



United Church of God Thanks Victor Kubik for Nine Years of Presidency

By Ariana Del Signore and Terri Eddington

In March 2022 the Council of Elders made the decision to transition to a new leader to serve as president of United Church of God (UCG). Victor Kubik plans to retire within the next year, having served as president of UCG for nine dedicated years and more than 50 years of faithful service within the Church. The United Church of God would like to recognize Victor and Beverly Kubik for their dedication to the Church during his presidency.



The Kubiks were instrumental in the start of UCG in Indianapolis in 1995. Victor then served on the Council of Elders from 1995-2010, while also pastoring congregations in central Indiana. Mr. Kubik recounts, "In 2010 Roy Holladay called on me to oversee Ministerial Services in Cincinnati. Then in 2013,

upon the death of my mentor and closest friend Denny Luker, I became President of the United Church of God and have served in this role for nine great years. I am happy to report, as I leave this post and retire, that I look with fondness on this period as a wonderful opportunity to work with many devoted and God-fearing men and women. I will always treasure these days."

Mr. Kubik has numerous accomplishments from his tenure as president, many being the result of his love for people and the desire to build and maintain connections between them. Upon arriving in Cincinnati, he immediately began a relationship with the community through the Rotary Club. He says, "Community leaders knew where our building was, but had never met anyone

from UCG. By taking an interest in them, the Rotarian members took an interest in us. Three Rotarians came to our Public Appearance Campaign and several came to recordings of *Beyond Today*. Another, a former Deputy Ambassador to Iraq, came to speak to ABC and the home office staff and was positively impressed by our faculty and students. A domestic relations judge Rotarian, being knowledgeable of our views on the divine institution of marriage, has contacted and visited us asking how we could help couples in the late stages of divorce proceedings." As a Rotarian and CEO, Mr. Kubik was also asked to sit on a scholarships committee and interview high school students. These connections and friendships have also greatly benefitted overseas work, as Rotary International has granted funding for ambulances and boreholes, and even funded a visit to Malawi.

ed a weekly podcast called *Inside United* with the purpose of communicating UCG news from within the home office and from around the world. Many individuals of varying roles and backgrounds, including both members and nonmembers, have provided unique perspectives to listeners. More than 240 episodes have been recorded since its inception, with almost as many guests.

Over the years, the Kubiks have consistently advocated for the purchase of church halls, and there are nine congregations in the U.S. that have done so. *United News* recently published a series of articles highlighting some of these churches. A consistent thread among them has been twofold: the ability for members to spend more time together has fostered stronger bonds between each other and made it easier for them to serve their communities.

In 2013, Mr. Kubik initiated

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Ambassador Bible College Hosts Annual Charity Auction for 2022

By Audrey McGuire

The ABC Charity Auction was a success once again! Held at the UCG home office on March 20, the event was the first auction held in-person after two years. The auction was run, hosted and performed by ABC students and faculty. Themed "Back to the Theater," the entertainment section of the event featured several comedic skits that were almost entirely original pieces, providing laughter and entertainment for the guests in attendance. Such skits included "Goldilocks and the Three Elephants," "Right Place Wrong Time," and "Nebby

K." The students also sang a few select songs from various musicals such as *Les Misérables*, *The Muppet Movie* and *The Sound of Music* to tie into their theme.

Of course, the main event was the auction itself. The goal for the 2022 performance was to raise money for brethren in Zambia to receive a new bus so they may gather for the Sabbath each week. The bus costs \$15,000, and the non-profit LifeNets, started and run by the Kubiks, committed to cover the difference depending on how much money the Charity Auction raised.

Hosted by student body president Matthew Rains and student service committee head

Winston Snyder, the auction was an enormous achievement. More than 150 brethren arrived to watch or bid at the auction. Thanks to the generosity of multiple attendees, the students had over 40 varieties of desserts and treats to auction off. With such a wide variety ranging from Pokémon cookies and a Star Wars cake to bourbon brownies and cheesecake, there was something for everyone. The silent auction featured a large assortment of items as well, including paintings, baseball cards, dishware and even an almost-new flatscreen TV!



The charity auction raised funds to purchase a bus for brethren in Zambia.

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Dallas-Fort Worth Congregations Hold Regional Family Weekend and Teen Prom

RICHARDSON, TEXAS—From March 11-13, the Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas, congregations hosted a regional family weekend with the theme, “Developing A Servant’s Heart.” Approximately 170 brethren from 10 different states, including guest speakers Jorge de Campos and Benjamin Light, assembled to forge new acquaintances and renew old friendships while participating in activities.

The weekend was kicked off by a service project at the North Texas Food Bank, followed by a mouth-watering dessert social on Friday evening. On the Sabbath, a teen hospitality hour was followed by interactive preteen, teen and adult Bible studies related to the theme. The adult Bible study, “Let This Mind Be In You . . .,” was given by Jorge de Campos while Matthew McDonald facilitated the teen Bible study, “What Does Serving Look Like?” After lunch, Ben Light gave the sermon, “Ordinary Men . . . Extraordinary God.”

Musical highlights included hymn accompaniment by a multigenerational instrumental ensemble and special music by a combined DFW-Phoenix, Arizona, teen vocal ensemble. Graduating seniors were honored in a slideshow presentation. Willing hands and hearts joined together to coordinate delicious meals



Brethren from almost a dozen states gathered for the family weekend and teen prom, complete with dinner, a photobooth and games for the preteens.



over the course of the weekend.

The Starry Night-themed prom was attended by more than 50 teens, who enjoyed a catered dinner and danced the night away under the twinkling lights of the ballroom. Meanwhile, remaining brethren dined together at the church hall, and preteens enjoyed activity stations, a dance party and a movie. It truly was a night to remember! On Sunday, brethren gathered to fellowship



and play volleyball, basketball and dodgeball.

Thank you to all who attended and all who extended hearts

of service to make the weekend a reality! The local charity to which donated goods were given is most appreciative.



Mark your calendars for next year’s DFW Regional Weekend, scheduled for March 10-12, 2023!

The Reinoso Family

UCG Thanks Victor Kubik for Presidency Continued from front page

In the home office, Mr. Kubik is respected for his interest in and support of what his coworkers do, and for being relatable and approachable in his interactions with them. Media Operation Manager Peter Eddington commented, “It’s been a wonderful nine years working with Vic as he served as Church president! Terri and I have appreciated our great friendship with Vic and his wife, Beverly, since 1995. His tireless dedication serving in many areas of the work has been invaluable in providing stability to the Body of Christ. Vic will be very missed at the home office. Terri and I pray for a blessing upon the Kubiks as they transition to other duties.”

Ministerial and Member Services Operation Manager Mark Welch commented, “It has been a real pleasure and blessing

to be able to work closely with Vic these past 3½ years. I have greatly appreciated Vic’s sense of humor, his warmth, his integrity and, most of all, his balanced approach in dealing with some very difficult issues. I have learned a tremendous amount from Vic’s approach and appreciate him and Bev a great deal. They make an awesome team and will, undoubtedly, continue to serve in many highly beneficial ways in the future.”

Council of Elders Chairman Len Martin commented, “Vic has been instrumental in the leadership and organization of the Church ever since our founding in Indianapolis, in 1995. He has worn many hats over his 50 years of being in the ministry of Jesus Christ and he will now be able to focus more of his time on LifeNets, which

has been a passion of his for 22 years. Thank you, Vic and Bev, for your ongoing service to the Church.”

On Monday, May 2, the home office staff gathered for a special lunch to honor Mr. Kubik on his retirement, along with Connie Seelig, who is retiring, and also Jessica Hendrickson as she moves on from the home office to other future employment. Many coworkers shared kind words about Mr. Kubik’s impact on their lives. Comments focused on his approachability, kindness, personability, eagerness to try new things and attention to the success of those with whom he works. Connie Seelig summed up many of the comments by saying, “No matter what we’ve talked to him about, even if we disagreed, we knew he still loved us.”



The Kubiks smile during his retirement celebration held at the home office on May 2.

Mr. Kubik noted that after many trips to dozens of countries around the world on five continents, people have asked him what his favorite trip has been. He replied, “My favorite trip is from Batavia to Milford each day”; that is, from his house

to the home office building. The home office staff wish the Kubiks all the very best as they transition to a new chapter in their lives, and the United Church of God thanks Mr. Kubik for his dedicated tenure of service as our president. **UN**

Pondering the Path to Pentecost



Lili Popper/Unsplash

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4).

This dramatic display of power imbued the disillusioned disciples with a confidence that transformed them into apostles who fearlessly took the gospel to the world. Peter unapologetically told the crowd gathered on Pentecost, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly

that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:36-38). Three thousand heeded the call, repented and were baptized on that day.

We tend to “romanticize” the glory of what occurred on this Day of Pentecost without pondering the path that led to it. Indeed, the day was glorious—the power of the “Promise of the Father” that transformed the hearts

and minds of the thousands was unprecedented.

However, the path that preceded this transformative event was tumultuous and traumatic. Let’s consider a few of those present that day: Their Lord and Master, whom they expected would establish the Kingdom of God in Israel, was summarily executed in the most excruciating manner. This made them enemies of the Roman state with the very real risk of suffering the same fate.

Three days later when the tomb was empty, powerful men framed them with the false accusation that they stole His body while the Roman soldiers slept (Matthew 28:13). Imagine the fear that this accusation could have caused them. Now, not only were they enemies of the state, they were allegedly conspiring to cause an uprising greater than the first. It’s no wonder they went into hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jews (John 20:19).

Then Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst behind the locked doors and said, “Peace be with you.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands

and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (John 20:19-20).

Sometime later they were with Him on the Mount of Olives and watched Him as “He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).

These are just a few of the tumultuous and deeply traumatic events the disciples encountered on the path to Pentecost. By any measure these events were enough to cause acute and crippling Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Except the trauma did not cripple them. They preached the gospel fearlessly throughout the known world and changed the course of history.

What made this possible? The power, promise and presence of the Holy Spirit.

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

No matter how tumultuous our path, let’s ponder and embrace the power, love and soundness of mind extended to us by the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on Pentecost. **UN**

Quarterly Council of Elders Meetings Held From Feb. 28-March 3, 2022

The Council of Elders held a regular meeting at the home office from Monday, Feb. 28, through Thursday, March 3. Ten Council members met in person, along with staff from church administration, while Council members Paul Wasilkoff and Scott Ashley participated via video link.

The meeting included reports from president Victor Kubik and the operation managers Mark Welch, Peter Eddington and Rick Shabi, along with chairmen of the Council’s standing committees.

A large portion of these meetings focused on plans for the future. The Media Department presented plans for a new logo that will provide a unified graphic image for the Church and *Beyond Today*, and the Council approved continued development and refinement.

The Strategic Planning and Finance Committee presented results of the triennial revision of the church’s strategic plan. The new plan focuses efforts through a framework of “Speaking the

Truth in Love,” and incorporates new graphics to portray its concepts. That plan, along with a draft for using a similar framework for the annual Operation Plan, will be presented to the General Conference of Elders at its annual meeting in May.

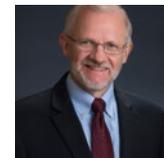
During these meetings, the Council reached a decision not to appoint President Victor Kubik for a fourth term. He has successfully served for nine years as president, and plans to retire later this year.

The Council thus began implementing a detailed plan for selecting the next UCG president. That plan was approved in December 2015, and it allows for every elder in the General Conference to nominate a man for the role. The Council will conduct interviews in May and appoint a president then.

The Council appreciates prayers for God’s guidance in this important work, as well as in decisions yet to be made.

Frank Dunkle

John Miller serves as an elder in the North Canton, Ohio, congregation. He has been involved in the ministry in various capacities in the U.S. and Europe since 1993. He can be reached at john_miller@ucg.org.



Updates From Ministerial and Member Services

On Feb. 19, 2022, Troy Phelps was named the pastor of the San Francisco Bay Area and Petaluma, California, congregations. The previous pastor, Tim Pebworth, is now devoting his time to serving as International Senior Pastor for all French-speaking congregations and members throughout the world.

Also on Feb. 19, David Meidinger was named the pastor of the Albuquerque, New Mexico, congregation. Randy Schreiber now serves the Albuquerque congregation as an associate pastor.

Due to the death of pastor Shawn Cortelyou, Devin Schulz was appointed pastor of the congregation in Elkhart, Indiana, on Feb. 26. Mr. Schulz also pastors the Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids and Lansing congregations in Michigan.

