



United Church of God an International Association

eNews from Ministerial and Member Services

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Personal From the President...

Today Russia invaded Ukraine, starting with aerial bombing and shelling on civilians. Targets have included major cities including Kharkiv, where members of my family still live. I thank everyone, including our friends in Germany and Australia, who sent me thoughtful prayerful emails expressing concern about what they are seeing in the news.

As I wrote in my column two weeks ago, my pathos is in the human toll and suffering that is just beginning. Seeing a picture of an old woman with a face covered in blood from the cowardly indiscriminate shelling pained me deeply. Facebook groups in Ukraine are springing up giving reports and showing photos of what's going on. I just joined the "War in Ukraine" group. As nuclear world powers are faced off to one another, and with Russia involved, the outcome is not likely to be good.

While the world looks on aghast at these actions with fear and anxiety, we in the Church of God hold the powerful truth that *God is all-powerful*, that He is intimately aware of all things. We have the unbreakable biblical truth that "He controls the course of world events; he removes kings and sets up other kings. He gives wisdom to the wise" (Daniel 2:21, New Living Translation).

Now is the time to yield and surrender our wills to God, seeking and trusting Him and remaining under His care. While we are to pray for all people, I would ask special prayers for our many friends, particularly our Sabbath-keeping brothers and sisters in Ukraine with whom we have worked over the decades. We will give you reports as we get them.

When Jesus Christ was troubled beyond measure knowing what His immediate fate would be, He declared to His disciples: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

While we may not like to think or talk about the Doomsday Clock (created by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists and currently reflecting 100 seconds to "midnight"—potential human extinction), we do know that God will send Jesus Christ to intervene at the last minute when humans are posed to annihilate themselves. We also hold and proclaim the good news of the coming Kingdom of God, which will finally end human misery and usher in an incredible new era of real peace.

Let us lay aside any fear and unify together under the marvelous promises of our God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, praying always "Thy Kingdom come!"

Embrace the Power of Forgiveness

What does a disciple of Jesus Christ do when they have been harmed or hurt by others?

We live in a world where conflict is often common between husbands and wives, friends and families, workers and colleagues. In fact, one study showed that 85% of American workers have to deal with conflict at their jobs on a regular basis, costing companies an estimated \$359 billion annually in lost productivity and HR expenses.

So, how does a person following Jesus Christ respond when they have been wronged or hurt? The apostle Peter received an unusual answer when he asked Jesus Christ about this issue: “Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’” (Matthew 18:21).

The answer is important, especially during a time when we begin to prepare ourselves spiritually for the annual taking of the Passover. What was the response of Jesus? “Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to *seventy times seven*’” (verse 22, emphasis added throughout).

That can be a tough assignment, especially when one is harmed by a friend, loved one or trusted colleague. It can be tempting to indulge in self-pity or harbor resentments, but the alluring edge of that negative spiritual pit can crumble quickly into worse problems.

What do we do? The answer from Jesus is clear: we must step back and *forgive*.

I have recently been relaying some firsthand experiences in Russia and Ukraine that illustrate spiritual points. Allow me here to recount another one with a Ukrainian origin, which relates deeply to the vital topic of *forgiveness*.

As I have mentioned in other accounts, when Bev and I lived in Indianapolis, I was once introduced to a remarkable man: Hart Hasten. Because of our backgrounds we ended up having a long luncheon conversation. The discussion ultimately included some deep spiritual lessons for me. Allow me to relate.

At the time I met him, he was an accomplished and well-respected community leader, particularly in the Indianapolis business and Jewish community. But he was also well known and his wise counsel was sought by leaders in high places in Washington, D.C., and even internationally, including senior government officials in Israel. His positive influence ranged from helping found a prominent Indianapolis K-8 Hebrew Academy—where a number of teenagers of Church of God families have taken their SAT and ACT exams for a non-Sabbath Sunday administration—to founding, leading and growing various investment, financial and business institutions.

But Mr. Hasten didn’t always live life this way. In fact, as we learned from each other, we possess remarkably similar childhood experiences.

Mr. Hasten was born in a predominantly Jewish community in what was once Poland but became Ukrainian territory after World War II. My father also grew up in the same region. When the Nazis invaded the region in 1941, my father Igor was taken west to Germany as a slave worker. At the same time, rightly fearing deadly persecution, Mr. Hasten’s family fled

east to Kazakhstan to relative safety. Life in Kazakhstan was extraordinarily harsh, but the family somehow survived.

When they struggled back to their home region after the war ended, they were met with a horrific fact: their *entire* extended family had perished in the Holocaust.

