe Creative Suite), playing piano and violin, and watching soccer. After graduation, Nathan plans to attend the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) to pursue a major in accounting. He has also been accepted into the IUPUI Honors College program.

Favorite scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

Collin McKeon

The son of Scott and Carrie McKeon of the Northwest Phoenix, Arizona congregation, Collin graduated from Cactus Shadows High School in Cave Creek, Arizona. He swam all four years for the

swim team and was captain his senior year. He has also earned several college credits. Collin has enjoyed UYC summer camps since he was a young boy. He also enjoys fishing and designing aquascapes for his and his friend's fish tanks. Collin has plans to pursue a degree in environmental sustainability and water science.

Brenden Robert Merring

The son of Bert and Tricia Merring of the Orlando, Florida congregation, Brenden attended South Lake High School, where he lettered in three varsity sports: golf, soccer and tennis. He was also captain of the soccer team. While in school, Brenden worked at Webber Construction and became an Eagle Scout. Brenden enjoys mountain biking, snowboarding, wake boarding, playing guitar, helping on sound crew at church and working as staff at summer camp. After graduation, Brenden plans to obtain his electronics certification and become an electronics technician.

Favorite scripture: Ecclesiastes 12:1

Favorite quote: "You miss 100% of the shots you never take."—Wayne Gretzky.

Kira Grace Montgomery

The daughter of Eli and Michelle Montgomery of the Roanoke, Virginia congregation, Kira graduated from Bland County High School with honors. She was on the theater team, on the MACC team for English and in the string instruments music group. Her interests and hobbies include, learning about science, acting, art, music, playing video games and spending time with her cat Sven and Russian tortoise Sushi. She also likes to travel and see new places. After graduation, Kira will be attending Wytheville Community College in the fall with a scholarship that pays for her tuition and books. She plans to take her basic classes and then transfer to another institution to study film and acting.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the school postponed graduation until June 19. At a nearly traditional graduation in June, graduates came in early to watch pre-recorded speeches from their valedictorian and salutatorian and two senior videos. They also held a senior picnic that morning, and were given senior survival bags full of goodies and a stuffed teddy bear since they are the Bland County Bears. The school has always held their graduations on Saturdays, but when Kira expressed to school adminis-

Congratulations Class of 2020!



Tabitha Moody



Damien Anthony Olar



Layla Carson Parker



Lili Parman



Jared M. PerMar



Andrew Preston



Keith Porteous



Kimberly Riquelme

tration that she would not come because she did not want to miss the Sabbath, the teachers and principal went to the school board on her behalf to change the date to a Friday afternoon well before sunset. We know that was an awesome miracle performed by God.

Favorite scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6

Tabitha Moody

The daughter of Paul and Darla Moody of the Spokane, Washington congregation, Tabitha is graduating with straight A's, and received her varsity letter in band playing flute. She worked throughout high school on her parents' ranch raising and training Icelandic Horses. Tabitha enjoys training horses (particularly in jumping), writing music and creating art (drawings and paintings). Tabitha won her first belt buckle at the age of five years old, winning the Mutton Busting contest at the Spokane Interstate Fair. She has continued to win belt buckles, prizes, and ribbons showing horses and entering her art projects. After graduation, Tabitha will be attending Spokane Falls Community College to acquire her associate in arts degree, and possibly to pursue an art degree or coursework in American Sign Language.

Favorite scripture: Matthew 19:26

Damien Anthony Olar

The son of Derek and Kim Olar of the Canton, Illinois congregation, Damien graduated from Pekin Community High School. He enjoys cooking, trying new recipes and playing video games. Damien plans to attend Midwest Technical Institute for HVAC training.

Favorite Scripture: Isaiah 11:6-9

Layla Carson Parker

The daughter of Steve and Angela Parker of the Austin, Texas congregation, Layla is a May 2020 graduate of Spicewood Academy. She graduated with a GPA of 3.8 and has been a member of honors band. She also mentored students through the Texas Home School Coalition. Layla has participated in a variety of UCG camps through the years: Camp Piney Woods as a camper first and then as a teen helper; Camp Pinecrest five times as a camper and Camp Woodland once as a camper. She was also a part of the victorious Austin/San Antonio Bible jeopardy team. Her favorite Feast site (so far) has been Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. After graduation, Layla plans to continue her academic pursuits at community college with the plan to then finish at the University of Texas.

Favorite scripture: Philippians 4:13

Lili Parman

The daughter of Frank and Lisa Parman of the Seattle, Washington congregation, Lili graduated high school with honors and an Associate in Integrated Studies degree from Cascadia College. Lili received President's honors, is a member of the National Society of High School Scholars, served as a student representative to the School Board, played on North Creek High School's basketball and tennis teams and lettered in badminton. She also worked as a pantry chef at Russell's Restaurant and Loft. Lili enjoys hiking, sports, music and spending time with friends and family. She has enjoyed being involved with the teen group at church, singing special music and attending camp where she has made many wonderful friends. Lili has been accepted into the honors program at

Northwest University where she will be attending in the fall.

Favorite scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6

Jared M. PerMar

The son of David and Robin PerMar of the Orlando, Florida congregation, Jared recently graduated from Florida Virtual School. He plays violin, and is learning the clarinet. He enjoys serving as staff at pre-teen camps, and hopes to serve as staff at teen camps in the near future. Jared begins his freshman year of college this summer at Seminole State College, and plans to attend ABC in a few years.

Andrew Preston

The son of Dan and Kim Preston of the Charlotte, North Carolina congregation, Andrew graduated from Piedmont High School. While in school, he worked at Chick Fil-A. His interests include baseball, football and computers. After graduation, Andrew plans to attend University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC) for computer engineering.

Favorite scripture: Romans 8:38-39

Keith Porteous

The son of Daniel and Linda Porteous, Keith's local congregations include Auckland, New Zealand and now Olympia, Washington, USA. Parent's arrival is anticipated for the end of June. Keith graduated from Capital High School in Olympia, Washington on June 13. He spent the last two years studying abroad from New Zealand, living with his aunt, Cher Richards, and graduated with honors. Throughout high school, Keith was heavily involved in Capital's theatre program in and outside of the classroom, mostly in behind-the-

scenes roles like setbuilding and sound design. In November 2019, he wrote and directed a one-act musical that was put on at Capital's annual Dramafest. Currently the songs are being recorded with the original cast. Church activities include assisting with sound, service projects, special music and summer camps. Keith quite enjoyed a class called "School of Rock," covering the recording and technical aspects of music. This class gave him the skills to record many of his songs and publish them. He plans to continue to apply these skills on the side by pursuing creative endeavors as he attends Renton Technical College at some point in the near future to study musical instrument repair.

Kimberly Riquelme

The daughter of Javier and Cheryl Riquelme of the Dayton, Ohio congregation, Kimberly graduated from Milton-Union High School and Sinclair Community College with an associate degree in biology. She made the dean's list at Sinclair many semesters. She was awarded the Thelma Ross Dalton Scholarship from Miami County for \$3,000 and a College Board Scholarship for \$1,000. While in school, she worked at Kroger, Sinclair and Goodwill. Kimberly also obtained her first aid and CPR certificate along with the ACEMS certificate. She is very interested in anatomy and physiology, learning new things about the body and self-improvement. She always took college classes nonstop throughout high school while working and being involved in extracurricular activities. Throughout high school and

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Congratulations Class of 2020!



Tarra Scott



Kayla Jeanine Taylor



Elizabeth Tinkler



Emily Wood



Jeremy Grinnell



Logan McKeon



Andrew Michael Olar

Graduation Announcements continued from previous page

college she was in softball, quiz team, swimming, interact club, church club, SSS and psychology club. Her hobbies are exploring new things, watching movies, drawing and spending time with friends. Kimberly will attend Olivet Nazarene University in Illinois this upcoming fall, where she plans on finishing her bachelor's degree in biology/pre-med. After she takes the MCATS and begins medical school, she wants to specialize in orthopedic surgery.
Favorite quote: "Doubt will kill more dreams than failure ever will." —Suzy Kassem

Tarra Scott

The daughter of Craig and Laura Scott of the Raleigh, North Carolina congregation, Tarra graduated summa cum laude from Cary High School, ranking in the top 10 of her class of over 500 students. Tarra was section leader for sopranos in the advanced choir and a member of the a cappella group for two years. She also accompanied the choir on piano, played varsity lacrosse for four years and was a member of the National Honor Society. She has worked as a lifeguard at a pool and as a hostess at a restaurant. Tarra has been going to camp since age 11, and has been to Cotubic, Woodmen, Northwest and Winter Camp. She has also been staff at Camp Seven Mountains. Tara has been playing piano for 11 years, and also enjoys painting, drawing and making jewelry. After graduation, Tarra plans to attend a local community college for prerequi-

sites before transferring to North Carolina State University, where she has been accepted into the college of engineering.
Favorite scripture: Psalm 121:2
Advice: "Saying sorry sooner rather than later is always better, but later is better than never."