On the same date, Bill Bradford was appointed pastor of the congregation in Munster, Indiana. Mr. Bradford also pastors the Chicago (Illinois) and Beloit (Wisconsin) congregations.

Marcus Lucas, a member from the congregation in Rome, Georgia, was hired on March 10 as a ministerial trainee. He serves the congregations in Cincinnati, Ohio, with pastor Steve Myers.

We would greatly appreciate your prayers and support for these men and their families as they transition to serve God and His people in these new roles.

Chris Rowland

4 Honoring Retiring Employees



Tim Sipes

On Monday, March 28, the home office staff gathered to recognize Facilities Manager Tim Sipes upon his retirement. Office employees and even some remote employees shared egg and cheese bagels, donuts and fresh fruit as many shared stories and memories of their time working with Tim.

Tim and Connie Sipes were Ambassador Bible College students in 2010 when positions at the home office opened rather suddenly. Kitchen and building management became an immediate need, and Tim and Connie graciously stepped in to serve.

Since then, Tim has been an



Victor Kubik presents Tim Sipes with a signed card at Tim's retirement party.

integral part of the home office. Serving as the Facilities Manager, Tim has overseen all building-related activities including utilities, maintenance, repairs, inspections and remodeling. He has also managed the upkeep of equipment, and handled service contracts and inspections, budgeting and tracking expenses, handling landscaping, and managing and organizing the warehouse. While Tim has been in this position, many changes and upgrades have taken place at the home office, perhaps most notably the *Beyond Today* studio which was finished in late 2018. His last project before retiring

was to finish a break room for the employees, complete with a kitchen, dining area and sitting area. He was also ordained a deacon in the Cincinnati East congregation in April 2018. At the farewell breakfast held in Tim's honor, nearly everyone had a story about him helping them around the office wherever needed, and just being a good friend with whom to talk things over.

Tim reflected on the journey of the past twelve years, "My wife and I came to Cincinnati the spring of 2010 to attend Ambassador Bible Center [now College] that fall. It was a great experience for our first year of marriage. We

planned on attending the classes and then moving on with our new life. In the middle of that school year, a few people left the employment of the church and with a lot of prayer and evaluating, we applied for the jobs of Facilities Manager and Food Service Manager respectively. I had my own construction company that I had sold and so had the building/maintaining experience. I enjoyed working with God's people and being able to oversee the construction of the new *Beyond Today* studio in 2018 along with my regular duties of maintaining the facility and grounds. It has been a blessing to work for the church and I am grateful for the experience and all the people we have met along the way. We look forward to what God has in store for us in retirement years. We plan on selling our property and moving to Northeastern Kentucky this year, God willing."

Tim has two sons, Cody and Josh, a step-daughter, Rachel, and nine grandchildren. He loves anything to do with building and fixing things, hunting and fishing. Tim and Connie look for-

ward to the many projects they plan to pick up in Northeastern Kentucky upon their move.

Media Operation Manager Peter Eddington commented, "The positive, serving attitude of Tim has been a real blessing to all of us at the home office. His care for Church facilities and his concern and welfare for the home office employees has been greatly appreciated. Tim was always available to help when needed, no matter the hour or the task. He will be greatly missed and Terri and I pray for his success during his retirement years."

Building and IT Manager Richard Kennebeck reflected, "It truly was a God-send when Tim began working for the home office as the Facilities Manager in 2011. The home office, and those who came in contact with Tim, greatly benefited from his vast knowledge and his ongoing desire to humbly serve and help those in need. I will greatly miss seeing him around the office."

The United Church of God thanks Tim Sipes for all of his dedicated service to the Church and wishes him all the best in retirement. **UN**



Connie Seelig

The United Church of God (UCG) would like to recognize Connie Seelig upon her retirement from employed service to the Church. Connie has been working in the Mail Processing department since 1972.

Born in Lincoln, Nebraska, Connie moved with her family to Chicago and then to California by the time she was three years old. Her parents were baptized into the body of Christ when she was six years old. When Connie was 17 years old, her 12-year-old sister with Down Syndrome died. About this, Connie says, "She was the light of our lives. Her death had a profound effect on the whole family."

Connie attended Ambassador College from 1968 to 1972



Connie Seelig and her husband Gerald smile with their family at Connie's retirement party.

and was hired by the Spanish department after her first year. Having previously studied Spanish for eight years, this fulfilled one of her long held dreams. In 1976 she married Gerald Seelig and they had three daughters. Connie continued working full time in the Spanish department until their first daughter was born in 1979, after which she transitioned to on-call and part-time status until 1995. When UCG began, she was hired to work full-time in the mail processing department, which she notes, "was an easy transition for me because I was familiar with [al]most all aspects of the church, having worked in the Spanish Department, which was a mini-work within the overall

work."

Richard Kennebeck commented, "Connie has been a pillar in the office since United began in Arcadia, California in 1995. Through the years I've enjoyed working closely with her on many projects and she is one of the hardest working people I know. I cherish our time together and will miss her greatly."

Since the beginning of UCG Connie has continued to work in the mail processing department, first as Mail Processing Supervisor and then as the Mail Processing Manager. Peter Eddington commented, "It's been an amazing 27 years working with Connie! Her tireless dedication to the work of the Church in the mail processing and do-

nation processing area has been invaluable in moving the work of the Church forward. She will be sorely missed in the Media and Communications Services department. Terri and I wish her well in her retirement years, being able to spend more time with her family and grandchildren."

Working for the Church was her life's ambition from the time she was a small child, and Connie has spent fifty years working for the Church in various mail-processing roles. She reflects, "I have loved working for the Church. I especially enjoyed helping take care of the brethren. I've also enjoyed doing whatever I could to help the field ministry—in providing reports, mailing labels, solving member issues with their subscriptions, etc. Often it has been like a roller coaster ride, but I have no regrets. I've learned many lessons through the many trials that were experienced over these fifty years. I've appreciated all the personalities I have worked with over the years and have learned much from every one of them. One thing that carried me through all the challenges was a quote from Mr. Armstrong, 'Don't believe me. You go to the Bible and prove it for yourself!' That works for is-

sues other than doctrinal issues, as well. Don't believe hearsay. Prove it for yourself—of course, with God's help."

On Monday, May 2, the home office staff gathered for a special lunch to honor Connie on her retirement. Connie shared a few words about her life's journey, and many coworkers shared memories and stories about the impact that Connie has had on their lives for many years.

Connie has always enjoyed sports, particularly softball and volleyball, and has participated in these as both a player and a coach. She hopes to pursue hobbies after retirement, such as her interest in woodworking, and to spend more time with her grandchildren. She commented, "One of the reasons I retired is to spend more time with my grandchildren. I have a special-needs grandson that takes up a lot of my time now. I look forward to being able to work with him and his therapy in a more focused manner. We are blessed with three grandchildren so far and one on the way . . . as a grandparent now, my grandchildren are my favorite interest. I have learned so much from my children and grandchildren that every day is an adventure!" **UN**

Associate Editor, United News and Internal Publications

The United Church of God has announced an opening for an associate editor for *United News* and other internal publications.

The associate editor's primary responsibilities will be to copy edit and lay out *United News*, as well as the *Festival Planning Brochure*, the *United Youth Camps Magazine* and Ambassador Bible College publications.

A bachelor's degree (B.A.) and one to two years' direct related experience is preferred, with training in communications, English grammar and proofreading. Experience using desktop publishing (Adobe InDesign) and photo editing (Photoshop) software is needed. An equivalent combination of

education and experience may be considered. Strong language, logic and communication skills and algebra/geometry level math skills are required. Those applying for consideration and invited for an interview must supply a portfolio of their work.

Potential employees must be baptized members (in good standing) of the United Church of God. Applicants must be biblically literate and possess a thorough working knowledge of the doctrines, beliefs and practices of the United Church of God.

To request a job application or if you have any questions about the position, please contact human_resources@ucg.org. **UN**

Systems Administrator/Programmer

The United Church of God has announced a position opening for Systems Administrator/Programmer. The position will be responsible for:

- Overseeing, maintaining and upgrading server and desktop hardware and software in a Microsoft Windows domain running in virtual environments.
- Helping coordinate corporate technology direction, development, production activities and budgeting for the Information Technology department.
- Helping with supervising, implementing and maintaining local and cloud computing systems and equipment.
- Performing and verifying backups and disaster recovery.
- Helping optimize and

oversee network infrastructure and security.

- Programming using .NET and/or Microsoft Access languages.
- Providing 2nd level help desk support for local and remote users.
- Assisting the Information Technology Manager with special tasks and duties.

Qualifications, knowledge and skills:

- Proficient in the latest Microsoft Windows server and desktop OSs, AD, and VMWare technologies.
- Proficient in Microsoft Office Suite and Office 365 management.
- Proficient in at least one modern programming language, preferably .NET or Microsoft

Access VBA. Drupal/PHP skills are a plus.

- Strong understanding of Web technologies.
- Excellent organizational skills and attention to detail.

Education and/or experience:

College degree and one year experience, or three years related experience or equivalent are required.

Potential employees must be baptized members (in good standing) of the United Church of God. Applicants must be biblically literate and possess a thorough working knowledge of the doctrines, beliefs and practices of the United Church of God.

To request a job application or if you have any questions about the position, please contact human_resources@ucg.org. **UN**

Ken Japhet Hired as Facilities Manager



The home office has recently hired Ken Japhet as Facilities Manager for United Church of God.

After growing up near Orlando, Florida, Ken spent most of his adult life on the West Coast of the U.S. in California, Oregon and Washington. He served four years in the U.S. Air Force, and since then has worked mostly in equipment manufacturing.

He has designed and built electrical and hydraulic control

systems and worked in maintenance, installation and service, equipment rebuilds and sales. He commented, "The years of working with electrical, hydraulic and mechanical equipment provided a lot of the skills I bring to this job."

Before moving to Ohio, Ken worked as service manager for an equipment distributor, where he ran a crew of up to eight service technicians. A few of his responsibilities as the Facilities Manager at the home

office include overseeing all building-related activities including utilities, maintenance, repairs, upkeep, inspections and remodeling.

He will also coordinate service contracts and inspections to ensure compliance with state and federal regulations, budgeting and tracking facility expenses, handling landscaping and managing the warehouse. Additionally, Ken will be involved in managing the Church's interest in buildings that UCG owns

throughout the U.S.

Ken commented, "After working in worldly jobs for so long, I find it quite refreshing working for the Church . . . in the few months that I have been employed by UCG I have been very comfortable with what has been required of me and enjoy serving the Church and the work, even in an indirect way."

The home office staff has enjoyed having Ken join the team and looks forward to working with him. **UN**

ABC Hosts Charity Auction

Continued from front page

During the intermission, guests were provided with snacks and drinks to refresh themselves between acts. The students outdid themselves, preparing a beautiful charcuterie board, chocolate fountain with fruit kabobs and sparkling cider. Guests were allowed final access to the silent auction items for one last bid during this time, and then it was back to the fun.

Overall, the silent auction, live auction and online donations added up to approximately \$10,000, reaching two thirds of the goal that LifeNets provided. Weeks of planning and practice went into this afternoon, and it could not have gone better. The students enjoyed putting on this show and were glad it was going

to such a worthy cause. Multiple guests agreed it was a wonderful event, and that they thoroughly enjoyed going.

We look forward to seeing what next year brings! **UN**



New England Teen Weekend Builds “On This Rock”



Left: Using random materials, two teams raced to build a tower that would withstand a storm. Right: Massachusetts teen Valerie Sutherland plays ping pong during the teen fuel-up weekend.

LUDLOW, MASSACHUSETTS—The melody of chatter and laughter was a delightful sound for the Worcester, Massachusetts, congregation as 14 Northeastern teens and their families gathered for a fuel-up weekend Feb. 19-20.

Erica Rains, a local deaconess and event organizer, said they opened their home, the hub for weekend activities, because the teens needed a bonding experience.

“The teens in the Church have always had a special place in my heart and prayers and I know how much they love to get together,” she said.

Add to that deep desire the hiatus of teen events during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Mrs. Rains said the weekend was more a need than a simple want.

“It’s so important that they get together,” she said. “With the COVID[-19] [pan]demic, it’s been harder for that to happen. My husband and I were hoping that bringing them together on a smaller scale and making it more intimate would be an encouragement for them.”

And according to the teens, the weekend did just that.