There was nothing left for them. So, they continued as refugees traveling west, where they were eventually admitted into a Displaced Persons (DP) camp in Austria. As many of you know, my parents endured similar experiences in Germany before moving to Minnesota. Coincidentally, the Hasten family made a similar move to the same state.

We talked freely about several topics including our personal faith and our observances of the Sabbath and the annual Holy Days.

Our luncheon conversation then turned personal and animated. Unexpectedly, this extraordinarily successful business and civic professional confided that he had to lift the heavy burden of hatred off his mind. He knew the answer—he had to forgive. And he did! He spoke passionately about having to forgive the murderers who callously took the innocent lives of his family. He admitted that he could not continue to carry this emotionally acidic burden, one that could consume him.

Mr. Hasten wrote a memoir titled *I Shall Not Die!* The book title comes from Psalm 118:17-19: “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. The LORD has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the LORD.”

Why would he select such a title? He explained in his book:

“Looking back at the events of my life, I am able to discern the handiwork of a greater power. I am convinced that the Almighty is more powerful than the Nazis, the Soviets, the PLO and all of the enemies that have risen up against the Jewish people throughout history. And, like the Jewish people, I have been brought close to destruction many times, only to be saved by the outstretched hand of God . . . To paraphrase the Psalmist, the title expresses the fact that I did not die, but was allowed to live to relate what the Almighty has done.”

The point? Forgiveness holds astonishing healing power. As we approach the Passover, let us deeply consider this.

Forgiveness and gratitude often complement each other as spiritual gifts. As I write, thousands face painful tumult and upheaval. This is certainly presently true of Ukraine, where Mr. Hasten and I both share human roots. Other areas in Africa and Asia face terrible conflict, even outright genocide.

Today, many of us in the Church of God community enjoy the blessings of relative peace. We can—and should—be grateful to God for this wonderful peace.

That has not always been the case. Through the ages, beginning in Jerusalem and stretching across the Roman Empire and then further, disciples have had to contend with conflict and injustice. Conflicts over the keeping of a seventh-day Sabbath and the annual Holy Days often make us uncomfortably stand out, even suffering innocent loss.

Mr. Hasten inspired me. He had made peace with his undeserved plight and forgave people who murdered his family. The magnitude of this forgiveness would be a good topic to meditate on and consider as we approach the Passover season.

And let us carefully think on the fact that Jesus Himself died for us while we were yet sinners! (Romans 5:8)

With that as a backdrop, think humbly about *this*: “consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.” (Hebrews 12:3-4).

Jesus Christ set the standard, even with our adversaries: “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 5:44).

Why? “That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

Jesus’ main point? “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?” (Matthew 5:44-47).

Let’s be honest. This can be very hard to do. But it is the standard! We must earnestly ask God and Jesus Christ daily for the love of God to be poured out in our hearts that this may be achieved (Romans 5:5).

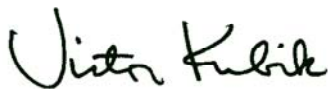
In His model prayer to God the Father, Jesus further instructs us: “Forgive us our debts, *as we forgive our debtors*” (Matthew 6:12). Even as we receive forgiveness, we must extend grace and practice the forgiveness of others who may hurt or harm us.

Why is this vitally important? Read the answer of Jesus: “If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15).

God does not want us to suffer, becoming bitterly addicted to thoughts of revenge and self-pity. *God is love!* (1 John 4:16) Paul instructs us “Be *imitators* of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and *live* a life of love” (Ephesians 5:1-2, New International Version).

Let us embrace the power of forgiveness!

In Christ’s service,



Victor Kubik

Personal From Ministerial and Member Services...

Dear Ministers and Brethren,

Last Sabbath I visited both congregations that Shawn Cortelyou pastored, Elkhart and Munster, Indiana. It was apparent to me that Shawn was truly loved by the members of both congregations and that he is going to be sorely missed. They were all quite welcoming, but I could sense their concern and sadness over the very recent death of their beloved pastor.



Shawn Cortelyou

After having an opportunity to fellowship for considerable time in both congregations after services, I joined with most of the members of the Munster congregation as we gathered at one of the members' homes for a very enjoyable evening of extended food and fellowship. The host had mentioned to me that he just felt they all needed to be together as much as possible right now—to help comfort and strengthen one another.

I was able to spend both Friday and Saturday nights with my oldest sister and her husband who live in South Bend, Indiana. Then on Sunday I drove the five hours to the small town of La Harpe, Illinois, where Shawn had grown up. In the late afternoon, I gathered with some church members at the funeral home to reminisce on some of our thoughts and experiences with Shawn and his family, and to watch a video collage of Shawn's life.