Kayla Jeanine Taylor

The daughter of Danny and Darla Taylor of the Columbia, Maryland congregation, Kayla graduated from Fallston High School, where she followed the Early Childhood Education pathway and worked with the three-year-old class at a day care for two years. She was a French club officer and a member of the French National Honor Society. Kayla teaches Sabbath School at her local church and serves as a greeter. She participates in teen/young adult Bible studies and service projects. She attended the Midwest teen prom, Camp Cotubic, Camp Woodland and Winter Family Weekend. She also volunteered as a counselor at Seven Mountains preteen camp. Kayla plans to pursue a bachelor's degree from Towson University in special education and early childhood education.

Favorite scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:31

Elizabeth Tinkler

The daughter of Brian and Marty Tinkler of the Cincinnati East, Ohio congregation, Libby graduated 10th in her class from Blanchester High School. She enjoys baking, fishing, painting, writing and singing. After graduation, she plans to attend ABC in the fall of 2020, then Miami University in Oxford, Ohio for a degree in English education.

Favorite scripture: 1 Peter 3:3-4
Advice: Take advantage of every good opportunity that comes your way because whether it turns out good or bad, it helps to shape who you are and you always learn something worthwhile.

Emily Wood

The daughter of Robert and Ruth Wood of the Albuquerque, New Mexico congregation, Emily graduated from Estancia Valley Classical Academy with 30+ dual credit hours. For three years while in school, she worked as a lab technician in natural medicine. Emily is interested in music, art and God's Creation. She is also interested in being able to help and guide others anytime she can. Emily enjoys any and all camps she can attend, and enjoys being a part of anything church-related! She believes that being around God's people is the best place to be. She loves music, playing guitar, and being active and outdoors in nature.

Some of her favorite outdoor activities include hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing and trail running. After graduation, Emily plans to attend New Mexico Tech to pursue a degree in cognitive neuroscience and psychology in hopes to help adolescents through their developmental stages. She hopes to be able to help and support youth as much as she can with her future career plans. She believes that youth do not receive the help they truly need and would love to fill that need.

Favorite scripture: Psalm 139:9-12

Motto: "Where there's a Wood, there's a way."—Robert Wood

College/University

Jeremy Grinnell

Originally from Los Angeles, Jeremy attended college near San Diego. He considers both congregations his home. Jeremy graduated from San Diego State University with a bachelor of science in business administration with an emphasis in marketing and an honors minor in interdisciplinary studies. During his college career, Jeremy was a marketing intern for Inflatable Design Group and held leadership positions such as vice president of community service and director of university relations for a professional business fraternity called Delta Sigma Pi. He also worked part time at Aztec Lanes bowling alley on campus for the last three years of college. When not in class, work, interning or doing fraternity duties, Jeremy enjoys surfing, basketball, spikeball and watching movies. In the San Diego congregation, he served on the sound crew. When in-person services resume, he hopes to serve as a song leader as well. After graduation, Jeremy plans to attend ABC for the 2020-2021 school year.

Favorite scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:58

Logan McKeon

Logan graduated from Arizona State University's W. P. Carey School of Business with a bachelor's degree in supply chain management. He attends the Northwest Phoenix, Arizona congregation. Logan has participated and served at UYC camps over the years. He deferred a year of his studies to attend ABC. After returning from ABC, Logan has served in the local congregation giving sermonettes, song-leading and teaching youth classes.

Andrew Michael Olar

Andrew graduated from Methodist College of Nursing in Peoria, Illinois. He attends the Canton, Illinois congregation. He works at UnityPoint Health Methodist 5 Crescent Cardiac Nursing and was a part of Phi Kapp Phi and Sigma Theta Tau. Andrew enjoys cardiac and dialysis nursing. His interests also include Star Wars and spending time with family and friends. He plays the clarinet and saxophone. Andrew will continue working at 5 Crescent and growing in faith.

Favorite scripture: Prodigal Son Parable in Luke 15:11-32. **UN**



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Talking to God reminds us to focus on Him rather than on our fear of the challenge in front of us.

What Should I Do When I'm Afraid?
Continued from page 8

Responding to fear

We often read in the Bible where God tells His people not to fear, or not to be afraid. If you are someone who is timid, like me, you might wonder whether this means that you shouldn't ever feel the emotion of fear. But God has given us our emotions, whether joy, sadness or even fear. The key is to consider how we ought to respond to those emotions.

I have never been more afraid than when I saw that rock nearly crash into my husband's head. I wish I could say that I reacted to my fear with courage, but really, I just cried and prayed out loud as I raced down that trail! I can remember my heart pounding with panic. I wasn't thinking of anything except running away from danger. And this is the problem with fear: if we let ourselves be swamped by it, fear can overwhelm our thinking and cause us either to freeze or to act wildly to change the situation. Often, fear can cause us to act without thinking, and we can end up in worse trouble than whatever we had originally feared.

Life presents us with all kinds of challenges and obstacles. Sometimes we're going to feel afraid. What should we do then?

Pause. Occasionally, we are faced with an urgent situation that requires immediate action. Most of the time, though, we fear things that are less urgent. We fear for our finances, our health, the safety of loved ones... all kinds of things. When you feel that kind of fear, pause. Take a deep breath. Try to identify what you are actually afraid of. In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul reminds us that God hasn't given us a spirit of fear, but rather of power, love, and a sound mind. God doesn't want us just reacting in whatever way first comes to mind. He wants us to take time to call on Him and to act out of our understanding of Him and His ways.

Talk to God. In 2 Chronicles 20, King Jehoshaphat of Judah was told that a huge army was coming to attack. The first thing he did was to proclaim a fast and to gather the people before God to ask Him for His help. We can do the same thing! God can see all

aspects of a situation, while our vision is limited. And when we're afraid, we might see only the challenge in front of us. Talking to God reminds us to focus on Him rather than on our fear of the challenge in front of us. We might feel ashamed to confess our fears to Him, but we don't need to. After all, doesn't He already know our thoughts and feelings?

Talk to someone else. Have you ever been worried about or afraid of something, but ashamed of feeling that way? Maybe you didn't want to confess it to anyone. I think that has happened to all of us. We aren't sure what others would think of us for feeling as we do, and so we keep the matter to ourselves. But have you noticed that when we do that, the problem often doesn't seem to get smaller? Instead, it seems to grow even bigger. I have often been surprised to find that when I talk to a trusted friend about a situation, the situation doesn't seem as bad as I thought it was. And knowing that you aren't all alone can give you a lot of courage. They may even be able to help you think of ways to approach whatever is filling you with fear.

Decide whether there is anything you can do. Take some time to consider whether there is anything you can actually do about the problem confronting you. Ask God to help you to know how to proceed. Back in 2 Chronicles, God told Jehoshaphat that he wouldn't have to fight that battle... but He also told Him to have the army take their positions. Sometimes God will remove the challenge. Sometimes He will walk us through the challenge.

Move forward. If you can take proactive steps to deal with whatever has frightened you, absolutely take those steps. But even if there seems to be nothing to do, it's important to keep moving. Fear is a place we will all visit from time to time, but we don't want to live there! Remember that talking to God and asking for His help and guidance is the best thing to do, and sometimes it is the only thing you can do. When you have done that, make the choice to focus on the tasks that you have in front of you.

Rein in your thoughts. Philippians 4:8 reminds us of the things that God wants us to focus on: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, worthy of praise. When you are feeling fearful, it can be difficult to think of even one thing that has those qualities! Remember, though, that whatever you look for is what you will see. If you focus on the fear, you are just going to find more and more ways to be afraid. Challenge yourself instead to find just one good thing. Write it down. Challenge yourself to find another good thing, and write that one down, too. It could be positive aspects of your situation, or remembering ways God has delivered you in the past. It could be as simple as flowers blooming or a sunny day or a text from a friend. Take control of your thoughts and choose not to let them be hijacked by fear.

Fear is a call to action

One way to help gain control of fear is to remember that—like many feelings—it is a call to action. We can decide in advance that what we will do when we feel afraid is to call on God first. If we make it our practice to talk to Him at all times, every day, it will be easier for us to not be overwhelmed by fear, but to turn to Him instead and to walk in faith and understanding.