Lydia, 15, of Pennsylvania, said it was “fun and wonderful” to be with her Church friends again.

“Just playing games and seeing each other was so great,” she said. “I’m taking home with me the friends I made and what I learned, that I can discuss the Bible things with friends, too, not just ‘friend’ things.”

New Hampshire teen Josiah, 13, agreed.

“I really liked how we could hang out with teens that we don’t see much every year. It was just

really nice to get together again and socialize and be a part of a really fun weekend,” he said.

Josiah said the team-building exercises were a highlight.

The teens split into two groups to journey out on a 12-clue scavenger hunt that culminated in the building of a large tower that could withstand a storm.

The challenge came in building the towers out of some pretty random materials—tiny cups, marbles, string, marshmallows, toothpicks and straws, to name a few.

“We really had to work together on that,” Josiah said.

New Hampshire brothers Trenton, 13, and Mattix, 15, said they enjoyed the Bible Escape Room, created by local deacon and deaconess David and Kayla Rains.

“It was really hard,” Mattix said of the escape room, which kept the teens guessing at every turn and solving complex puzzles together. Nevertheless, the Caron boys were all smiles during the weekend events.

Part of those events included a Sabbath Bible study and Sunday-morning compass check.

“It was nice to discuss the Bible study, I really liked that part of the weekend,” Trenton said.

New England pastor Andy Duran said the teens were engaged in good discussion over the theme of the weekend, “On This Rock.”

“We covered some fundamental principles considering the identity of the Rock in the Old and New Testaments, understanding that the teachings Christ brought were from the Father and both the Father and

Christ were in unity for those teachings,” Duran said. “We had good discussions concerning how to build daily habits and apply those teachings in our lives.”

The Sabbath Bible study was about building on the Rock, looking into the parable Jesus Christ gave in Matthew 7:24-27. It focused on who the Rock is—Christ—and to know and apply His teachings so that our lives have Christ, the Rock, as our foundation.

The compass check Sunday morning built on that same theme, going through the Sermon on the Mount.

Teens had the opportunity to apply Christ’s example of service through a project benefiting the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Each team helped stuff bags, handmade by members over the last two years for foster children, with essential living materials.

“When a child is taken from their home, they can’t take anything with them,” Erica Rains said. “This is a service project that the New England churches have done for years, but due to COVID[-19] we have not been able to deliver some of them.”

DCF has given the go-ahead to receive these donations again. The bags put together by the teens will be donated to DCF and go to children who are missing the most basic things, such as toothbrushes, combs, soaps and more. They also included some fun things, too, such as books, toys and coloring books with crayons.

Overall, the weekend was a success and we hope to hold weekends like this in the future.

Amber Duran

Maryland Congregation Collects and Donates Baby Supplies



Ladies in the Columbia congregation collected hundreds of baby items and wrote cards of encouragement for new mothers.

COLUMBIA, MARYLAND—In the month of March, the ladies of the Columbia congregation collected baby shower items such as diapers, wipes and clothing, to benefit the Greater Baltimore Center for Pregnancy Concerns (CPC). CPC is a local, non-denominational, non-political, Christian organization whose mission is to protect the physical, emotional and spiritual lives of women and their unborn children.

The congregation collected hundreds of baby items and spent time creating cards of encouragement for the pregnant



moms. CPC was overwhelmed by the incredible generosity of our members.

Michelle Diggins

Southeast Formal Weekend Excels in Friendship and Fun for Teens and Families



Teens from half a dozen states gathered in Georgia for Sabbath services, a formal dance and roller skating during the weekend of March 26-27.

PEACHTREE CORNERS, GEORGIA—The Atlanta and Buford, Georgia congregations hosted the 2022 Southeast Formal Weekend this year on March 26-27. With teens coming from as far away as California, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Texas and Washington, events began with services on Sabbath in Peachtree Corners. All total, 213 people were in attendance for services along with 32 YouTube connections.

The Sabbath service was tailored to a younger audience, at the same time giving attention to the Spring Feasts. This year's United Youth Camp video was played on two giant wall screens for the sermonette. After which, Jasmine Aust performed a vocal and piano solo of "Only God Knows" for special music. Dr. Philip Aust, pastor of Atlanta and Buford, gave the main message titled "Covid's Chief Lesson: Connections Count." Drawing from a 2021 Pew Survey that found the

greatest challenge of the pandemic was social isolation, the message emphasized that God created us to need a connection with Him and each other. The weekend offered a unique opportunity to do this. Following services, attendees enjoyed fine dining at nearby restaurants.

Evening events started with graduating senior recognitions. This year, seven seniors were honored: Ben Ellithorpe, Serenity Cartwright, Brooklyn Hackney, Ben Hoffman, Eli Hoffman, Logan Holladay and Lilly Puckett. Family and friends acknowledged their accomplishments as well as their church and high school achievements and post-graduation plans.

Following senior recognitions, attendees were directed to the dance venue. This year's theme was "A Night in Morocco." Decorations in the main hall included a breathtaking tented ceiling, tapestries and ornate lamps, and large pillows on the floors. Refreshments fea-

tured Mediterranean foods like pitas and hummus, falafel and fresh fruit. A total of 92 teens attended the dance. The evening concluded at 11:30 p.m. so everyone could get rest for the morning activity.

On Sunday, 120 teens and family members participated in skating at nearby Sparkles Family Fun Center. Although events began just after 9 a.m., the rink was filled by those of all ages. Skaters rolled and danced to current hits and hits from past decades. Skating ended right before noon, with some choosing to enjoy a meal together before the ride home.

Positive comments continue to come in, as does feedback thanking the Atlanta area for doing an excellent job of hosting the event once more. The most frequent comment since this year's formal is: "We can't wait to see one another again at camp and at next year's formal." By all accounts, God blessed the event.

Philip Aust

Congregations in Georgia Hold Women's Tea



The Atlanta Women's Club gathered for the club's tea party, in which they played ice-breaker games and introduced a new book for the Atlanta Women's Book Club.

ATLANTA, GEORGIA—The Atlanta Women's Club gathered on Feb. 20, 2022, at the Talbott home for the club's fourth annual tea party. This year, the event featured a wintry theme. Attendees included members from UCG's Atlanta, Buford and Columbus, Georgia, congregations. In all, 32 ladies were in attendance.

Upon entering the property, guests were welcomed by a young butler and directed where to park. Once inside the home, decorations—evoking the movie "Frozen"—included tables set with polished silver as well as distinctive plates, teacups and saucers. The atmosphere also featured turquoise bows tied on chairs and turquoise napkins folded into the shape of snowflakes. A three-tiered stand laden with delicacies functioned as the centerpiece of the decorations. Servers dressed in black—with white aprons and hats—served five varieties of tea.

To begin the tea, Wendy Englehardt welcomed the ladies on behalf of the Atlanta Women's Club. An opening prayer was asked for the event. Then, Kristine Talbott explained the basics of "High Tea" and offered details

concerning the latest variety of teas. The first course consisted of tea sandwiches and savories, the second course included scones with jam and cream, and the third course offered sweets. After the group enjoyed all three courses and fellowship, Sarah and Jasmine Aust led the ladies in a "Tin Pail" ice-breaker game where groups of six to eight ladies were formed and each person was tasked with writing something unique about themselves on a piece of paper. Teams were next responsible for matching up each fact to its owner. Prizes were given to the individuals who had the most interesting revelation. Next, Edma Briggs led a discussion about the Atlanta Women's Book Club. She then introduced a new book titled, *Discover Your God-Given Gifts*, by Don and Katie Fortune.

The tea concluded with a quiz from Sarah and Jasmine Aust on the history of "High Tea." Those who answered the most questions right received an additional prize. Everyone left this year's tea having enjoyed themselves and looking forward to next year's event.

*Wendy Englehardt
and Philip Aust*

Costumed Nashville Brethren Eat, Dance and Laugh

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE—A parade of costumed children and adults showed off their creativity after a potluck following sundown on March 12 in Nashville. As socials and potlucks have begun again in earnest with the waning of COVID-19, brethren have been eager to rekindle bonds of fellowship with one another—and have a little fun, too.

Members cast votes to award prizes to those with the most creative costumes in various categories for both kids and adults. After sunset, the parade of costumes took place, and while the votes were being tallied, a dance kicked off. Costumed children, teens, young adults and a few



Brethren showcased their costumes after the potluck on March 12.

older members cut a rug. The winners were announced and prizes given out. Many thanks to the Cason family and all who

helped with organizing a wonderful evening for the Nashville brethren.

Mitch Moss

Young Adults Meet in Arizona for Uplifting Weekend



Young adults gathered at Camp Wamatochick, site of the UYC Southwest summer camp, for an edifying weekend.

More than 50 brothers and sisters in Christ from six states came together and enjoyed a winter wonderland at beautiful Camp Wamatochick in Prescott, Arizona, on Feb. 25-27, for an uplifting and encouraging young adult weekend.

Inspiring messages focused on equipping the young adults with the biblical tools and knowledge necessary to face the many trials and challenges of life. Bible study on Friday night introduced the theme of the weekend, encouraging the young adults to courageously embrace their calling as one of Christ's disciples while setting a good example for the teens and pre-teens who are influenced by them.

Messages on the Sabbath began with a call to embrace the challenges in life with faith

and allow God to shape us into His people through them. Four seminars continued the theme, equipping the young adults with practical tools regarding managing stress and handling difficult conversations with grace, and spiritual tools on how to overcome addiction and to confidently rely on God to forgive and to bring us to perfection.

Trivia, fellowship, card games and snowball fights completed the fun, as well as delicious food provided by volunteers from the local congregations.

God richly blessed us with great weather, inspiring messages and a spirit of unity as we celebrated (God willing) the first of many Camp Wamatochick young adult weekends.

Brianna Foster

Tacos Turn Out Large Group of Young Adults



FRANKLIN, TENNESSEE—The Nashville and Murfreesboro young adult group has long held bi-monthly Bible studies and get-togethers, but perhaps none in the group's history has had quite as high of a turn-out as the gathering on March 19, where a pitch-in taco bar brought 35 young adults to a local members' home.

In 2020, the group moved to virtual meetings to keep the spirit alive, but in the roughly 18 months that practice was in effect, more than a few couples had children, several individuals and couples aged out of the group, and a handful of teens aged into the group. The first real meeting in person again at the end of 2021 was almost an entirely different group than the one which had originally formed in 2017.

The dynamics have changed a little—grandmas, grandpas and other older folks now attend to wrangle the half dozen children under age 4 during the dis-



The local Nashville young adults met for fellowship, a pitch-in taco bar and edifying discussions about discipleship and future service projects.

ussion—but the spirit of fellowship and discipleship continues.

Discipleship is the long-running, evergreen source of study and discussion covered by pastor Gary Petty during the meetings. It's a wellspring of practical, relatable and relevant topics for all Christians, but in particular young people living in an increasingly secular society.

Following the tacos and study was a discussion of a ser-

vice project to help an orphanage in Africa. The group discussed ways to help organize efforts to gain access to aid that's available through various charities.

The meetings are a welcome source of camaraderie, drawing the group together and serving as a designated time and space to edify one another and discuss ways to better serve the Church. The tacos aren't bad either!