Those videos of one's life are so powerful and meaningful; it is truly inspiring to consider the impact that one person can have on so many others. This was certainly true of Shawn. His personality came to life before our eyes by his numerous facial expressions that appeared throughout the video to bring joy and laughter to those he loved. Some of his hobbies and interests were displayed, and his love of family and friends was apparent. I found it quite moving and inspirational for me, personally.

Shawn's memorial service was the next morning and the funeral home was packed with family and friends from the Church and from the community. A close personal friend and fellow pastor, Len Martin, officiated and spoke of his own personal knowledge of Shawn's character and dedication as a true man of God.

It was good to see so much support for the Cortelyou family. There were teens and young adults who came to show their love and support for Shawn and Beth's daughters. There were several close friends of theirs in the ministry who traveled to show their support. There were friends who attended from all the congregations served by Shawn and Beth and from the congregations where Larry and Terri serve, in addition to friends with other connections to the

family. This was a classic fulfillment of the scriptures that encourage us to love and support one another at all times, but especially during the most difficult times.



Graveside service for Shawn Cortelyou.

After the service at the funeral home, there was a short graveside service at the local cemetery only about a mile away. It was a beautiful day, sunny and very warm for February. Most everyone stayed a full hour to fellowship even further.

Please continue to remember Shawn's wife, Beth, and their three daughters, Megan (husband, Jake Crouse), Heather, and Emma in your prayers for the "God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3) to continue to comfort and strengthen them—likewise for Shawn's parents, Larry and Terri Cortelyou.

Wishing you all a very physically and spiritually rejuvenating Sabbath day!

In God's love and service,

Mark Welch, Operation Manager for MMS

From Ministerial and Member Services...

Recent Pastoral Changes



Troy and Cindy Phelps

Effective on Feb. 19, Troy Phelps became the pastor of the San Francisco Bay Area and Petaluma, California, congregations.



Tim and Maryse Pebworth

Tim Pebworth will now be devoting his time to serving as International Senior Pastor for all French-speaking congregations and members throughout the world. We want to thank both Tim and Maryse for their love and dedicated service to the San Francisco Bay Area and Petaluma congregations and for their continued service to our French-speaking brethren.



David and Laura Meidinger

Also on that Sabbath, David Meidinger became the pastor of the Albuquerque, New Mexico, congregation. Randy Schreiber now serves as an associate pastor, working with David to serve the needs of the congregation. We greatly appreciate their continued service to our Albuquerque brethren.



Randy and Kay Schreiber

We would greatly appreciate your prayers and support for the Phelps, Pebworth, Meidinger and Schreiber families as they transition to serve God and His people in these new roles.

Compass Check Magazine

Important announcement for pastors and parents:

All teens in the United Church of God should automatically begin receiving their own copy of *Compass Check* magazine when they turn 12 years of age. If they are not receiving *Compass Check*, it is likely there is no birth date on file for them at the home office; parents, please let your pastor know if your teen is not receiving the magazine. Pastors, please check to make sure the birthdays of the young people in your congregations are up to date on your intranet dashboard, or by contacting Kathe Myers at the home office. Please help us get a subscription of *Compass Check* to every Church teen in the U.S.!

Why Ambassador Bible College?

Comparative Religion

We all know people who do not attend the United Church of God and have different religious beliefs. Have you ever talked with them about the Bible or about their beliefs?



Chris Rowland talks to the ABC class during this year's orientation.

I teach a class at Ambassador Bible College called Comparative Religion which meets for one hour each week throughout the year. The first semester focuses on non-Christian religions; the second semester covers many of the Christian religions and denominations. The purpose of the course is not to compare one religion with another religion, but to compare each religion to what is revealed in the Bible.

Many of our students have not been exposed to the broad range of religious belief that we find in our world and may not know the historical background of the various religions, nor the distinctions between their beliefs. The course tries to distill the core concepts and beliefs that make each religion unique, providing a foundation for additional study.

The approach for the class is to be fair in stating what each religion teaches and what its adherents sincerely believe. As much as possible, I try to present their beliefs in their own words. In many cases, I show video clips of people explaining firsthand why they believe a certain way.

Some students have jokingly remarked that I am the only instructor at ABC who gets to teach “heresy”—teaching about beliefs that are *not* supported by the Bible. But there is value in learning about and understanding things that you often won’t hear about at Church services so that you can be prepared to confront those topics when the occasion might arise.