My adventure on the mountain in Utah had a happy ending, but I definitely don't want to feel that panicking feeling every day! It was a good reminder to me that my natural instincts when I'm afraid are not very useful. Taking time to turn to God and to look at a situation more calmly will always yield better results. **GN**

A More Excellent Way

Throughout history, inventors have produced physical innovations that have bettered the lives of many people. In an infinitely greater endeavor, the Eternal Creator has developed a remarkable spiritual advancement that will enhance the lives of every person on Earth.

By John LaBissoniere

In your wallet or purse, you may have a credit or debit card with an integrated circuit chip embedded in its face. This smart card is like a mini-computer, storing thousands of bytes of data.

Credit and debit card companies are migrating to this technology instead of older magnetic strip cards. This upgrade is due to the growing problem of credit card fraud and identity theft. Smart cards have been used in Europe for many years and provide better data security.

Smart microchip technology is also used in smartphones in the form of SIM cards—Subscriber Identity Module. SIM cards store a user's data and make it possible for the phone to connect to the Global System for Mobile communication (GSM).

The smart card was invented in Paris by Roland Moreno in 1975. Although Moreno was little known internationally, he was considered a national hero in France. In 2009 he was awarded the Legion of Honor, France's highest order of merit. Just how significant was Moreno's innovation? Following his death in April 2012, *The Guardian* wrote in an obituary that the smart card had "touched almost everyone on the planet."

In an infinitely greater way, God has developed and is offering an unparalleled spiritual advancement that will impact everyone on the planet.

An exceptionally better approach

Just like Moreno was unsatisfied with the state of cyber security and invented the smart card, God is not pleased with how human beings live their lives. He offers an exceptionally better method. The apostle Paul wrote, "I will show you a more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31). It is "more excellent" because it is God's own "perfect way" to live (2 Samuel 22:31). It is all about obeying the "royal law" of love toward God and neighbor, as compared to self-centered behavior (Matthew 22:37-40).

Although God has not made His splendid way of life known to all people yet, He is inviting some individuals in this age to practice it (1 Corinthians 1:26; 1 Peter 2:9-10). They are to grow in spiritual character and zealously support the mission of proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ and the coming Kingdom of God as a witness to the world (Matthew 24:14).

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A More Excellent Way
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Indeed, God may be calling you right now to become a vital part of His spiritual family on earth, which scripture describes as “the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15). If so, Paul tells you to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).

But pursuing this “perfect” way of true Christian love in a society that is fundamentally in rebellion against God can be demanding. Stephen was killed for his poignant address to the council and high priest of his time (Acts 7:51-52). Jesus Christ—who was utterly without sin—was despised, persecuted and killed (1 John 3:5, Isaiah 53:3-9). Not only did people who “loved darkness rather than light” have contempt for Him as a troublemaking eccentric, they also loathed His disciples (John 3:19, Matthew 10:22).

A way that is beyond comparison

Jesus’ approach to living was entirely different from self-centered, humanly-conceived philosophies and ideas. He didn’t conform to man’s culture, traditions and methods (Mark 7:5-8). He “walked to the beat of a different drummer” and “defied conventional wisdom.” In all His teachings, and by His personal example of love for God and neighbor, He illustrated “a far better way” (1 Corinthians 12:31, The Message).

God may be calling you right now to become a vital part of His spiritual family on earth.

Jesus taught His Father’s righteous and abundant way of life (John 10:10) in the face of the selfish, duplicitous methods of a society influenced by dark, demonic forces. He made it plain to everyone who would listen that He personally represented a superior way forward when He said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). So, if you desire to follow in Jesus’ footsteps, you need to exert yourself, with God’s divine help, to live His “more excellent way.” And you must reject flawed, humanly-generated concepts and behaviors (Colossians 1:10).

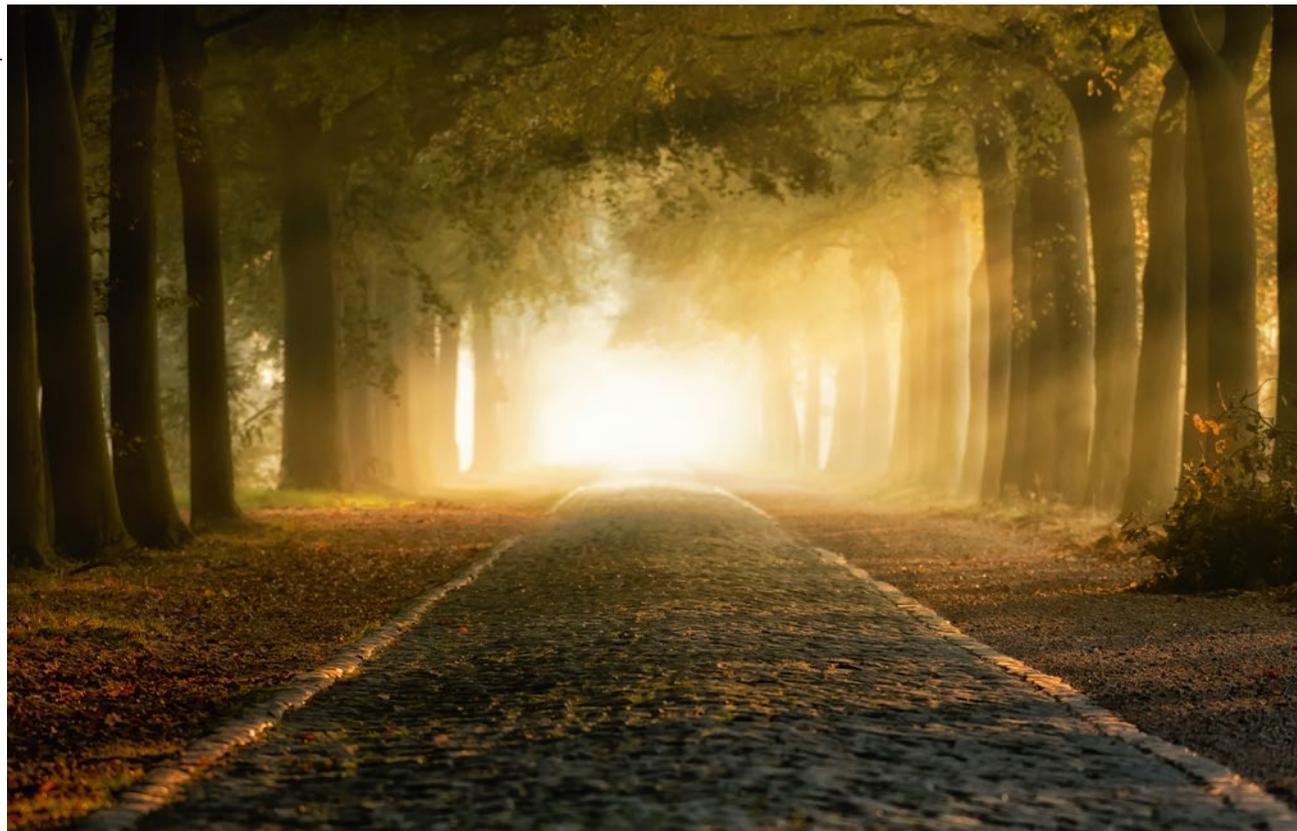
How can you accomplish this vital, yet challenging responsibility? It is helpful to review biblical examples of God’s servants who gave themselves as instruments “to do what is right for the glory of God” (Romans 6:13, NLT). These men and women are models of God’s exceptional way of life. Let’s briefly review some lesser-known but highly notable New Testament personalities.

Examples of living a more excellent way

Barsabas. Following Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension in the clouds to heaven, the 11 apostles met to select a man out of the 120 disciples to fill the apostleship left by Judas Iscariot. They decided there were two qualifications a candidate had to have. He had to have been a devoted follower of Jesus and had to have been an eyewitness of Christ’s ascension to heaven. The candidates they selected were Barsabas and Matthias (Acts 1:20-26).

Although Barsabas was not chosen, just the fact that he had been a nominee for such an important responsibility is testimony to his longterm faithfulness

Jan Meeus/Unsplash



Jesus made it plain to everyone who would listen that He personally represented a superior way forward when He said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

as Jesus’ disciple. Barsabas was one who pursued God’s “more excellent way.”

Gaius. The apostle John expressed the following about a highly dedicated and respected Christian disciple: “The Elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth” (3 John 3-4).

Not only did Gaius faithfully serve local brethren, he was hospitable to guests (verse 5). He becomes an example of one who faithfully served in “giving glory of God” and following His “way of life which transcends all others” (1 Corinthians 12:31, Weymouth New Testament).