Mitch Moss

GN

The Good News

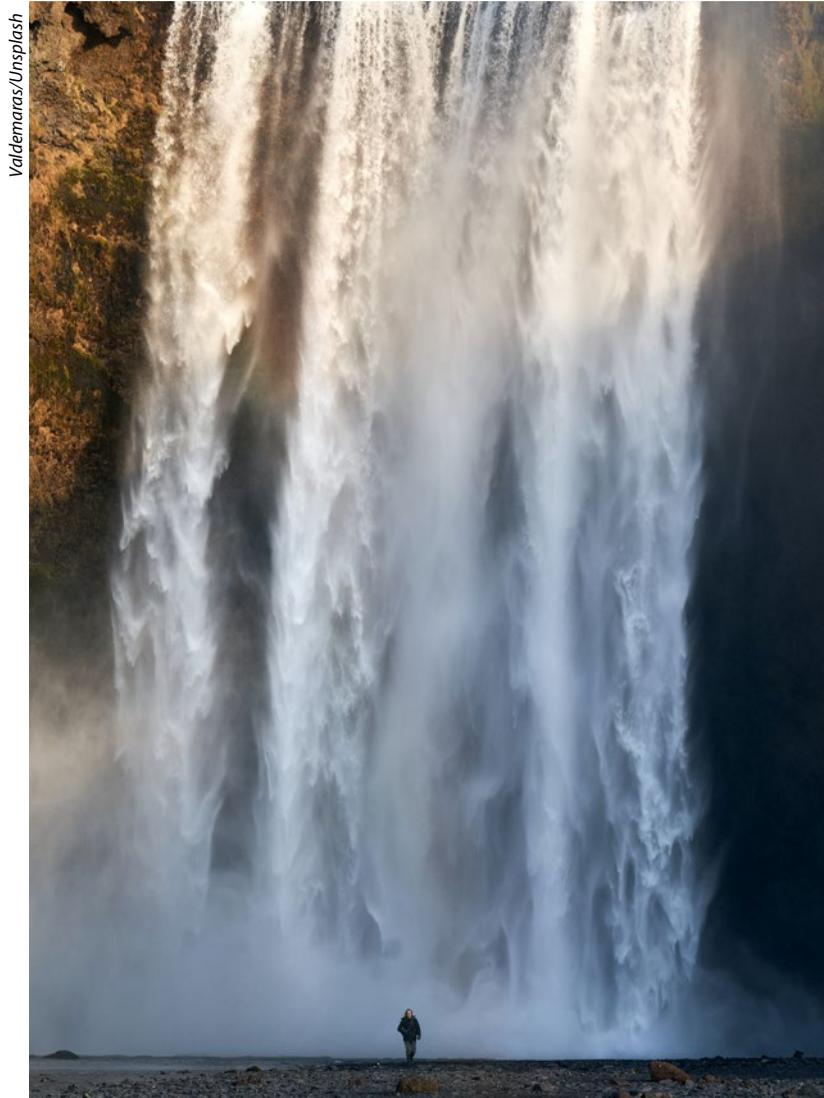
Marvelous Functions of the Holy Spirit

How does God use His Holy Spirit and what does He accomplish through it? As we prepare to observe the Holy Day of Pentecost, let's focus on three of the various roles and functions of the Holy Spirit. By doing so we can better appreciate God's divine gift to His greatly blessed and deeply loved people.

By John LaBissoniere

The Bible explains that the Holy Spirit is central to everything God is and does. The Holy Spirit is not a person but is the very *essence* of God's perfect nature, character, power, influence and authority. For example, God's Spirit was instrumental in the creation of the entire universe—including the earth and all life on it (Job 26:13; Job 33:4; Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:30). Quoting Isaiah 61, during His earthly ministry Jesus said, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed*" (Luke 4:18, *emphasis added throughout*).

Also, when the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples on the first New Testament Pentecost in A.D. 31, they were filled with spiritual drive and fortitude. By employing the power, courage and wisdom of God's Spirit they became intrepid witnesses of Jesus Christ and fearlessly spread the good news of His future government on earth (Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15; Acts 4:31). As we prepare to observe the Holy Day of Pentecost,



Through spiritual begetting you and I can not only become inheritors of everlasting life but we can develop the very mind of God.

let's examine three of the many vital functions of the Holy Spirit. By doing so we can better appreciate God's divine gift while supporting His Church as it resolutely disseminates the true message of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God throughout the earth today (1 Corinthians 1:23; Matthew 24:14).

1) The Holy Spirit as God's begetting power

Similar to how a human father imparts part of his nature to his offspring through the reproduction process, God begets His own spiritual attributes to those He calls when they repent, are baptized and receive His Spirit by the laying on of hands by God's true ministers (Acts 2:38; Hebrews 6:2). The apostle Peter explained that these actions result in His people becoming "partakers of the *divine nature*" (2 Peter 1:4).

All of this was made possible because Jesus Christ lived a flawless life, faced and endured His sacrificial

death and was resurrected to spirit life. Consequently, God's faithful people become *a new creation and heirs of God* in His divine family (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 4:7) As Peter also wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy *has begotten us again to a living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled* and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-4).

So, through spiritual begetting you and I can not only become inheritors of everlasting life but we can develop *the very mind of God* (1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5). Plus, the Holy Spirit infuses converted Christians with God's incomparable divine love (Romans 5:5).

Besides this, the begetting of the Holy Spirit shows that *we belong to God*. "And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, *he identified you as his own* by giving you the Holy Spirit, [which] he promised long ago. The Spirit is *God's guarantee* that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be *his own people*" (Ephesians 1:13-14, New Living Translation). These wonderful passages should leave us in sublime awe as to what God has promised to those who love and obey Him.

2) God imparts spiritual powers and capabilities by His Spirit

Through His Holy Spirit, God imparts divine gifts to His blessed people so that they can accomplish His work in the world and grow in godly righteousness (Acts 2:7-8; 2 Corinthians 5:21). For example, in the Old Testament we read how God provided His Spirit to certain individuals—including kings, judges and prophets—so that they could accomplish special missions. The prophet Micah wrote, "But truly *I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord*, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (Micah 3:8). Also, God gave King David the Holy Spirit to implement His divine purposes for ancient Israel as their God-inspired human leader. "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and *the Spirit of the Lord came upon David* from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13).

Furthermore, through His Spirit, God grants splendid divine gifts to individual members of His Church. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

Please see next page

Marvelous Functions of the Holy Spirit
Continued from previous page

Through the Holy Spirit, God bequeaths to us the capability and strength we individually need, just as He did for Jesus during His earthy ministry (Isaiah 11:2). As God's people, we must actively employ the divine abilities He has given us to support the Church and personally grow to spiritual maturity (Ephesians 2:19-22; 2 Peter 3:18).

3) God teaches, leads and guides through the Holy Spirit

It is by the Holy Spirit that called, repentant individuals are able to grasp "the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-11). By contrast, "the person *without* the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:14, New International Version). Again, human beings absolutely need God and His Spirit in their lives to *even begin* comprehending spiritual things.

It is through His Spirit that God enables those He calls to fully comprehend what He is doing and what He wants them to accomplish.

It is through His Spirit that God enables those He calls to fully comprehend what He is doing and what He wants them to accomplish (John 14:26). The apostle Paul wrote, "We don't speak about these things using teachings that are based on intellectual arguments like people do. Instead, we use the Spirit's teachings. *We explain spiritual things to those who have the Spirit*" (1 Corinthians 2:13, God's Word Translation). Moreover, the Holy Spirit helps us draw ever closer to God so we can "be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Besides teaching spiritual truth through His Spirit, God diligently *leads and guides* His people. For example, Acts 13:2-3 describes how Paul and Barnabas were meeting in Jerusalem with brethren and teachers of God's Church. The result was that the Holy Spirit *led them* to send Paul and Barnabas to the gentiles to teach them about Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. The vibrant force of God's Spirit *guided* the disciples and apostles in their efforts to accomplish the work of preaching the Gospel with tremendous conviction, commitment and courage. In another instance the apostle Paul explained how God, through His Spirit, *inspired him* to preach the gospel, "not with wise and persuasive words, but with a *demonstration of the Spirit's power*" (1 Corinthians 2:4, NIV).

Finally, as we prepare to observe the Holy Day of Pentecost, let's be deeply grateful to our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ for the wonderful gifts and benefits of the Holy Spirit. It is through its many marvelous roles and functions that extraordinary blessings are conferred upon His deeply loved people so that they can steadfastly support the Church and personally grow in profound spiritual understanding. **GN**

(To learn much more about the Holy Spirit please read, order or download a copy of our study aid, *The Power of the Holy Spirit*).

Gifts of Speech

"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

By Katherine Rowland

I love giving gifts, especially when the gift is something that I know for sure the person I'm giving it to will appreciate. It might be something useful, something that they have been wanting for a while, something that will make their life easier, or maybe just something I stumbled on and knew that they would love. While I was planning a gift for my son, I happened to read this passage from Ephesians: "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:28-29).

The first thing I noticed about this passage was that the instructions are like each other: in verse 28, Paul writes that the person who has been a thief shouldn't steal, but should work to be able to give something to others who are in need. In verse 29, he writes that we shouldn't say bad things to each other, but instead should say things that "impart grace." In a way, these could be boiled down to "don't take away from others, but give to them."

In our speech, don't take away from others, but give to them.

Thinking about the passage like this made me think about giving gifts: when I talk to people, are my words giving to them (by building them up, encouraging them, helping them), or are they taking away? How can I be sure that my words to others are like gifts?

1) Gifts are about the receiver, not the giver.

Have you ever been given a gift that didn't seem like it was even intended for you? Sometimes we give gifts that reflect ourselves more than they reflect the person we're giving them to. We can do that with our words, too. Often, when we're in a conversation, we're thinking more about what we want to say than about what the other person is saying, or what they might need to hear. The growing use of social media to communicate can make this even more true, because we get used to saying whatever comes to mind, whenever it comes to mind.

To make our words like gifts, however, we have to listen to that other person and think about them first,

Priscilla du Preez/Unsplash



To make our words like gifts, we have to listen to the other person and think

before we ever start thinking about what we want to say. We have to focus first on what would help them, encourage them, and instruct them, rather than what would make us feel good to say.

2) Gifts are carefully prepared.

If all that focusing on others seems like work, well, it is. When I plan to give a gift to someone, I devote thought to what I know about that person. I choose the gift. I think about how I will give it to them—when? Where? Is it the kind of gift that I should wrap up? Or just a little something I can give them anytime? Not all gifts—and not all conversations—require huge amounts of preparation, but some do. We should think about what it is we're saying and how much we should prepare for it.

3) Gifts are given thoughtfully.

No matter how nice a gift is, it won't be well received if I just throw it at the person's head! When we give gifts, we don't do that. We think about how to give it to the person. It's the same with our words. Most of the time, we're just having casual conversations. We should still be thoughtful, but we don't have to consider our words intensely. But sometimes, we have something special to say, either positive (perhaps words to express gratitude for the other person) or negative (something that will be painful for them to hear). We need to think about what we're saying, and give it the right amount of thought before saying it.

What does this all look like in everyday life? As I mentioned, most of the time we are not having big, important conversations with one another. But even



about them first, before we ever start thinking about what we want to say.

Have I Told You Lately That I Love You?

God intended marriage to be a lifetime date, but it is very easy to take our mate for granted. Emma's story shows the importance of expressing love and appreciation every day.

By David Mills

When Emma was a young girl, her family moved from California to the Willamette Valley in Oregon. It was around 1910, and she remembered their horse-drawn wagon getting stuck on the muddy road.

Around age 20 Emma met a man named Larry, and they dated for a year or two before getting married. But it wasn't long before Larry began to mistreat and abuse Emma. Much of the abuse was verbal, and the marriage was miserable. Back then, divorce was uncommon, so Emma stuck it out as long as she could. But finally after 23 miserable, unhappy years, Emma could take the abuse no longer, and she got a divorce.

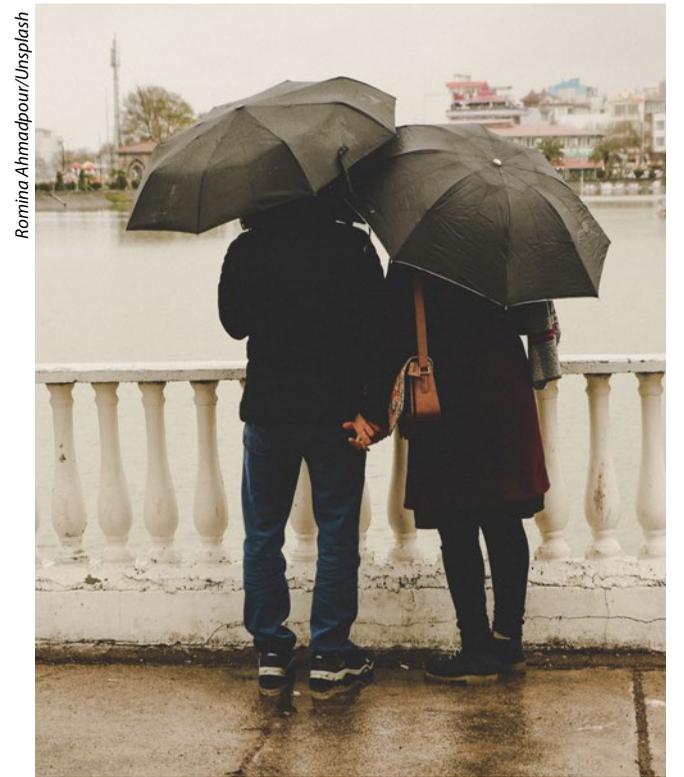
A few years later, Emma, now in her mid-40's, met a man named Charles. She and Charles dated for a little while, and they soon fell in love and got married. What a different marriage it was for Emma. Charles was tender and kind—a true gentleman—and for the first time in her married life Emma felt truly happy. What a difference from her marriage to Larry! By contrast, Charles really loved and appreciated Emma, and he expressed it daily in numerous ways. He gave Emma the tender love relationship of a happy marriage. But sadly, after 17 years of marriage, Charles died rather suddenly. How hard this was for Emma, leaving her a widow in her early 60's.