As an ABC student, we hope to enable you to engage those people you may encounter who hold other beliefs and to provide a foundation so that you will be able to speak with them intelligently and convincingly about the truths of God’s Word.

—Chris Rowland, faculty member, Ambassador Bible College

Inside United Podcast



Kathy de Campos—The Many Hats of Kathy de Campos

Kathy de Campos joins host Victor Kubik to discuss the many hats she wears while working in the home office, and her upcoming “bittersweet” move to Texas with her husband as they assume pastoral duties for the Dallas area congregations.

ucg.org/inside-united-podcast/inside-united-podcast-236-kathy-de-campos-the-many-hats-of-kathy-de-campos

Send us your questions, comments, or suggestions at podcast@ucg.org.

Listen to past episodes: ucg.org/inside-united-podcast

Start a Bible Journaling Group in Your Area—Here's How!

Chicago pastor Bill Bradford has spoken to us on different occasions about an effective children's Bible journaling program in their congregation. He showed us examples of journaling Bibles and how children learn from them. We would like to recommend this program in addition to other programs such as the *Family Study Guides* program coordinated by Randy and Kay Schreiber.

For more information, please write to Bill Bradford at W.M.Bradford@outlook.com.

From Bill Bradford:

To increase opportunities for brethren of all ages to fellowship together while studying the Bible, our congregation provides a Bible journaling club.

The club meets once a month after services to review a selected passage of the Bible, discuss some key ideas from the passage, and select elements from the discussion to "Bible journal." For the scripture review, a member of the club will read aloud the selected passage, or we listen to a dramatic online reading of the chosen text. The facilitator then interactively discusses key learnings from the passage with the group before transitioning to the Bible journaling activity. During the journaling time, club members use Bible journaling pens and pencils to represent a creative and artistic picture or drawing of that passage in their Bible journal. The club ends with each member sharing their artistic interpretation, drawing or journal entry with the rest of the club.

Benefits

- Allows all ages of the congregation to study the Bible together in a shared experience.
- Helps reinforce scripture learnings for creative or artistic-minded learners.
- Gives younger children an age-appropriate active role within the congregation.
- When aligned with sermonettes, can reinforce messages from the Sabbath services.

Supplies

- Journaling Bible or paper—Many journaling Bibles are available with extra-wide margins for artistic enhancement. We generally use an NKJV Bible journal. For younger children, we just use plain paper until they're old enough for their own journal Bible.
- Journal pens and pencils—A full range of Bible journaling supplies is available at Amazon or other providers. We have a shared set of pens/pencils, and many club members also bring their own journaling instruments based on preference.

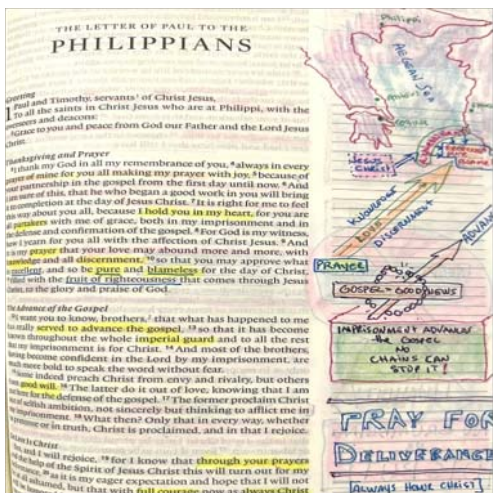
Typical Journaling Agenda

- Scripture reading: 5 min
- Review scripture lessons: 5–10 min
- Individual journaling: 20–25 min
- Share journaling with others: 10 min

Sample Topics

- The fall of Jericho, Joshua 6:1-20
- The kingdom of heaven, Matthew 13:31-32
- Rejoicing in difficult times, Philippians 1:12-18
- Moses and the burning bush, Exodus 3:1-10

Sample Journal Entries



Sample Bibles

Here are some links to titles for sale at Amazon. There is Journaling Bible in every translation with a variety of looks and styles. Here are three. I try to keep people primarily in the NKJV, but the ESV may be preferred by some and other translations are also available.

- NKJV, Journal the Word Bible, Bonded Leather, Brown: [amazon.com/dp/0785218491](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0785218491)
- NKJV, Journal the Word Bible, Cloth over Board, Gray Floral: [amazon.com/dp/0785218424](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0785218424)
- ESV Single Column Journaling Bible, Cloth over Board, In Bloom: [amazon.com/dp/1433572710](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1433572710)

—Bill Bradford

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