Lois and Eunice. After Paul was imprisoned at Rome in about 60 A.D., he wrote a second letter to his faithful companion Timothy. Paul applauded him for his knowledge of the scriptures and his extraordinary faith which was first demonstrated in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:4-5).

As devout Jewish individuals living in Lystra, which is now part of present-day Turkey, Lois and Eunice were converted to Christianity most likely following Paul’s first visit to that city. Certainly their sincere Jewish faith and broad knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures prepared them to respond to Paul’s words about Jesus Christ.

When Lois and Eunice were called by God into His Church they gladly chose to follow a much better way of life than what they had previously known. As a result of their training of Timothy, they have been noted in biblical history as outstanding women of faith who abided in “a way of more surpassing excellence” (1 Corinthians 12:31, Darby Bible Translation).

These faithful disciples responded with sustained vigor and obedience to God’s calling (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14). They grasped Christ’s manner of service and sacrifice and how He opposed humanity’s deficient, selfish attitudes and practices. Plus, they followed Jesus’ perfect example of demonstrating the loving fruit of the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:22-23).

Love personifies God’s manner of living

So, what can you do to pursue and manifest God’s “way of life that is best of all” (1 Corinthians 12:31, New Living Translation)? It can perhaps be chiefly expressed in this passage: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:12, NIV).

Our inner selves must be clothed in godly love (Ephesians 5:2). Love is the adhesive that fastens all other God-ordained qualities together. It personifies God’s perfect way of life (1 Corinthians 13:13). We must all diligently pursue it while being extremely careful not to be corrupted by society’s ways (John 15:19; 17:15).

From smart card to God’s way

When Roland Moreno invented the smart card, he offered a better way—a more effective technological approach to electronic financial transactions and cyber security. In an infinitely greater manner, the Eternal Creator offers you a way of life “that is beyond comparison” (1 Corinthians 12:31, Berean Study Bible).

Although He is now calling only a few people into His Church to grow in character and support the vibrant mission of preaching the gospel, He is preparing to ultimately change the lives of everyone on the planet. This will begin when Jesus Christ comes to earth a second time to set up the government of God and to rule and educate all people in His Father’s righteousness. At that time, everyone will have an opportunity to participate in God’s magnificent way of life. But for now, those who God is inviting to be part of His Church must emulate Jesus Christ’s example by living diligently in obedience to the royal law of love.

So, what are you doing personally right now in responding to God’s wonderful calling to pursue His “more excellent way?” **GN**



Amos and Sage Tomes

March 14, 2020



Corbin Rose & Kur Guintu

May 9, 2020



Rod & Gloria Chambers

February 29, 2020



Kenneth Maurice Aime

Oct. 23, 1949 - April 25, 2020



Sherry Mayer

May 22, 1955-March 21, 2020

Engagements

Corbin Rose & Kur Guintu

Corbin Rose and Coleen Ann "Kur" Guintu are excited to announce their recent engagement! Because of the crazy situation the world is in now, they are planning a small fall wedding with livestreaming for people to experience the special day from a distance.

After returning to Manitoba he worked for Dashwood Windows, STE, Rose Lumber and Marchinski Lumber before starting his own business designing and building cattle oilers.

Ken was a member of the United Church of God, and he was known for his love of people. He always had time to sit with someone and listen, encourage and lift them up. His energy and enthusiasm for life were his trademark.

Ken was suffering from congestive heart failure with decreased health for several years and when pneumonia set in his heart couldn't keep up. He died on Saturday April 25, 2020 at the Selkirk Regional Health Centre.

Ken was predeceased by his parents, Maurice (1992) and Edith (2009), and his brother Albert (2013). He is survived by his wife Betty; their three children; Sonya Aime, Kabe Aime (Chantelle), and Teresa Aime; nine grandchildren and one great-grandchild. There are also four stepchildren and six step grandchildren. He is also survived by his brother Doug Aime (Alice).

No funeral is planned at this time due to social distancing. Special thanks to the staff at Selkirk Regional Health Centre and Gilbert's Funeral Home for their care and compassion at this time.

Sherry Mayer

Sherry (Stroup) Mayer died after her battle with cancer on March 21, 2020 at the age of 64. She is survived by her husband, George Mayer; son Nathan Mayer of Denver, Colorado; daughter Lindsey Mayer of Pueblo, Colorado; three grandchildren; her sister Robin Rusovick and others in her extended

family. She was born on May 22, 1955 as a "preemie" and spent the early months of her life in the hospital. She survived other early childhood health problems to live a full and happy life.

She was raised in Pueblo, Colorado and came into the Church and was baptized in 1975. About that time, she met her future husband, George Mayer, and they were married in 1976. They were married just short of 44 years when she died. Pursuing career advancement for George, they lived in Pueblo, Colorado; Los Alamos, New Mexico; Denver, Colorado and then in the Los Angeles, California area, where they remained for over 35 years. Through the years, Sherry worked in retail sales, food services and data entry jobs.

She was generous and giving, fun loving, free spirited and a gentle soul. She loved horses, her beloved cat, children, games, books, laughter and humor, camping with her husband and family, swimming, painting and riding with George on his motorcycle. In fact, she was a licensed rider herself. Their lives together began with a honeymoon on a motorcycle and continued with that as a constant part of their lives.

She loved her friends and family, and was an encourager to others even when she herself was not doing very well. She was loved by those who knew her and was known by her warm smile. She was constant in her Christian walk of over 45 years and loved God's way. We look forward to seeing her again in the resurrection.

Ruth McFarland

Our friend and sister in Christ, Ruth McFarland, awaits her resurrection! She was born

Nov. 2, 1934 and died June 4, 2020 at 85 years of age.

Ruthie was a wonderful and loving wife, mother, grandmother and friend. As a deaconess, she mentored many of the younger women in our Columbus, Ohio congregation while serving faithfully and cheerfully as the kitchen director of our congregation's many potlucks and social activities. Ruth exhibited fruits of the spirit and was especially known for her patience and great faith. Although she suffered from several ailments the past few years, she never complained, but instead portrayed a positive and wonderful example for all of us, smiling through it all. She was a beautiful and shining example of living God's way of life.

She'll be deeply missed by all, but especially by her husband Ray and their children, son Ray McFarland and daughter Rebecca McFarland. They have two grandchildren, Jamie and William, whom she deeply loved.

Ruthie is preceded in death by her parents, Earl and Mildred Baker, by her sisters Helen Baker and Mary Lou Dort, and by her brothers Roy Ramsey, Ted Baker, Dan Baker and Dave Baker.

Ray and Ruth would have celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary this year; he looks forward to the resurrection when he can be with his "Ruthie" again.

Sheena Pope

Sheena C. Pope was born on March 22, 1944. A longtime member of the Church of God, Sheena was baptized on Nov. 6, 1976 by a Worldwide Church of God minister. Her favorite Bible verse was Matthew 6:31. Sheena died on May 26, 2020. **UN**



Ruth McFarland

Nov. 2, 1934-June 4, 2020

Births

Amos and Sage Tomes

Chris and Kaylee Tomes of the Los Angeles, California congregation are excited to announce the birth of their twin boy and girl, Amos Keith Tomes and Sage Deborah Tomes.

The twins were born prematurely at 33 weeks on Saturday, March 14, 2020, at 10:42-43 p.m. Amos weighed 4 lbs., 9 oz. and was 17.75 in. long. Sage weighed 3 lbs., 8 oz. and was 17 in. long.

Both were born healthy but spent several weeks in the NICU where they grew well and passed the milestones they needed to come home. They've been home for a couple of months now, and are thriving and showered with so much love.

Maternal grandparents Tom and Debbie Randle of the Twin Cities, Minnesota congregation and paternal grandparents Keith and Christy Tomes of the Bakersfield, California congregation are overjoyed at the arrival of their first grandchildren.

Weddings

Rod Chambers & Gloria Gunderson

Rod Chambers and Gloria Gunderson were united in marriage on Feb. 29, 2020 in Tacoma, Washington. Mr. Chambers plays the bagpipes and is a member of the Fort Vancouver Pipe Band. A fellow bagpiper played music for the wedding and reception. Roc Corbett walked the bride down the aisle and Gloria was given away by her four daughters. Rex Sexton performed the wedding. The couple now reside in Vancouver, Washington and attend the Portland, Oregon congregation.