Larry comes calling

But guess what! When Larry found out that Emma's second husband had died, he asked her for a date. Emma was skeptical at first, but Larry finally persuaded her things would be very different. Sure enough, Larry had changed; he was a different man. And before long, Larry begged Emma to marry him again and give him a second chance. Emma accepted, and they were married—their second marriage to each other. And sure enough, it was different. Larry had grown—he was kind, loving and caring for Emma, and he verbally expressed his tender love and appreciation for her every day. This second marriage to Larry lasted until his death 13 years later.

My wife and I first met Emma in Salem, Oregon, in 1980, a few years after Larry died. Emma was now around age 80. We visited her numerous times, and she would always tell us “her story.” She took great pleasure in telling us about her three marriages to two different men—and especially the second one with Larry.

She always had a glint in her eye when she told



For this lifetime date to be truly happy, husbands and wives must express their love and appreciation every day—verbally and by actions.

us that every day in that second round Larry would turn to her and say, “Have I told you lately that I love you?”—words taken from the popular song written by Scotty Wiseman for the 1944 musical film, “Sing, Neighbor, Sing,” with the repeating line, “Well darling I'm telling you now.” (Over the years there have been many versions of this well-known song by various performers.) Emma was so delighted to hear these words from Larry every day. He indeed had changed, and he won back Emma's heart; they had 13 very happy years together.

Expressing love and appreciation

How different it could have been the first time, if only Larry had realized that marriage is a lifetime date; an affectionate, loving relationship. God intended male and female to be attracted to each other, and for the tenderness of dating and courtship to carry over into the marriage and to last for a lifetime of love, commitment and fidelity to each other. When a husband and wife are in a tender and loving, lifelong relationship—often with children and grandchildren—marriage and family life is beautiful! That is the way God intended.

The tenderness of dating and courtship should last for a lifetime of love, commitment and fidelity to each other.

For this lifetime date to be truly happy, husbands and wives must express their love and appreciation every day—verbally and by actions. If their love and appreciation is not expressed, how is their mate to know? It is important to spend sufficient time together daily, talking, eating meals together, occasionally going out for something special. It's a lifetime date, as they grow ever closer and closer, becoming one in purpose and mind.

Remember “Emma's story”! Let's be sure to express our love and appreciation to our mate every day—verbally and by actions. And like Larry, maybe we'd also like to add, “Have I told you lately that I love you?” **GN**

When we all work together to really think about using our words well, we build each other up.

When we all work together to really think about using our words well, we build each other up—and we build up the body of believers. In this way, our words can impart grace to one another, and even to those who don't believe. We can all work to make our “gift of gab” more of a blessing! **GN**

Christianity: A Cult for Jesus?

In this three-part series, let's briefly examine the historicity of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the nature of Jesus in the context of modern cult worship, and how one might discern whether the cultivation of Christianity is based on authentic design or cultish forgery.

By Amanda Miller

If you devote your life to Jesus Christ—a man who claimed to be God in the flesh, and who promised a millennial kingdom and eternal life to anyone who repents and believes in Him—does that make you part of a cult? How can you know whether the Christian faith is of divine origin or merely a manifestation of cultish human phenomena? In this three-part series, let's briefly examine the historicity of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the nature of Jesus in context of modern cult worship, and how one might discern whether the cultivation of Christianity is based on authentic design or cultish forgery.

The Nazarene cult

Before the word “cult” took on its modern definition of a group's harmful allegiance toward an abusively charismatic leader, it was simply a word associated with any practice which “cultivated” worship towards a deity. In Jesus' day, cults were part of the religious norm as paganism, emperor worship and the Pantheon of gods in Greek mythology were still a vibrant part of Roman culture. In fact, shortly after the death of Julius Caesar, Halley's comet shone through the Roman sky and was believed to be the divine spirit of Caesar returning to heaven.

Likewise, Julius' successors Caesar Augustus and Tiberius Caesar Augustus, who reigned during the lifetime of Jesus, were declared to be physical sons of god based on Caesar's lineage. However, in Jesus' final moments, the Roman centurion who was responsible for witnessing and reporting His death to Pontius Pilate, “stood there in front of Jesus,” “saw how he died” and declared that, “Surely this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:37-39, New International Version).

While worship of the gods was a critical element of the culture in Jesus' day, neither Jew nor Roman could have predicted that this new, so-called, “cult of the Nazarenes” who believed in Jesus' divinity would change the course of human history (Acts 24:5). Because, unlike the imperial cult of His day, Jesus not only claimed to be the one and only Son of God, but He also substantiated His claims of divinity through His bodily resurrection from the dead.

Motives and mythology

Scholars and historians across the spectrum of worldviews can agree on three historical facts: that Jesus Christ was killed by Roman crucifixion, His tomb was empty after His burial, and individuals and groups of people witnessed Him after His death—and testified of His bodily appearances very early on.

Skeptics in Jesus' day undoubtedly accused the disciples of stealing His body from His tomb; however, even those who didn't believe in His resurrection from the dead did not claim that His body was still in the tomb or that He survived the crucifixion. “Frankly, it would have been impossible for Christianity to get off the ground in Jerusalem if Jesus' body were still in the tomb. The Roman or Jewish authorities could have simply gone over to his tomb, viewed his corpse, and the misunderstanding would have been over” (Michael Licona, PhD, as quoted in the book *In Defense of Jesus*, p. 130). Yet, according to believers and unbelievers, Jesus had died, and three days and nights after His death, His tomb was empty.

Further, it is not probable that His body was stolen after His crucifixion for numerous reasons. The Jews, had they stolen His body, would've reinforced what His followers believed—that He would die and be resurrected on the third day, and therefore, be divine as He had “blasphemously” claimed (John 10:31-33). The Romans, who crucified Jesus in order to appease the Jews and settle the civil unrest, wouldn't have taken His body because it would've elevated their existing tensions with the Jews. Additionally, stealing His body would have supported another “cult” in Roman society which eventually rivaled the imperial cult worship of Caesar.

Jesus' followers, likewise, would have had nothing to gain by stealing His body and everything to lose, as their testimonies would've been a lie which they paid for with their lives—a feat that is psychologically highly unlikely. And Jesus' tomb was guarded for the sole purpose of preventing any claims of His resurrection from gaining traction in His following, adding another layer of improbability to this idea. The only motive which makes sense in this situation, is that those who wanted to discredit Jesus' claims of divinity and His resurrection would've had a motive to claim that His followers stole the body in order to account for it being missing; which is exactly what we see recorded in the ancient biography of Jesus, known as the book of Matthew (Matthew 27:63-66; Matthew 28:11-15).

After the death of Jesus, the apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians of a creed he gave them, “that Christ died for our sins . . . He was buried . . . [and then raised on] the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, NIV). “We know that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians between AD 55 and 57. He indicates in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 that he [had] already passed on this creed to the church at Corinth, which would mean it must [have predated] his visit there in AD 51” (Gary Habermas, PhD, DD as quoted in *The Case for Christ*, p. 338). That means he gave this creed to them within twenty years of Jesus death—and even further, Paul was also converted and based this testimony on his personal eyewitness of Jesus, which is believed by scholars to have taken place within A.D. 32-38, just a few years after the death of Jesus (Acts 26:12-18; Galatians 1:11-19)! “So this [was] incredibly early material—primitive, unadorned testimony to the fact that Jesus appeared alive to skeptics like Paul and James, as well as Peter and the rest of the disciples” (Habermas, p. 339).

This is far too early to presume these accounts were based in mythology, because Paul claimed that

Jon Tyson/Unsplash



How can you know whether the Christian faith is of divine origin or merely a manifestation of cultish human phenomena?

Jesus had appeared not only to himself but “to more than five hundred [people] at the same time, most of whom [were] still living” at the time he wrote this (1 Corinthians 15:6, NIV). These witnesses could have been readily cross-examined and corroborated by new converts, and so, Paul challenged them to search out whether or not their testimony was true because, “if Christ [had] not been raised, [their] preaching [was] useless and so [was] their faith” (1 Corinthians 15:14, NIV).

Unlikely suspects

When Jesus made claims of being the incarnation of God and promised Messiah, His brother, named James, was not convinced by Him. And when Jesus' believers started claiming that they saw Him after His death, Saul, who belonged to the Jewish sect of the Pharisees, also thought that these claims were so dangerous that he persecuted and killed those who were carrying on this idea. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that these two individuals would have been duped into Christianity based on the fanciful claims of Jesus' following.

Yet, we find that both James and Saul (later named Paul), became converts and martyrs for Jesus Christ after they personally witnessed Him alive after His death. It was not that they believed in His divinity and then witnessed Him resurrected; it was that they didn't believe in His divinity, and then witnessed Him after His crucifixion. They became so convinced of seeing Him that even from a predisposition of disbelief, they became willing to die for their testimonies. This makes it increasingly doubtful that their accounts were something they willfully invented for the sake of attention, and more likely that it was based on the authenticity of events of which they were eyewitnesses.

When we look at the beginnings of Christianity, the entire belief structure hinges on one historical fact: that Jesus was raised from the dead. If He was not raised from the dead, then Christians are, as Paul said, “most pitiable” (1 Corinthians 15:19). Because, if He was not raised from the dead then His following was merely a demonstration of a cultish phenomenon. However, if Jesus was raised from the dead that changes everything, and His claims of divinity are worth further investigation. So, let's take a deeper look into the person of Jesus from another dimension, and examine His merit in the context of our modern understanding of cult leaders. Join me next time for part two! **GN**



Randy John D'Alessandro

Jan. 18, 1952-Oct. 13, 2021

Obituaries

Randy John D'Alessandro

Randy John D'Alessandro was born on Jan. 18, 1952, in a suburb of Detroit to Roselynn (Moore) and Carmine D'Alessandro. One of three children, Randy had an older brother, Carmine (Chick) D'Alessandro, and a younger sister, Katie Lynn D'Alessandro.

In high school, Randy excelled at both academics and athletics, achieving good grades and lettering in both football and basketball. At age 15, he was scanning through radio stations looking for a Detroit Tigers baseball game and came across a Canadian station broadcasting "The World Tomorrow."

The program piqued his interest, and he began to tune in consistently. This experience initiated a lifelong passion in Randy for studying the scriptures and seeking guidance from the pages of his Bible.

Soon afterward, Randy decided to attend weekly church services, but his parents would not support the idea. Despite this challenge, Randy personally committed to the teachings he had learned from the scriptures and made the decision to quit the high school football and basketball teams to appropriately observe the Sabbath. As Randy learned about the Holy Days, he kept them by himself at home.



Theodore A. Efimov

March 2, 1933-April 1, 2022

In 1970 when Randy turned 18, he was accepted to Ambassador College in Pasadena, California, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theology in 1974. After graduation, Randy married his first wife, Lois (Mayes) Lubeck and they settled near Detroit where Randy embarked on a successful career in sales. He worked for Tuck Tape and GOJO Industries, covering territories from Detroit to north of Chicago. He was ordained as a church elder in 1979.

In 1982, son Brandon Lee D'Alessandro was welcomed into the family in Detroit, Michigan, and daughter Danielle Maria D'Alessandro was born in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1985. Randy loved being a father, and then a grandfather to Stryker Kaleb, Austin Rae, Memphis Francis and Knox Dean and he treasured time with his family.

In 1984, Randy answered the call to the full-time ministry, serving in Raleigh, North Carolina (1984-1989); Cookeville, Tennessee (1989-1993); Parkersburg, West Virginia (1993-1997); Ann Arbor and Detroit, Michigan (1997-2016) and Chicago, Illinois and Beloit, Wisconsin (2016-2021).

In 2003, Randy met his second wife, Mary Beth Snyder. After an exciting courtship they married in 2004 and shared 17 years of joy, active service and a deep love for each other. Mary has remarked on traits she admired in her husband including



Mary Ella Sanderson Nelson

Jan. 22, 1927 - Nov. 23, 2021

his attention to detail around the house, his consistent support of her as his wife, his love of travel and beaches, his enjoyment of a good meal and his affectionate nature.

