



## United Church of God an International Association

eNews from Ministerial and Member Services

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### Personal From the President...

Dear fellow servants of God,

#### **Fulfilling Our Focus as Disciples of Jesus Christ**

What's the most significant indicator by which others will know that we are Christ's disciples? In other words, what demonstrates most that we are Christians? Jesus stated it very simply in His last full day of His life on earth: "By this *all* people will know that you are my disciples, *if* you have love for one another" (John 13:36, English Standard Version, emphasis added throughout).

Shortly, we will have the opportunity to broadcast this to the world as many will travel to meet with those of like mind and shine their lights to those in the world who are not of like mind.

There is an ancient tradition where Jews are encouraged to mentally recite the Shema from Deuteronomy 6 immediately upon waking up. This tradition helps capture a spiritual mindset for the unfolding day. This is an important tradition for us to consider, as verse 5 was specifically defined as the Greatest Commandment by Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior and living Head of our Church.

Jesus makes this plain in Mark 12:30-31: "'You shall *love* the Lord your God with *all* your heart and *all* your soul and with *all* your mind and with *all* your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall *love your neighbor* as yourself'" (ESV).

Jesus declared that love--love for God and love for our neighbor (our brothers and sisters in the faith, our co-workers, our family, essentially everyone we meet)--was to be paramount in the daily lives and interactions for His disciples--no exceptions!

True Christianity is not found first in platitudes, fighting for our "rights" or making odious bravado statements that point to us and not necessarily to Jesus Christ.

Jesus magnified this further: "This is my commandment, *that you love one another* as I have loved you" (John 15:12, ESV). When Jesus spoke this commandment, He wasn't doing so from the top of Mount Sinai, but it is no less binding--Jesus speaks this directly to you and me!

We need to grasp that this means *total commitment*. *All* our resources are to be dedicated to loving God and our fellow humans; the latter specifically focused on our brethren in the faith!

Focusing on and working to achieve this fulfills two critical goals: first we set and renew ourselves to

become more like God our Father--whose very definition is that of love (1 John 4:7, 16). Second, loving our brothers and sisters in the Church of God openly demonstrates and represents a vital part of preaching the gospel!

Is this easy? Often it is not. But that doesn't make it any less of our commitment and personal responsibility. We are expected to be disciples of action! As the apostle John declares: if anyone "sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk *but in deed and in truth*" (1 John 3:17-18, ESV).

Here is the standard that is set for us: "may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. *Then* you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God" (Ephesians 3:18-20, New Living Translation).

Here's our challenge, especially for these times we live in today. This focus on the spiritual gift of love, of not just receiving love from God, but passing it on, should be front and center for each of us.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians and to us today a beautiful example and framework to check our status in how we are learning to love God and our brethren. All of us know it well.

But I invite you to make it personal. Let's take a test based on 1 Corinthians 13. Where you read the word "love," substitute your name. Then ask yourself: can people objectively and truly say this about you?

"[Your name] is patient, [Your name] is kind, [Your name] does not envy, [Your name] does not boast, [Your name] is not proud. [Your name] does not dishonor others. [Your name] is not self-seeking, [your name] is not easily angered, [your name] keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Corinthians 13:4-5, New International Version).

How did you do? Did you find some room for improvement? We *all* do. This is a hard test, for certain. But this is the standard that we must all aspire to!

Paul provides us with another practical example. In the Corinthian congregation, brethren living in an environment of pagan worship looked differently at what they could or could not eat in good conscience. What should have been a simple personal decision ballooned up into a divisive issue. Paul appealed to the brethren there to be "sensible," noting that while eating some foods may be lawful, they were not necessarily helpful to the conscience of some brethren, to the point where "All things are lawful, but not all things build up" (1 Corinthians 10:15, 23, ESV).

Regarding personal situations, Paul made a broad point. He essentially told the Corinthians to be sensible, *showing love and respect to each other*, respecting potential differences in behavior or circumstances. As he states, which surely applies to us today, "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor" (verse 24).

We may hold different opinions about health, about nutrition, about current affairs that may affect our individual consciences. Whatever they are, they are all subject to fulfilling our focus as disciples of Jesus Christ: "This is my commandment, *that you love one another* as I have loved you."