Obituaries

Kenneth Maurice Aime

Ken was born to Maurice and Edith Aime in Selkirk, Manitoba and grew up on a dairy farm there. After finishing the Lord Selkirk Regional Comprehensive Secondary School, Ken spent four years in Bricketwood, England attending Ambassador College. During that time, he spent one summer in Israel working on an archeological

brethren in Angola have been congregating in small home gatherings on the Sabbath, trying to include all so that no one is left out. Notwithstanding the difficulties, the brethren are continuously grateful for all the prayers around the world for them.

Jorge de Campos

Malawi: In an effort to avoid a potential COVID-19 outbreak, the government of Malawi declared a state of emergency and the indefinite closure of schools.

Several members are affected by this development—teachers and students whose futures are uncertain as long as this school closure remains in effect. The impact of school cancellations is greater here without widespread access to Internet.

We request prayers on behalf of the Malawian brethren that God might remove the uncertainty of the schooling situation in our country, and that the schools may be reopened soon.

Cephas Chapamba

Zambia: We have to wear face masks in public; church services are restricted to 50 people and can last no longer than an hour. A health official inspected our hall to see that we could socially distance. Rodrick Epomba, a deacon in Solwezi, conducts a successful weekly radio broadcast and holds a Bible study at the local prison. When his visits were temporarily suspended due to COVID-19, he bought six small radios at his own expense so the inmates can listen to his radio broadcasts.

Derrick and Cherry Pringle

South Africa: Things are getting tough for most people economically. Here in the Western Cape Province we have the highest number of infections and the highest number of deaths, but our government acted swiftly and decisively early on, which has helped slow the rate down. On Monday June 1, some of the restrictions were eased—including the 8 p.m. and 5 a.m. daily curfew. In an unexpected address last night, the President also announced that churches may resume meeting with a maximum of 50 attendees.

Barbara Botha

Asia

Hong Kong/Asia: Together, the Good Works program, LifeNets, Legacy Institute and the Boise congregation have helped the brethren in Asia greatly, coordinated by David Bensinger, who has served there in the past along with Earl Roemer. Mr. Roemer

works mostly with Hong Kong but also serves the few other members in scattered Asian countries. The brethren and prospective members and their families would be starving without their support.

It was difficult to help, as most banks were closed. Most members could not go anyway, for fear of arrest for violating curfew. We sent money through cellphone service and bought bags of rice for the families. We will deliver another set of rice bags in June until they can return to work.

Aaron Dean

India: Most of India went into a severely restrictive nationwide lockdown early on. With a population of 1.4 billion people living in a country one third the size of the United States, there was much concern that if the virus was allowed to spread, the inadequate hospital systems would not be able to handle the sick.

Lockdowns, which began in late March, were strictly enforced and if one was caught outside their homes during the hours of the lockdown, they could be beaten, fined or thrown into jail. Most lockdowns ended May 31.

Travel was prohibited. Initially, thousands of migrant workers were stranded in cities without a way to reach their home villages. Some started 100-mile journeys on foot; many died along the way from dehydration, hunger or mishaps on the road. With supply chain disruptions across the country, others have relied on the government for food handouts.

As the lockdown restrictions began to be slowly lifted, people were allowed out of their homes for short periods of the day to buy food and essentials.

Brethren in Minnesota sent funds to UCG members and other Sabbath-keeping families who did not have food. The brethren in India bought large bags of rice and divided it into smaller bags to help fellow church members and the poor in their village.

One Sabbath-keeping pastor said, “The situation in our area is very severe. Myself, family, pastors, orphan children and all of our Church people are suffering a lot for food. Your prayers for us are highly necessary.”

As COVID-19 spread, so did other disasters in India. A major gas leak occurred in the city of Visakhapatnam (where two UCG families live), and killed 12 people—350 were hospitalized and thousands near the chemical plants evacuated. The Hindutva rage is also at its peak. The killing of minorities is on the rise in

India, with primary targets being Muslims and Christians.

Another member reported that they were dealing with the aftermath of a cyclone that hit near Pune leaving two dead, several injured and damage to nearly 140 homes. Super-cyclone Amphan, the most powerful storm in the Bay of Bengal in over a decade, ripped through eastern India and Bangladesh on May 20, killing at least 86 people in West Bengal, destroying thousands of homes and uprooting innumerable trees. Prospective members in Bangladesh attended the Feast with us in Sri Lanka last year. We also have *Beyond Today* readers in Pakistan who have written and asked for our prayers and support.

In Agra, where we have several brethren, severe storms recently hit Uttar Pradesh, killing 43 people and damaging the Taj Mahal.

The country also now has 100 million people unemployed, as well as a seething border dispute with China. In the northwestern part of the country, a locust invasion is reported to be the worst in more than two decades. Our brethren and the Sabbath-keeping groups in India who read *Beyond Today* have endured quite a lot over the last three months. They are in need of prayers and support. Financial gifts to assist can be given to Life Nets/India and Sri Lanka. We'll ensure it gets to those in need.

David Schreiber

Myanmar: In Myanmar, the condition is currently not grave. Members who were unable to work or eat received assistance during the lockdown. The lockdown measure has been removed and most businesses have reopened. Members in Yangon and nearby have resumed work. Schools, colleges, universities and social gatherings are to reopen in early July. Travel within Myanmar can restart but international airlines are still closed—only domestic airlines have opened. People still have to wear masks in public.

Due to coronavirus lockdown and social distancing, members have not met together for Sabbath services since early March. While the UK has a Zoom meeting for Sabbath services and Bible study, it was impossible to connect to some parts of Myanmar where there is no power, Internet connection or computer to tune into live services. In May, we created a group of people from parts of Myanmar, Singapore and the UK. We put together Sabbath services in ad-

vance, then I post the program of Sabbath services two days prior to each weekly Sabbath day.

Last week Austin Jennings was a guest speaker from Brisbane, Australia. Having attended the Feast in Myanmar in 2019, he was familiar with Church members in Myanmar. Members were excited to meet him again and were strengthened by his sermonette. On the Sabbath of June 27, we will be receiving the message from David Bensinger. I will be translating. Due to the time difference, he will be giving the message at 12:30 a.m. in his time zone. In all things we are thankful to God for wonderful technology which He has allowed us.

Davidson Lay Beh

Philippines

Mindanao: There are 66 families—over 200 people—scattered across this island. At the beginning of government lockdown, we were mostly unaware of the threat this virus posed to our health and economy. It happened so quickly that most brethren were caught unprepared. The government imposed travel restrictions and limited businesses, which has affected the livelihoods of some brethren. To go out and purchase food and medicine, we must carry a quarantine pass issued by the local governments. One person per family is allowed to go out twice a week to buy food and medicine. Senior citizens 60 years old and above, and children 16 years old and below, are not allowed to go outside.

Thankfully, the government acted quickly to distribute relief goods to people who are living below the poverty level, many of whom are already receiving financial aid. Government cash assistance was also provided for the first month. A second payment will be given to those still under quarantine next month. Local governments also provided rice and canned goods.

Thanks to the financial assistance of the Church, all the brethren in dire need have been assisted. The Church also provides monthly assistance to members who are widows and elderly. At this time, the brethren do have sufficient food. The traditional close-knit Filipino culture helps families cope and contributes toward the necessities of life. As of now we have not heard of any brethren in Mindanao or Sabah infected with the virus. We are very much thankful for our God's divine protection and the prayers and support.

Raul Villacote

Visayas: In addition to the impact of COVID-19, people in the Visayas region have recently experienced typhoons and earthquakes, which have caused devastation to homes and livelihoods. Our brethren have always remained resilient and steadfast despite their financial difficulties and challenges, but are also experiencing fear and anxiety. A number have lost their livelihood and even homes. Like others around the world, our brethren are strongly affected by the loneliness of missing Sabbath fellowship.

Our members are impacted by the current separation and social distancing. Many have expressed a longing to worship and fellowship together. We are all thankful that God never forsakes His people and we have learned to maximize the available technology to contact and check on the welfare of each other.

The elders are in regular contact with our brethren to find out who needs financial assistance. Our pastor has been able to visit members to distribute some root crops and vegetables. Grocery items have been provided to some senior members who are confined by quarantine laws. Cash assistance has also been provided to families who are severely impacted but not able to receive the government's financial assistance, which is reserved for the poorest.

Above all, even with limited equipment and the sudden need to virtually conduct Sabbath services, we are thankful that God made a way for us to webcast our weekly Sabbath services live to our scattered brethren. We are also able to webcast weekly Bible studies from our senior pastor and provide other Bible study resources from the UCGIA website. *Beyond Today* is broadcast regularly every Sunday via our church Facebook pages. Although our brethren still long to go back to our usual gatherings, we are grateful to God for giving us the technology to virtually meet together.