Others have commented over the past few days on the impact Randy made on their lives, and a repeating theme from people across different backgrounds is that "Randy was my friend." He was a good friend and mentor, down to earth and valued for his sincerity and approachability. Still others have shared that Randy "had a beautiful, radio quality voice"; "always worked hard to have a good, clear point for each sermon"; "was outward focused, remembering small details about people's lives and consistently encouraging" and "has a library of online sermons that will be treasured."

Early in the morning on Wednesday, Oct. 13, Randy, 69, died unexpectedly. He was in the hospital battling symptoms from a COVID-19 infection contracted several weeks earlier and had been seeing some improvements in the previous days. This was a tremendous shock to his beloved wife, children and grandchildren, and to all who knew him.

Randy John D'Alessandro dedicated his life to pastoring; his passion was helping members of his congregations to grow spiritually and thrive in life. From the example of his steadfast commitment to follow God as a teen, to his example of perseverance and continually moving forward even in the face of challenges, his life inspires all who knew him. His faithfulness, enthusiasm and trust in God provides a path for the many people who loved him and called him friend.

Theodore A. Efimov

Theodore Efimov was born on March 2, 1933, to Theodore James Efimov and Olga Efimov. At the very young age of 13 he became an accomplished pianist. He enjoyed playing the piano on a daily basis. As he entered high school, he started playing football. Even though he was a lightweight, he became a proficient tailback and eventually the manager of the team by his junior year. This showed his early managerial skills, determination and sales skills.

In 1951 he met the love of his life Sylvia Ogden. After five years of dating, when Dad received his first job commission as a teacher, he said to Sylvia, "Well, I guess it is time for us to get married." Sylvia said, "Is that a proposal?" They were married later in 1955.

During the time while Ted was dating Sylvia, he sold Fuller Brush products while also working at Brach's chocolate factory. He then entered into, and graduated from, Chicago's Teachers College. This would begin the track that prepared Ted to be the consummate teacher and salesman. He started teaching in September 1955 and married Sylvia on Nov. 5 of that same year. Ted received his draft notice and left for his assignment in January 1956. Ted was given the assignment to leave for Verona, Italy, in the last part of 1956 where he was stationed for two years.

In 1958 Ted returned from the Army and was honorably discharged in 1962. It was in 1958 when his cousin Art introduced him to Radio Church of God, which became Worldwide Church of God. He was baptized in July 1958. He also joined State Farm as an insurance agent in 1958.

He was ordained a deacon of the church in 1969. His wife, Sylvia, who has been by his side for 72 years, was ordained a deaconess and served him and those of the greater ecclesia unflinchingly with him since 1958. Their home, which was like the "Super 8 of Chicago," hosted many people and families, which was one of their greater joys. The opportunity to serve was uppermost in Dad's heart whether it was for people to come for dinner, or stay for a few days, there was always a key "under the mat."

Besides being a father of four children born between 1960 and 1967, Ted became a proficient State Farm Agent, which includ-

ed being a Minuteman, as well as qualifying for the Millionaire Club 16 times to be an Ambassador Traveler. Ted many times lost sales due to "teaching" but he wanted people to have what was best for their needs.

Along with Sylvia they reared their four children: the eldest is Deborah (Debbie) Louise Willard, the second born, James Drew, third born Bryan Jon, and fourth born Brett Arthur. All have become successful parents in their own right.

His steadfast dedication to his faith, his wife, his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and extended family is a model for all who survive him within the family.

A former State Farm manager of Ted's once wrote of him: "I believe if you keep your faith, you keep your trust, you keep the right attitude, if you're grateful, you'll see God open up new doors." Ted saw this unfold in his own life.

In lieu of flowers please make donations to: LifeNets via LifeNets.org or you can contact info@lifenets.org.

LifeNets is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization that develops programs offering practical assistance that promote the well-being and self-sufficiency of disadvantaged people throughout the world and, where possible, encourages them to pass on their LifeNets benefit to others.

Mary Ella Sanderson Nelson

Mary Ella Nelson, age 94, suffered a stroke and died a few days later in Craig, Colorado, on Nov. 23, 2021. She has been a faithful member and a sterling example in the Church of God for more than 55 years.

She was born on Jan. 22, 1927, to William and Gertrude Sanderson in Omaha, Nebraska. Underweight at birth, Mary survived early health challenges, and at 18 years of age found work as a telephone operator in Omaha, Nebraska. She met a dashing young soldier just back from the war and married Bill Nelson on March 23, 1946, in Olathe, Kansas. They began farming in Nebraska—at first, without electricity. It was a hard but productive life, and the family tells of many adventures. When the children were small, Mary contracted polio, but resolutely continued her

Announcements for *United News* can be sent by e-mail (preferred) to un@ucg.org, or by mail to *United News*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027. Please include a color photo; if mailing in, please indicate if you would like the photo returned. Announcements should not exceed 500 words, and may be lightly edited for length and/or clarity by *United News* staff.

By Rex Sexton

Feb. 23, 1836, began the famous siege of the Alamo. This 13-day moment in history turned a ruined Spanish mission on the river a short distance from the small town of San Antonio, Texas, into a shrine known and revered the world over.

On Jan. 17, 1836, Sam Houston, the commander of the revolutionary troops, had sent Colonel Jim Bowie and 25 men to San Antonio. Colonel William Travis had arrived in San Antonio on Feb. 2 with a small cavalry company. The total number of Alamo defenders was only about 130.

The Alamo was not a strong fortress, but rather an old Spanish mission built around a church. The walls were not high, ranging from eight to twelve feet. The north wall was missing, with a wooden palisade of upright posts as the only barrier. On Feb. 9, Davey Crockett and 14 other Tennessee Mounted Volunteers rode into San Antonio, adding to the small number of defenders.

Mexican President D. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, with a well-equipped army of 6,000 men, crossed the Rio Grande on Feb. 12—a month earlier than expected. His goal was to crush the Texans. He occupied San Antonio on Feb. 23 and issued an ultimatum to the defenders of the Alamo, warning that they would all be executed if they did not surrender. Travis, Davey Crockett, and the Texans provided their answer to Santa Anna with a blast from their 18-pounder cannon. Travis dispatched a note to Gonzales calling for reinforcements, noting that only 150 men defended the Alamo. The next day he wrote his “Letter from the Alamo,” probably the best known of all Texas documents. His message was published as soon as possible in Texas and the United States. The famous words “To the People of Texas and All Americans in the World . . . shall never surrender or retreat . . . Victory or Death!” are considered one of the most heart-wrenching pleas that has ever been written. Santa Anna ordered his men to pound the fortifications with cannon and rifle fire for 12 days and nights, hoping that the defenders would surrender.

At four o’clock on the morning of March 6, 1836, Santa Anna advanced his men to within 200 yards of the Alamo’s walls. The first and second attacks were

repulsed by the Texans, but the third was directed against the wooden wall, which collapsed under cannon fire.

The ensuing battle was terrible, with the defenders exacting a heavy toll for every step gained. When it was over Santa Anna had 1,544 dead and over 500 wounded. The few prisoners taken, including Davey Crockett, were executed. Six weeks later, Santa Anna was defeated at San Jacinto. The men who died inside the walls of the Alamo had bought with their lives the time needed for General Sam Houston to build a force that won Texas its independence.

Historians today debate how the defenders of the Alamo, outnumbered and outgunned by more than 30 to one, held out for 13 days and fought with such determination in the face of certain death. The only answer is obvious: the one unpredictable and unmeasurable facet of war—courage built on the brotherhood of the men. These men had all crossed the line in the sand drawn by the sword of Colonel Travis—promising to each other that they would fight to the death if need be. They became a classic “Band of Brothers.”

Now it is 2022. Earlier this year, the world witnessed the beginning of the awful invasion of Ukraine by the powerful Russian army. Russian president Vladimir Putin predicted the show of force would mean quick surrender of his victims. Instead, the Ukrainian people, inspired by a determined leader in Volodymyr Zelenskyy, have faced the enemy with courageous resistance that has inspired support from people across the globe. Putin seemingly miscalculated the “Band of Brothers” mentality of the Ukrainian people and his army will likely pay a heavy price for that.

As the world descends into an increasingly evil abyss, the true followers of Jesus Christ will need to rely on each other as a “Band of Brothers” more than ever.

The future is foreboding in many ways: likely food and energy shortages, rampant inflation, political persecution and upheaval, more wars and possibly diseases. Jesus said that this will be a time of “great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21). The prophet Daniel described it as a time of trouble, “Such as never was since there was a nation” (Dan-



Historians today debate how the defenders of the Alamo, outnumbered and outgunned by more than 30 to one, held out for 13 days and fought with such determination in the face of certain death.

iel 12:1). In fact, the coming suffering of humankind will be so terrible that “unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved” (Matthew 24:22).

The importance of being supported by each other is strongly emphasized in the Bible. Writing to a church that was about to see its city destroyed, forcing them to flee for their lives with only what they could carry, Paul instructed, “Some people have given up the habit of meeting for worship, but we must not do that. We should keep on encouraging each other, especially since you know that the day of the Lord’s coming is getting closer” (Hebrews 10:25, Contemporary English Version).

During the past two years, it may have become easier for those of us in the U.S. to get “out of the

habit of meeting for worship” due to some of the temporary government measures taken during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Encouraging each other requires meeting regularly for worship. Being connected by screen or phone simply is not the same.

Paul wrote to the church at Rome, “I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me” (Romans 1:11-12).

God intends Christians to be a “band of brothers,” being encouraged together by the mutual faith of each other. That will be increasingly more important in the coming days. You will not want to face these days alone.

So, while many people prepare by hoarding food, fuel and essential items, we should prepare by developing and solidifying our relationships with God and with one another. Here is what we need to do: “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5: 19-21).

As a “Band of Christian Brothers and Sisters” we will need the courage and support of each other in the coming days more than ever. Remember the Alamo—or at least this important lesson we can remember from the men at the Alamo in 1836. **UN**

Pray for the Gospel to Have Free Course

(2 Thes. 3:1 KJV)

Paper Shortages for *Beyond Today* Magazine and Study Aids

Scott Ashley, managing editor of *Beyond Today* magazine, described ongoing impediments to obtaining paper for *Beyond Today* magazine and study aids (booklets) due to economic and supply chain difficulties in the paper market. Here is some of what he wrote:

“We were barely able to obtain enough paper to print the March-April and May-June 2022 issues of *Beyond Today*, even though they had been scheduled for a year. Also,

since we could not source enough paper to print the usual years’ worth of renewal cover wraps, we printed only enough for the May-June 2022 issue of *Beyond Today*. Furthermore, a different paper stock had to be used for the recent reprinting of our *Heaven and Hell* booklet because our usual paper wasn’t available. Plus, we had to delay reprinting *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* booklet because the printer could not acquire insert card stock until the first week of May.

“The bottom line is that I have never seen anything like this in nearly 50 years in the printing industry. We have been informed that paper shortages may continue well into 2023.”

Your prayers would be greatly appreciated that God will bless the Church’s efforts to obtain sufficient paper supplies to publish the truth of the gospel.

Peter Eddington,
Operation Manager, Media
and Communications Services



The class of 2020 visits an art museum in Cincinnati.



CINCINNATI, OHIO—After two years, the Ambassador Bible College class of 2020 was blessed to be reunited for their class trip over President's Day weekend in Cincinnati.

Due to COVID-19, our class trip, charity auction and several other key end-of-year activities were canceled for our class. However, we held out hope to be able to see one another once

it would not compromise the health and well-being of our classmates. Adam Butler and I worked to coordinate initial planning of the weekend and its activities. We were able to find a beautiful historic home in downtown Cincinnati that was listed on Airbnb from a Christian family. The home was bright and cheery with antique wood features and stained-glass

windows throughout. It also had a massive dining room and living room that allowed for home-cooked meals for Sabbath dinner Friday night and a morning brunch before church services.

Saturday evening the current ABC class (class of 2022) graciously hosted a barn ball for ABC alumni to attend! There were snacks, fun music and great games. After dancing for a couple of hours, our class ended the evening back at our Airbnb where we played charades, ping pong and heads up.