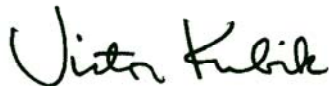
In these challenging times, none of us need energy-sapping quarrels, criticisms or expressed disrespect. We must guard our hearts, believing the best, for we are specially warned of a coming time when "the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12).

We need to renew our trust in God, asking Him to direct our paths. As David wrote: "Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!" (Psalm 27:14, ESV).

Power is available to us in the Church of God. Spiritual love in plenty is available to us. As Paul declares to us today of God's will for us: "To him who is able to do *far more abundantly* than *all* that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever" (Ephesians 3:20, ESV).

The rewards are great--both now and in the time to come--for doing this. Let us fulfill our focus as disciples of Jesus Christ!

In Christ's service,



Victor Kubik

## Plan for Festival Videos

For Feast of Tabernacles speaking schedule planning, please note that three videos will be produced by the home office for distribution to United Church of God festival sites around the world:

- A short, 3- to 4-minute opening night or first day "Welcome Video."
- A split-sermon length video, "The Work of the Church During Unsettling Times."
- A split-sermon length video by president Victor Kubik.

The two split-sermon length videos could ideally be presented on the same day of the Feast, whichever works best into your festival schedule.

The videos will be available for download by festival coordinators at least a week before the Feast.

-- Peter Eddington/Charles Melear

## Feast of Tabernacles 2020 Advisory

For the vast majority of members, this has been the most challenging year to plan for the Feast of Tabernacles. The same is true for church administration which has considered many options, suggestions and recommendations for operating the Feast during this COVID-19 trial. All input has been considered and appreciated, knowing we all want what is best and to be led by God's Holy Spirit.

Each Feast site will abide by state and local regulations in arranging social gatherings--whether it be Church services, smaller Bible studies, luncheons or teen events, etc.

Please carefully read the arrangements at the site you will attend in terms of wearing masks and social distancing (some of that planning is not finalized). Be aware of interstate travel requirements for anybody leaving their state and returning home, too.

The Church advises all members to prayerfully consider their own individual situation and make decisions for yourself on whether to attend the Feast or any gathering at the Feast. It is a personal choice

and the United Church of God is not pressuring anyone to attend the Feast and expose themselves to health risks.

The United Church of God recognizes your personal decision, and for those not attending live services there will be daily live webcast services from the central and mountain time zones.

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## Feast Greeting Cards for Those Unable to Attend the Feast

For several years, large hand-made greeting cards have been sent from Feast sites around the country to those not able to attend the Feast. These cards were signed by members at the various Feast sites. However, due to a number of factors, this program will not be provided this year. We are asking all pastors to develop a program locally to assure that any member of your congregations receives some cards during the Feast. Volunteers can create pre-addressed labels to distribute to everyone who will be going to the Feast. Please make sure they are ready by the Feast of Trumpets. Thanks for taking on this task on a local level to serve who cannot attend the Feast.

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## Online Tests Available for *Bible Study Course*

Online testing has been available for the Church's 12-lesson *Bible Study Course* for several months now. The quizzes are at the end of each lesson--found on our website at <https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-study-course>. As you click on each lesson, please scroll down to the bottom of the Table of Contents and you will see the link to that lesson's quiz. For example, the quiz for *Bible Study Course* Lesson 1 can be found at <https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/bible-study-course/bible-study-course-lesson-1/quiz-bible-study-course-lesson-1>.

Since launching the quizzes in mid-May of this year, and without any publicizing of them, 140 tests have been completed with an average score of about 84%. Each quiz takes about 8 minutes to fill out.

This is a first step in finding ways to engage our online readers more with our Bible Study Course. Discussions are underway to enhance this experience with links to additional resources, videos and study materials.

-- Peter Eddington, Media and Communications Services

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## Inside United Podcast



**Gary Petty - The Mercy Effect, Part 5**

Gary Petty and Victor Kubik continue their discussion on emotional traps, getting over bitterness, and moving past the feeling of being the victim.


<https://www.ucg.org/inside-united-podcast/inside-united-podcast-171-gary-petty-the-mercy-effect-part-5>

Send us your questions, comments, or suggestions at [podcast@ucg.org](mailto:podcast@ucg.org).

Listen to past episodes: <https://www.ucg.org/inside-united-podcast>

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