We thank God that our brethren here are all accounted for and have not been harmed by the virus. We recognize all the more that we need to stay united and continue in prayer for God's will and His guidance as we wait for His Kingdom to come. We will remain steadfast as we continue to look unto Jesus Christ as our Savior and the finisher of our faith.

Noel Roy Gilos

Sri Lanka: As of this writing, a daily curfew of 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. is in place in Sri Lanka. Inter-district travel is not permitted for most brethren living in the Colombo district, as the highest number of cases is in the capital of Colombo. According to the media, almost all new COVID-19 cases detected during the last few weeks are from the navy camps and Sri Lankans returning from the Middle East mainly, but also from some other countries.

The government has not permitted any religious worship gatherings so far, not even in limited numbers. The building we hold services in has not been given approval to open up to the public yet. Work places have begun reopening with limited staffing. Essential services are continuing. There is also a general election on the horizon. It is expected that the government will open up the country gradually and church services will be permitted soon.

The brethren are in good health and their spirits are up overall. We are grateful to God that no one among the brethren or their extended families is infected. Technology has helped us to be spiritually fed very well from the home office as well as prerecorded messages from our senior pastor David Schreiber and me. Brethren keep in touch with each other by phone at regular intervals, encouraging each other. Three families who live in the same neighborhood meet regularly for services in the same home.

As expected, the cost of living is steadily increasing and effecting everyone. Food is available at a higher cost. Since the majority of the country's workforce in Colombo are still working from home, there is not as much need for private and public transportation. This has resulted in three of our brethren who provide transportation for hire to face challenging times financially. They are now struggling to make their monthly lease rentals even though they have received a grace period. A new member, a kind of "handy man," is having difficulty finding work. Two members have taken a huge pay cut and are also struggling. One member is now unemployed. The rest of the earning youth are thankful they have not received a pay cut or a loss of job as of today. A few of the brethren are now engaging in various kinds of home enterprises to earn some revenue to

get by. In all, God is seeing them through, one day at a time.

The needy brethren receive partial support from the Good Works program and generous brethren, which is much appreciated. We thank all those expressing and demonstrating love and concern, the ministry and the prayers of the brethren worldwide. We are looking forward to better times ahead with God's grace.

Frank Reckerman

Canada

Eastern Canada—Calgary, Alberta plans to begin meeting on July 4. People are anxious for services to resume, though they appreciate the webcast from Cincinnati. The province of Ontario is being very cautious so it may be awhile.

Richard Moulton is going through Scott Ashley's Survey of the Gospels and uses that for family discussions on the Sabbath. Their hall may not be available for some time.

Plans for the Feast in Midland are still on. Several speakers are from the U.S., so coordinator Pat Read made an alternate speaking schedule in case they are unable to cross the border. He and Jorge de Campos conduct a Zoom service every Sabbath with New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Windsor and Lexington.

Québec will have a satellite Feast site with about 40 people. Members who speak French now tune into a video conference for services each week that serves people from French-speaking areas. Those who speak English tune into the Cincinnati webcast. The Hamilton and Toronto congregations have a Friday night Bible study and fellowship after services on Sabbath using Zoom. Several are having health challenges. One member had COVID-19. She recovered but lost a lot of weight and muscle tone.

A hall has been booked for the Feast in Newfoundland—a bigger one to allow for distancing. The members there now tune into two services each week.

While the church office is closed officially, staff still answer phones, collect and process mail and fulfill booklet requests. Holy Day offerings were down somewhat, partly because some sent their offering to the U.S.

Linda Wasilkoff and Rainer Salomaa

Western Canada—The Victoria, British Columbia congregations plan to begin services on Pente-

cost. Both Southern Alberta and South-Central Saskatchewan hold Friday evening interactive Bible studies over Google Hangout to stay connected, and connect to Edmonton and Cincinnati on the Sabbath. Some listen to four services each week.

Mike Erickson hoped to have a few people over at a member's farm for services near Edmonton, keeping the group under 15. Prince George currently allows two families to meet together.

The Abbotsford building will hold their own services for a month and see how it goes before letting the UCG congregation back, likely in July. Their biggest issue is a lack of manpower since many of the speakers live in the U.S. and won't be available until the border opens.

The Vancouver and Okanagan congregations can meet, but Okanagan has no resident elder or speakers. John Elliott cannot cross the border to hold a live service, so they are continuing to webcast services on the Sabbath along with a webcast Wednesday night Bible study. Paul Wasilkoff has been having Zoom Bible studies in Hamilton. Some are going back to work, but others are still very isolated so they have been reaching out to them. Brethren are excited to be together again, although they are limited to a group of five. They contacted both halls they were renting and gave them donations because they were hurting financially.

In the three congregations Sheldon Sitter serves, they have an evening coffee time over Google Hangout. People can drop in to chat, and Larry DeLong announces next week's Bible study topic so people can begin studying it in preparation.

Rainer Salomaa and Linda Wasilkoff

Central/South America

Bolivia: Members in La Paz and Santa Cruz are doing well. There is a strict quarantine in these cities. Sabbath services are done through the webcast and YouTube. Despite being confined to their homes, brethren communicate via WhatsApp and study the Bible together during Zoom calls. We also have bi-monthly Bible studies through Wirecast. There is concern in Lima, Peru, because of the high incidence of COVID-19. We have three members there.

Raul Machicao

Brazil: In the tribal village of Maloca de Moscou, some 50 miles east from the city of Boa

Vista, there have been a few cases of coronavirus.

Among other scattered members in Brazil, there are also some affected by loss of jobs. A number are trying to seek new employment. Some prospective members are suffering from anxiety, have had the virus and/or have witnessed close friends dying.

In Brazil the distribution of *Boa Nova* has also been delayed, but we have recently been able to ship them. Booklets from the home office have been held back for about two months due to lack of international cargo flights to send them. We pray these temporary setbacks may be overcome soon.

Jorge de Campos

Chile: A number of members have been affected by COVID-19 in the Santiago area. Lately they have had an upsurge of cases.

Pastor Jaime Gallardo mentioned he tested positive of COVID-19 about a month ago. A few days later, his wife Maria came down with the basic symptoms of this virus, although she was not tested. They both have recovered, which was not pleasant at all, but at least they did not have to be hospitalized. They believe their young son Isaac probably had COVID-19 as well but had few symptoms.

There are other members in Santiago, Chile who suffered the virus. German Alarcon tested positive. His wife Clara and their older son Anibal had similar symptoms but were not tested. They also did not have to be hospitalized and have now almost totally recovered.

Mario Seiglie

Colombia: Of the five congregations in Colombia, no one has contracted the virus, although Jaime Salek, the resident minister there, is concerned because few precautions have been taken by the government authorities in most cities.

Mario Seiglie

Guatemala: Although there are a high number of cases in Guatemala, no members have contracted it. Pastor Israel Robledo believes that God has protected the brethren since some around them do have it. The national lockdown has left some stranded, jobless and unable to access their money to pay rent and buy food. Some could not access their bank or could not go outside to shop and began to run out of food. Brethren from the U.S. have collected funds to help

some of the brethren in Guatemala who were hit suddenly and harshly with the economic impact of the lockdown.

Israel Robledo and Mario Seiglie

Mexico: Mexico has a high incidence of COVID-19 cases and the testing is very deficient—less than two persons per thousand, so there is concern. A number of members are doctors or nurses in Veracruz and Matamoros and are in a high-risk group. Although some relatives of members in Mexico have COVID-19, no Church members have contracted the disease. They still need our prayers because of the latent danger of getting this virus.

Mario Seiglie

Europe/British Isles

Germany: Here in Germany, the government mandates the requirements to have services rather than pastors of individual congregations deciding when to open. Like other places, we've had online services over audio and Zoom. We have some members who have indicated that they will not attend right away as our services re-commence, since they are older and have to use public transportation to get to services, and they don't want to have the risk of being exposed.

Paul Keiffer

United Kingdom: Our Sabbath services continue to be held online using Zoom with links staying open after services conclude for one-two hours of fellowship. Zoom's "meeting rooms" tool is used for small-group fellowship after services. It remains uncertain as to when in-person meetings in the regular congregational venues might resume.

Experience gained with Sabbath services by Zoom has led to other meetings: weekly mid-week Bible studies have become a regular feature in several congregations. A women's discussion group has begun and other activities are being considered. The need for occasional training sessions for those who speak in Church has also been identified for action.

Currently, these mid-week activities are specific to individual congregations, although they may be extended to include members across congregational boundaries. We are looking at how details of mid-week activities might be shared within our Church community without becoming unwieldy or over-burdening the meeting hosts.