Sunday provided an opportunity for our class to relax together as we would have on our class trip. We carpoled downtown to get brunch at a restaurant called First Watch, and from

there we split into two different groups based on interest. One group stayed downtown and went to the Contemporary Arts Center where they enjoyed several exhibits. They also walked to Findlay market to enjoy some ice cream and live music! The second group went back to the Airbnb to play games and relax in the hot tub.

Another special aspect of our weekend was that those who attended were able to receive their yearbook! Adrianna Lockhart put together our yearbook and Hannah Riess and Adam Butler helped get it across the finish line in time for our class trip. We finished the weekend making s'mores by the campfire as we reflected on our time together and

our class year.

Our class trip took place almost two years after our classes went online due to COVID-19. Although in that time we all went our separate ways, this trip reminded us of the bond we all share of not only having gone through ABC together but having navigated it in a pandemic. I also want to thank the faculty for keeping our funds and enabling us to meet. This weekend couldn't have happened without their help!

It was a weekend full of laughter, games, dancing, reminiscing, catching up, shared meals, group prayers, and uplifting, edifying and celebrating our class—the ABC class of 2020.

Sophie Pebworth

One Couple's Journey to the Truth

By Bob and Jody Schenfield

The truth revealed

It was a hot, summer Saturday in July of 1968. Just out of the U.S. Navy, I was sitting in a large overstuffed chair in the living room of my father's house leafing through the latest issue of *Life* magazine. I noticed an ad offering a free publication about the meaning of life and where the events of that time were heading—the name of that publication was *The Plain Truth*. Also to be included, if I took the "hook," would a free booklet titled *Hippies, Hypocrisy, and Happiness*. I was always one to request anything free. The *Plain Truth* offer was for a three-month trial subscription, and I assumed that I would get a bill after the time was up, but I would then simply cancel.

It was soon evident that I was learning things that I had never heard of before—and with plain scriptural proofs to back them up. I remember being astounded by what I was learning and how clear the Bible became—and how much I started looking forward to studying it on a regular basis. I looked forward to the daily mail delivery with great anticipation as that meant I would receive even more literature I had requested, and I soon started receiving monthly coworker letters.

Looking back now, I realize that God had begun a process in me; I was being called. Yes, I had been one of those chosen and specially called to understand the mind-altering truths I was learning, and to be a true follower of



Left: Bob and Jody on their wedding day, May 23, 2003. Jody was baptized a year later on Sept. 7, 2004.



Right: A recent photo of Bob and Jody.

Jesus Christ!

Previous to God calling me, I had not comprehended a single one of the truths of the Bible—in spite of the fact that I had attended the Disciples of Christ, Christian Church and Sunday School with my parents as a youth, and was supposedly baptized at age 14. But, now, these awesome truths were being inculcated into my understanding, and part of what I learned was that with the knowledge of these truths comes a responsibility—that God holds people accountable for what they understand. I found that evident in James 4:17 and Hebrews 10:26.

So, I started to espouse what I was reading. I believed it when I read: "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make ye free" (John 8:31-32, King James Version). As I studied further I learned more and more about what that meant.

I knew there was no turning

back! I remember saying to myself in those waning days of my carnality—"The life I have lived to this point has been a joke—everything I have ever attempted to do I have either done it in a slipshod manner to just get by or I gave up completely." I was determined to change that—I knew I had to overcome those weaknesses that had previously defined my life.

Deja vu—It was a hot summer Sabbath day in July—a Saturday—the year was 1972. Just out of a four-year period of studying, learning and being humbled, I was sitting in an auditorium seat at a local high school leafing through my Bible as I intently listened to my first sermon about the meaning of life and where the events of that time were heading. I was now sitting in my true Father's house. I was baptized the following Sabbath.

Bob

The teaching church

I came to know about "the truth" through nothing short of a miracle. I was a widow and had met Bob, a wonderful man who had been in the Church for over 30 years. I began to share with him how I was struggling with my previous husband's death. I had mentioned my concerns, and he asked me if I wanted to read a booklet about death. I read the booklet and was totally put at ease regarding a lot of questions I had regarding death in general. Everything in the booklet made perfect sense. It had answered my questions in a way I had never thought of. After three years I can say I was beginning to accept my husband's untimely death with a new understanding.

I began to attend church with Bob. I noticed at the first service how respectful the men in the congregation were toward their wives. Men had their arms around them, some holding hands, and some shared hugs. I also took note of how the minister opened the Bible and asked everyone to go to the scriptures. I called it "The Teaching Church."

Another observation was everyone in the congregation seemed to know each other. How different that was! I was made to feel welcome by several people. That was also a first for me. In over 30 years of attending different churches, all of the above had never occurred.

My husband, Bob, and I were married a year and a half later. After attending my first Feast in 2003 I told him that God was calling me! I felt an urgent need to be baptized; I wanted to be one of God's firstfruits. I was baptized on Sept. 7, 2004.

As Bob and I are now entering our 20th year of marriage in 2022, we both stand firm in our faith that God is building teams to rule with Him in the Kingdom.

I have searched my entire adult life for my purpose on earth. The truth has a beginning, middle and end. What beautiful truths to know why we were born. I know what the good news holds in promise for me, and, God willing, I plan to claim it.

Jody

We are looking for stories about how our brethren began their journey and how God opened their minds to His truth. If you'd like to submit your story for consideration, please email un@ucg.org (preferred) or mail your story to *United News*, United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027.

Preaching the Gospel as a Witness

Discover how contemporary advertising methods play a vital role in the Church's commission to preach the gospel of God's Kingdom as a witness to all nations.

Jesus Christ's apostles asked Him about the signs of His second coming and the end of the age. After detailing several troubling events He said, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14, *emphasis added throughout*).

What does the phrase "as a witness" mean? The Greek term from which witness is translated is *marturion*, meaning testimony, evidence or proof emanating from an authoritative source. It is further defined as a declaration or announcement that makes something known (Matthew 10:18, Luke 5:14). Today, the United Church of God is bearing witness—*making known* to people throughout the world the truth about Jesus Christ and the gospel—meaning the good news of God's coming Kingdom (government) to be established on the earth.

This astounding message is reaching people everywhere today through a variety of contemporary media instruments beginning with our "flagship" *Beyond Today* magazine and *Beyond Today* long-form (30-minute) television program. In addition, radio programs are being aired and public Bible seminars (60-minutes) are taking place in a number of locations around the world.

Besides employing these techniques, people are being reached by means of advertising which includes short-form television ads (1-2 minutes), ads in printed publications, and through various Internet methodologies including search and display advertising. Each approach is educational in nature—giving people, even at a minimum, the *opportunity* to discover the magnificent truths of God.

Bearing witness about Jesus Christ and the gospel

All these media practices bear witness to the real Jesus Christ and the gospel of the Kingdom of God while also covering a wide range of biblical topics. And importantly, every article, video program, seminar and advertise-

ment has been ideally designed to peak people's curiosity about the captivating truths of the Bible. This is often achieved by challenging conventional human concepts and teachings while encouraging readers and viewers to both examine their own beliefs and request free literature to help them learn more about the accuracy and reliability of Scripture.

The Church's media outreach not only provides definitive testimony about the reality, presence and expectations of God, but makes known His profound love for His precious human creation who live in a society broken and corrupted by satanic deception, division, turmoil and unbelief. Furthermore, Church media shows the pathway toward godly righteousness to the many people God is calling to repentance, baptism and receiving the marvelous gift of His Holy Spirit (Matthew 22:14; John 6:44, Acts 2:38).

This aligns perfectly with a companion assignment that Jesus gave His Church which is to "Go therefore and *make disciples* of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

For those who choose to accept God's invitation and experience spiritual conversion, they become responsible to develop and maintain a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and actively support the Church's proclamation efforts—all while living in accordance with God's commandments (John 14:15; 15:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:9). In fulfilling these commitments they savor wonderful joy and peace while looking forward to a magnificent future as members of God's divine family in His Kingdom.

Considering all the above, what are the core methods by which the Church is carrying out its obligation to serve "as a witness to all the nations" through its home office and international offices? A recently released media report explained that since 2002, 8.5 million pieces of literature were mailed from the home office. It also stated that 51.1 million *Good News/Beyond Today* magazines were printed and distributed since 1997 and 91.3 million individuals visited the *ucg.org* website since 1999. Besides those notable benchmarks was the striking statistic that an



Today, the United Church of God is bearing witness of the good news of God's coming government that is to be established on the earth.

amazing 12.5 *billion* online advertising impressions have taken place via the Google, Bing and Yahoo Internet search engines since 2004.

Advertising "impressions"

Through this powerful medium, the Church places display ads for *Beyond Today* magazine and study aids (booklets) and also runs thousands of keywords in search and content advertising—all of which are described as "advertising impressions." This means that Internet users not only see our ads but have the opportunity to "click" on them—meaning users can be immediately directed to our website to learn more about the subject at hand. Taking this action is described in the industry as "engagement." To the Church, this gives a person the opportunity to spend time on our website and while there, conduct additional search if they so choose.

After engagement can come "conversion," which means a person may then actually request a piece of literature, read an article online or watch a *Beyond Today* video. Such tangible actions can be measured in "cost per response" or other metrics. A good "conversion rate" across industries is around 2 percent out of those see an online ad. Our various ads on Internet search engines are an important witness in the Church's duty to preach the gospel to all nations. Advertising through search engine technology brings far more people to our website at far less cost than we could ever do by our

own efforts.

In another example of advertising, for the past nearly six years the Church has been running robust ad campaigns on Roku video streaming devices. These have generated almost 50 *million* advertising impressions and generated almost 400,000 *clicks*. Since inception of the program *one million Beyond Today* TV programs have been watched. During the past ten months alone, 25,000 ads have run *each day* with hundreds of *Beyond Today* videos being watched daily.

Furthermore, *Beyond Today* video programming has been available for people to view on Amazon Fire TV, Samsung smart TVs, LG smart TVs, iOS devices and Android devices—all of which can create a powerful witness for the gospel.

Plus, throughout the upcoming 2022-23 fiscal year the Church's print advertising in Sunday newspaper coupons inserts will reach 224 million households in the United States. Although the widely-accepted conversion rate for such ads is 0.5 percent to 2 percent, our compelling half-page ads will be seen by multiple millions of people and therefore serve as a witness that the gospel of the Kingdom is being published today.

An opportunity to choose

When considering the vast number of people in the world who receive God's spiritual witness through the Church, it's clear they have the distinct opportunity to choose whether or not they will

pursue it further. As Jesus Christ said, "*many* are called" (Matthew 22:14) but, as the verse goes on to say, "*few* are chosen"—meaning that that some people decide to take additional steps through repentance, baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit and go on to develop a close, personal relationship with God (2 Thessalonians 2:13). This is made plain in Christ's parable about the sower and the seed (Matthew 13:18-23). Nevertheless, God readily and graciously offers His personal invitation to many people throughout the world today because of His boundless love and mercy.

So, a variety of contemporary media instruments serving multiple billions of impressions have taken place and are continuing to occur daily through the Church's advertising campaigns. But some may ask, what benefit does the Church derive from this momentous effort? The answer is that it is greatly blessed with the firm knowledge that Jesus Christ's commission to preach the gospel "in all the world as a witness to all the nations" is being carried out faithfully. Plus, as Church members back up this great effort, they are being made ready as "a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17) to serve in His coming global government.

Therefore, let us continue faithfully supporting the Church and its vital media work while praying diligently that God will richly bless and guide everything that is done in His great name.

Peter Eddington
and John LaBissoniere

Largest Print Advertising Campaign in UCG History to Begin in July

In Matthew 24:14 Jesus Christ made the following pivotal statement to His apostles: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.”

On Pentecost in A.D. 31, after Jesus’ disciples were given the amazing gift of the Holy Spirit, they began implementing His vital directive.

And today, God’s Church continues advancing that identical mission through contemporary electronic and print technology.

When the 2022-2023 fiscal

year begins on July 1, 2022, a new milestone will begin to be achieved as the largest print advertising campaign in the history of the United Church of God gets underway.

Through this mammoth effort, 224 million households in the United States will be offered various Bible study aids and *Beyond Today* magazine subscriptions through half-page ads in Sunday newspaper coupon insert sections. This quantity supersedes the 2021-2022 fiscal year’s record-setting campaign quantity by 101 million ads!

Beginning in September

2022 the Church will test six advertisements for a total of 24 million ads (4 million of each ad).