David Fenney

By Marissa Fike

I've always loved the way God uses us in ways we don't expect—how we can go into something with one intention, and end up spiraling into a whole new spirit-led project. My own little taste of this phenomenon occurred about two years ago, and has continued to be a part of my life ever since.

During that time, I had just created a business Instagram account to promote the inspirational fiction novel I was writing, "Edified." The book was not even halfway written at that point, but I had a pretty good idea of where it was going, and knew it was time to start building my promotional platform for when it was published. Writing the book and choosing which scriptures to incorporate served as my morning coffee with God, as I prayed through the chapters I wrote, asking Him to bless the process and help it to become everything He wanted it to be. I wanted to include Him all the same in the development of my business account, so that the people who would benefit from reading my book one day would stumble upon my account and be led to a potentially life-changing resource. I prayed this accordingly, that my efforts would flourish, and that I would connect with people I could help. Little did I know that God already had in mind exactly who He would send my way.

God works in wonderful, unexpected ways.

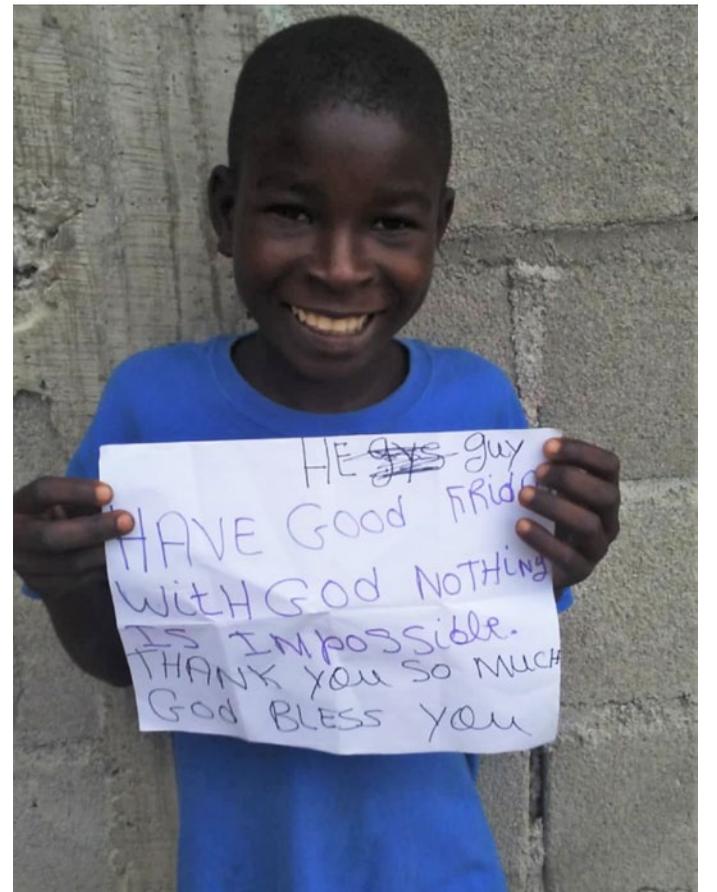
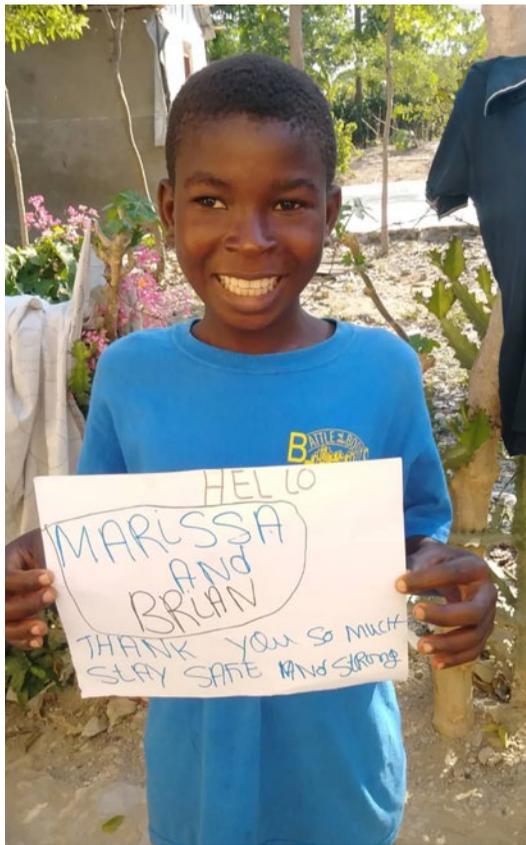
As my account began to grow, I was no stranger to private messages seeking support—but one in particular stood out. One message was from a man from Haiti, seeking support for his orphanage called "Child of God Orphanage." I was skeptical at first, as one usually is when someone online asks for a donation... but I felt something inside me, tugging at me to consider this man. I began asking him questions about himself and the children he supports, learning that there are 25 of them he cares for by himself. He sent pictures of the children, some laying on dusty floors, saying he doesn't have the proper space for all of them. He sent videos of the chil-

dren singing praise songs in their native language, and then they would repeat after him the lyrics in broken English. He sent pictures of smiling children and sad children, telling me all 25 of their names, and that he can't always afford to feed them all...

That the children are often hungry. I decided to look over his account, which had more than 1,000 pictures of the same children going about their lives together. I knew deep down that he still could very well be a con artist—someone who gets his pictures from another account to appear consistent with what he says... But after a heartfelt prayer, I decided to ask him what the orphanage needed. He gave me a humble list of things, such as toothbrushes, toothpaste and food items.

At this point, I knew I wanted to help. I thought, "If this man is a con artist, He would be asking for money... Not 25 toothbrushes." After talking with and receiving the support of my then-fiancé, I went to the store to collect the items—toothbrushes, toothpaste, a couple pounds of instant mashed potatoes, fruit cups, salt and pepper. I also decided to include a whole package of sweet treats along with three copies of our church booklet, "Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest." I obtained the orphanage's address from the man and included a handwritten letter, saying that I hoped he would save the sweets for the children as a Sabbath treat. The rest of the items they could enjoy right away, but I explained how the Sabbath is a special blessing starting from sundown on Friday and lasting until sundown on Saturday, and to make it special, we often have special Sabbath treats.

I took pictures of everything in the package and sent pictures to Fanot (the orphanage director), letting him know what was



Fanot sent photos of the children with signs thanking Marissa and Brian for donating to Child of God Orphanage in Haiti.

headed to Haiti. At this point, many prayers had been uttered, leading me to the conclusion that even if Fanot was a con artist, I didn't regret my actions because God Himself knew where my heart was, and something about this whole transaction just felt right—like God was placing His hand on my shoulder and saying, "Trust me."

Moments later, Fanot sent me pictures of the children holding up signs, addressing my fiancé and I by name, saying "Thank you, Brian and Marissa! God bless!" He said to me, "Praise God, that He is using you to help me with the children. God is able. God is good."

My heart melted. I knew the right thing had been done and that Fanot was genuine. When the package arrived in Haiti, Brian and I were sent many pictures of the children enjoying their treats. Fanot shared that he read the booklet I sent and was going to read it to the children. Now, Fanot wishes us a happy Sabbath every Saturday, and shares frequent updates on the children (who are now 30 in number). He tells us what biblical teachings they are learning each day and asks often how he can pray for us. We do the same and continue to help them as we are able, sending a new booklet along with each donation.

It's nothing short of amazing to me how God turned my little book promotion project into something much more meaningful.

God works in wonderful, unexpected ways. I could have overlooked Fanot's message—dismissed it as another person asking for support. But I had a gut feeling about this message... Some sort of pull to listen to Fanot's plea, and now it is clear to me where it was coming from.

My prayers had been for God to lead people to my book's account who I could help in one way or another... and those prayers were answered—just in an different way than I'd expected! **UN**



The Ambassador Bible College class of 2020.

On the afternoon of Sunday, May 17, the Ambassador Bible College class of 2020 began the program's first-ever virtual graduation ceremony. With friends and family joining the live webcast for a total of about

235 connections, the 18 graduating students were recognized for completing the nine-month intensive program to study the Bible.

The students this year have not had an easy road—with social

distancing restrictions affecting their ability to meet, they have listened to classes virtually and recorded choir parts separately. While in-person fellowship is a large part of the ABC experience, this year's students came together to thrive in the situation they found themselves in.

Dr. Frank Dunkle, ABC Coordinator, began the graduation ceremony with the invocation before Dylan Riess, student body president for the ABC class of 2020, followed with his discourse. President Victor Kubik then gave the graduation address, in which he exhorted students to go forth with courage as they begin their lives after ABC. Awards were presented to four students who demonstrated exceptional excellence and service during their time at ABC. Dean of Faculty Steve Myers concluded the ceremony with the benediction, before videos were shown of the students introducing themselves

and sharing some plans after ABC. Interspersed throughout the ceremony were three choir songs that the students recorded separately, some in their homes and others who met by household at different times in the home office to record. Clint Porter put the separate audio tracks together to create a beautiful virtual choir piece that brought some listeners to tears.

Dr. Dunkle noted, "The class of 2020 set an amazing example of adapting to trying circumstances and focusing on the most important parts of ABC. I especially liked how they used the virtual classroom during lunch times to maintain their morale and relationships."

Some students have since returned to their hometowns and others have pursued schooling or career opportunities elsewhere, but all completed ABC well-equipped to "go forth and serve."

Ariana Del Signore

Interested in learning more about ABC?

Visit abc.ucg.org to watch the ABC Experience Video, view the course catalogue or apply.

You can also visit www.ucg.org/inside-united-podcast to listen to Victor Kubik's *Inside United* podcast interviews with ABC Coordinator Frank Dunkle and previous ABC students.

ABC students and alumni also regularly host fundraising and information tables at Winter Family Weekend and various Feast of Tabernacles sites, both in the U.S. and internationally. Email frank_dunkle@ucg.org for more information.

An ABC Graduate's Reflection

By *Sophie Pebworth*

Attending Ambassador Bible College was a unique experience in my life. Not simply due to the COVID-19 pandemic causing the cancellation of in-person classes, but because of the purpose it instilled in me, the knowledge I was given of God's Word and the opportunity for practical application that gave me a safe environment to grow.

Throughout every class, every seminar, and every meeting at ABC was the common thread: *What does God expect from me as a member of His family and what is my purpose in His Church?* I learned the importance of ambassadorship and service—that it is not a glamorous vocation given only to the ministry, but a calling God has for each one of us.

I had the opportunity to be the music director for my class and to work with Mr. Shoemaker and Chad Browning to put together a musical program. That experience was one of the highlights of my year. As a pianist, I had never felt a sense of passion or pride about special music but mostly felt nervous that I would make a mistake. However, Mr. Shoemaker brought such a zeal for serving God through music that it showed me that God uses every aspect of our church

service and of our lives to show His love and His power.

I've grown up in the Church and was baptized in January 2015, yet I never knew the Bible could come alive the way it did at ABC. The faculty balanced the curriculum with deep understanding of the Bible. Many students, including myself, said that they had come to ABC not for the social atmosphere, but for biblical knowledge. Our class was uniquely held to that statement when safety measures for COVID-19 canceled nearly every single event ABC students usually put together.

I will not sugarcoat things; it was a painful three months watching everything we had worked toward—chorale performances, the charity auction, the class trip, graduation celebrations—be canceled. I personally struggled to understand why it happened the year I came to ABC. However, I realized that an important part of life and the Ambassador Bible College program was not and could never be canceled: knowledge of God and study of His Word. Classes continued online and although it was a less personal learning approach, I learned more than I thought possible. Importantly, I learned that God wanted me to open my Bible and spend

time getting to know Him regardless of circumstances. Socials and ceremonies are not the priority—God is.

The faculty is there to help you succeed—and that includes challenging you to grow and learn. Whether you are a recent high school graduate, in college, a recent college graduate (like me!), in the middle of a career or retired, ABC is a program that will meet you where you are at and support you to grow. If you come willing to put in the work, you

will excel and learn more than you thought possible. It is truly a safe place to ask the nitty gritty questions about God, about the Church and about yourself.

COVID-19 may have left our class saddened because we were separated and unable to finish the year together, but it also gave us a greater appreciation for each other. The small pet peeves or little squabbles that resulted from being in class together all day every day seemed so insignificant when we could no longer crack

jokes in the lunch line or give each other a hug good morning. Our class was smaller, and some could say on the quiet side, but we were strong and through the struggle of staying positive no matter what events were canceled, we became a family.

After ABC, I now go about my daily life with a renewed sense of purpose that I am a child of God, an ambassador of His way of life and an individual that is able to give an answer for the hope that lies within me. **UN**

Below, left: Tenors record parts for the virtual choir song. Below, right: Students take notes during ABC orientation.



- July 5-11 | **The Importance of Watching**
Presented by Darris McNeely
Literature offered: *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*
- July 12-18 | **Discerning the Time of Jesus' Return**
Presented by Steve Myers
Literature offered: *Seven Prophetic Signs Before Jesus Returns*
- July 19-25 | **The Sure Cure for Anxiety and Fear**
Presented by Gary Petty
Literature offered: *Why Am I Suffering?*
- July 26-Aug. 1 | **Saved By His Life**
Presented by Darris McNeely
Literature offered: *Jesus Christ: Saved By His Life*
- Aug. 2-8 | **Are You Prepared for the Ultimate Crisis?**
Presented by Darris McNeely
Literature offered: *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*
- Aug. 9-15 | **The Coming Prophetic Storm**
Presented by Steve Myers
Literature offered: *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*
- Aug. 16-22 | **After COVID-19: What Is the New Normal?**
Presented by Gary Petty
Literature offered: *The Church Jesus Built*
- Aug. 23-29 | **Satan's Four Great Deceptions**
Presented by Gary Petty
Literature offered: *Is There Really a Devil?*
- Aug. 30-Sept. 5 | **Three Keys to Knowing God**
Presented by Darris McNeely
Literature offered: *Is God a Trinity?*



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Leaving an Inheritance *What Should I Consider?*

When asked about inheritance, what enters your mind? Maybe you think about something your grandmother or grandfather, parents, brothers or sisters may have left you after their deaths. Perhaps you are considering a gift you want to leave to your heirs.

Proverbs 13:22 reads, "A good person leaves an inheritance for their children's children" (NIV). Leaving an inheritance for your children and grandchildren takes a lot of discussion, planning and effort throughout your life.

Inheritances include money, land and other possessions passed from one family member to another. An heir is someone who comes into control or ownership of wealth, belongings or a title through the process of inheritance.

Sadly, even though people make wills and trusts that leave detailed instructions regarding the division of their assets upon their death, confusion and hurt over inheritances is common. Additionally, if not thought through properly, an inheritance can have unintended negative financial consequences to the heir it was intended to help. When you think about leaving an inheritance, you may want to first assume your death occurred yesterday. What happens to your life's savings in the hands of your heirs with your current plan?

What are some things to consider?

- Talk to your family members about their inheritance prior to your death. While most people avoid these discussions, these conversations can lead to healthier relationships and better understanding of financial principles that will benefit your heirs for years to come.

- Treat all children equally. Many experts recommend this if you want to minimize fighting or hurt between family members. When distribution equally among children is not possible, communicate with your heirs either in advance or write a note to go with your will. In this way, your heirs will have some understanding as to why you set up the distributions the way you did.

- Are your children able to manage their finances wisely? If not, consider setting up a Trust with a few financial strings attached. Some adult heirs may not be responsible enough or seek guidance for lump sums of wealth that may be left to them as an inheritance. For a few heirs, receiving an inheritance speeds up destructive behaviors.

In addition, your life insurance or annuity contracts may offer various beneficiary payout options that you can customize to fit your heir's needs. These arrangements can provide installment-payout options that can be paid out regularly to the beneficiary over years, rather than in one lump sum.

- Do your heirs have any "special needs" that need to be considered? This would include mental or physical disability that require ongoing care. If not done properly, an inheritance could disqualify them from the public assistance they require since benefits are based upon need. Most states have rules to qualify for public assistance. One rule known as a "Spend-Down provision" requires the individuals receiving public assistance to have little or no savings or investments.

Establishing a special needs trust using the HEMS standard can be used. "H-E-M-S" is an acronym for health, education, maintenance and support. An inheritance placed in a special needs trust using the HEMS standard will not put at risk the needed public support. These trusts can provide terms and instructions to support heirs over a selected period of time or their whole lives. A special needs trust can be established before death or through a testamentary provision in a will.

The rules that manage how someone gives or receives an inheritance can be complex. The laws and customs for transferring the wealth of one person to another vary from state to state and nation to nation. Being in a position to fulfill Proverbs 13:22 means we need to start planning now. Start having conversations with your heirs and seek qualified advice. This will benefit your heirs both now and after your death.

What kind of inheritance will you leave behind?

Howard Marchbanks, CFP®