The study aids to be tested will include: *Russia and Bible Prophecy, Why Were You Born?, What Happens After Death?, The Truth About the Rich Man and Lazarus, Jesus Christ: The Real Story* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.

Following these tests the pace of the campaign will accelerate significantly. Ads that had proven highly successful in previous tests and campaigns will be rolled out in huge quantities to households

in cities, towns and rural areas. The distribution months, ads and quantities include the following:

- October 2022, *Angels: God’s Messengers and Spirit Army*, 50 million ads.
- November 2022, *Seven Prophetic Signs Before Jesus Returns*, 30 million ads.
- January 2023, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, 35 million ads.
- February 2023 *How to Understand the Bible*, 35 million ads.
- March 2023 will feature a rollout of the top two ads from September 2022 test—50 mil-

lion ads (25 million of each ad).

We want you to know that we are enormously grateful for your steadfast support of God’s work of witness and warning to this suffering world. It is through the giving of your tithes and offerings that this major effort is made possible.

We are also deeply thankful for your prayers for God’s great blessings that many people will not only see our advertisements but respond by requesting a study aid and a subscription to *Beyond Today* magazine.

Peter Eddington
and John LaBissoniere

New and Improved Search Feature on UCG.org Debuts

We are pleased to announce a new and optimized search feature on UCG.org. This new search engine works for all languages, and when searching for specific content, users will have greater control on how and what type of content is shown.

We don’t need to depend on a third-party provider that could cancel our account if they do not agree with our message.

This a preview of how search will work on the new site, with even more control and options in the future.

Please contact us if you have any questions about the new search feature. We are excited to better connect users with quality content from UCG.org, and enable members to find exactly what they’re looking for!

Web Development Team

The screenshot shows the UCG.org website with a search bar at the top. Below the search bar, the results are categorized by 'Type' and 'Publication'. The 'Type' section includes options like Sermon (6846), Article (5070), Media Production (948), News (835), Feast Posts (104), Congregation (74), Collection (57), Feast Site (25), Media Series (5), Conference Event (3), Recipe (3), Service Project (2), Content Page (1), and Website Help (1). The 'Publication' section includes options like United News (1507), Good News (1107), Blogs (611), Beyond Today (521), Beyond Today Daily (462), World News and Prophecy (434), Vertical Thought (368), Bible Questions and Answers (319), Beyond Today Television Program (294), This Is The Way (122), Beyond Today Magazine (96), Beyond Today Bible Study (85), Sabbath Services (61), The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God’s Law? (42), Bible Commentary (38), Compass Check (30), Jesus Christ: The Real Story (27), Is God a Trinity? (26), Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God (21), and Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion (21).

The search results for 'Holy Spirit' show a total of 13974 results. The first result is 'Do I Need God’s Holy Spirit?' by Mark Holladay, dated 2022-04-09. The second result is 'Lying to the Holy Spirit' by Tobias Morelli, dated 2022-03-05. The third result is 'Laying on of Hands' by Braden Veller, dated 2022-02-26. The fourth result is 'Why Should Christians Keep the Biblical Festivals of Leviticus 23?' by Craig Scott, dated 2022-04-02. The fifth result is 'From Darkness to Light' by Ray Wright, dated 2022-03-19. The sixth result is 'The Mystery of the Holy Spirit' by Dan Dowd, dated 2021-07-24.

The screenshot shows the UCG.org website with a search bar at the top. Below the search bar, the results are categorized by 'Type' and 'Publication'. The 'Type' section includes options like Media Production. The 'Publication' section includes options like Beyond Today Bible Study. The search results for 'Holy Spirit' show a total of 82 results. The first result is 'Power to Change: Part 1: The Work of the Holy Spirit' by Gary Petty, dated 2014-04-30. The second result is 'Let Us Keep the Feasts: The Holy Spirit in Us' by Steve Myers, dated 2015-05-20. The third result is 'How to Be God’s Friend: Part 3: Simeon & Anna' by Darris McNeely, dated 2014-07-09. The fourth result is 'Power to Change: Part 3: The Spirit of Love' by Steve Myers, dated 2014-05-28. The fifth result is 'Let Us Keep the Feasts: First Fruits' by Steve Myers, dated 2015-04-15. The sixth result is 'The Judges: Samson Battles the Gates of Hell' by Darris McNeely, dated 2018-02-21.

Midland Feast Announcement

Feast Housing Finalized for Midland, Ontario

Housing accommodations for the Feast in Midland will be held at the Quality Inn and Conference Center. Feastgoers are able to all stay in the same hotel that church services are held in, which has many amenities and comforts.

Please see the Midland, Ontario webpage at feast.ucg.org for more information and to register for this site. We welcome international travelers this year as well! Please contact Festival Coordinator Anthony Wasilkoff with any questions.

Trip to Trinidad and Tobago

For the first time in almost two years, from Feb. 24-28, 2022, Mary and I were able to visit the brethren in the island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Our last trip was March 12-16, 2020, leaving on one of the last flights out before Trinidad and Tobago locked down due to COVID-19. They have remained one of the more “locked-down” countries in the Caribbean, but are slowly opening up.

We arrived on Thursday evening, Feb. 24, thankful that our inexpensive, safe and friendly hotel survived the COVID-19 economic woes. We welcomed the Sabbath with a lovely dinner at our hotel with deacon Dale Bissessar, his wife Indeera, and daughters Tiffany and Elizabeth. The next morning, they picked us up for services bright and early. We usually meet in a small hall in Montrose Mall located in downtown Chaguanas, but Dale was able to rent a much larger meeting hall in the same building so that we could spread out according to COVID-19 protocols. We prepared the hall and welcomed the brethren as they arrived for services. Their smiles were covered by masks, but it was heartwarming to see their smiling, welcoming eyes in person! After a Caribbean update and sermon about “Waiting for Christ,” we enjoyed one of those famous, delicious Trini meals, which was prepared by several of the ladies. No one can prepare Trini food like the Trinians! We have missed it.

We had a total attendance of 20 persons. Some members were not able to make it this time, including our one and only member on the sister island of Tobago, Ann Solomon-Kerr. We hope that by our next visit, everyone who could not make it



to services this time will be able to do so.

After an interactive Bible study, a board meeting was held, where we discussed renting the larger hall full-time, the exciting plan we are about to launch for preaching the gospel in the southern Caribbean, and potential Feast of Tabernacles plans. We have since been able to procure a hotel in Reduit Beach, St. Lucia, for the Feast.

I then accompanied member Junia Marin as he transported a couple of the gentlemen members, Francis Ovid and Carlos, back to their respective homes on the southern end of the island (Mary returned home with the Bissessars and spent the evening with them). Little did I know I was in for a four-hour trip, and I enjoyed every minute of the time fellowshiping with these men and seeing more of the countryside, including the famous La Brea Pitch Lake. This 100-acre lake releases asphalt from the depths below and is the largest natural asphalt lake in the world. The road near the lake actually changes shape and the hills go up and down based upon the outside temperature. The houses in the area also tend to sit unevenly.



We were able to go as far south as Point Fortin, where we visited ailing member Dora Trim. Dora is dealing with serious health issues, and could certainly use our prayers. To hear her on the phone and read her encouraging emails, you would never know how much she herself is suffering. She spends much time praying for others, and encouraging and inspiring us all.

Our last full day was spent at the hotel, counseling and visiting with various members. This has been a most uplifting time for both Mary and me. We leave our Trini family with full hearts, praying that God allows us to visit again soon.

Chuck Smith



Chuck and Mary Smith attended Church services with the brethren and shared a potluck meal during their trip to Trinidad and Tobago.

Announcements

Continued from page 13

Mary Ella Sanderson Nelson Obituary, cont.

duties as a farm wife, even while not being able to walk! By the grace of God she survived that trial and recovered. This came to be typical of Mary throughout her long life.

Bill and Mary were farming and raising their growing family in Fremont, Nebraska, when God's calling changed her life.

She was baptized on Aug. 1, 1966. In those early years, she wasn't able to attend Church consistently, but built enduring friendships, serving as she was able.

Mary overcame a variety of trials and obstacles in order to live God's way of life. Through everything she kept the faith, attending Sabbath services, including the Feast and Holy Days. In doing so, she shared her cheerful good will and posi-

tive “can do” attitude with many. She became an encourager to everyone through example and positive good will—a teacher of good things (Titus 2:3).

When Bill died in 2011, Mary moved to Omaha, Nebraska, in order to be near the brethren. She entered joyfully into the life of the congregation and never missed a service or a social activity.

Mary loved meeting new people and thoroughly enjoyed

all opportunities to serve others. But her eyesight began to fail, and in 2015 Mary moved to Craig, Colorado, to live with her daughter, Peggy. There she kept in touch with the brethren by telephone and “snail” mail, although she could no longer attend services.

She is survived by five children, Larry Nelson (Jill), Richard Nelson (Paula), Kathy Lay (Ron), Peggy Campbell (Keith), and David Nelson (Wen-

dy); 13 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren. One child, Barbara Sue Nelson Anderson, predeceased her.

Mary's funeral was held on Friday, Dec. 3, 2021, in Fremont with Omaha Church pastor Mitchell Knapp, officiating. She is buried beside her husband at the Argo Cemetery near Uehling, Nebraska. Mary lived a joyful life and now awaits the joy of our Lord at the second coming of Jesus Christ! UN

Civil War and the Brethren's Safety

By David Bensinger,
U.S. Coordinator for Myanmar

In this first of two parts, we will discuss the current status, as of writing, of the civil war in Myanmar and how our brethren are doing. We continue to be careful of listing certain names or places that might bring harm to our brethren.

MYANMAR—The civil war rages on, but in the midst of tragedy some positive news sets root. Unofficial reports imply that the People's Defense Force (PDF), which organized in response to the military junta just over a year ago on Feb. 1, 2021, is beginning to successfully push back the military's forces in parts of the country. The Irrawaddy, an independent English and Burmese news agency, has reported that up to 3,000 military officers and soldiers have defected to date. Battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Myo Min Tun's high-profile defection in February was the latest. Defecting soldiers are in danger and the PDF and National League for Democracy (NLD), the democratic government formed by the protestors opposite to the military government, have established a reputation of accepting these military soldiers and helping them hide. Recently the Australian government announced its intention to provide asylum to defecting Myanmar military soldiers. Since many soldiers do not want to fight their own people, this may encourage defections and further weaken the military.

To be sure, war's atrocities continue. The military bombs, burns villages and arrests individuals who threaten the military's rule. As an example, The Irrawaddy reports that the military focused efforts in Khin-U township in the north central part of the country in March. This resulted in nearly 750 homes being burned, about 7,000 residents homeless, and more than 30,000 displaced. In all, nearly 9,000 homes have been burned down in this area. Of course, the PDF counter attacks in response. And these conflicts increase the death toll. One is reminded of James 4:1-3.

At this time, our brethren in Myanmar are safe, but the situation is challenging for them. Inflation has set in. Fuel

costs have doubled. Data costs have doubled (most Burmese have cell phones, but not data plans—they buy data as needed), hindering communications. All banks, and most offices and services, remain closed. The majority of people do not have jobs now.

Our United Church of God (UCG) brethren along with Living Church of God brethren are mostly in the same village in the southern delta region. This area is generally free of conflict as it benefits by being flat with open rice fields, which makes it difficult for either the military forces or the PDF to operate without notice. Our deacon there reports the safety of the brethren.

The members have been able to gather for services throughout most of COVID-19 and this civil war, which is a blessing. The village headman (like a mayor) gave approval for the Church to stay open for services initially in groups of 10, but now the entire group can meet. In the same village, the Baptist church has been closed since COVID-19 started. Davidson Leh Bey coordinates a Karen (pronounced care-in; the language and name of one of the largest ethnic groups in Myanmar) Zoom service each Sabbath with the UCG brethren in Myanmar and with their family members in Singapore and other locations (Davidson Leh Bey is a deacon living in England and is Saw Leh Bey's eldest son—please see the article titled, "Brethren in Myanmar Face Intense Civil Unrest," on page 13 of the May-June 2021 issue of *United News* for the history of Saw Leh Bey and those called in the south of Myanmar). We are also excited to have a prospective member in the village who attended services during the Feast of Tabernacles last year and weekly services since.

Members continue to plant rice, although inflation has driven the input costs higher. With the government (military) as the largest, and often mandated buyer, it is feared the market price during the next harvest may decline. Some of our young adults wish to work in Malaysia and Singapore on two-year contracts (a common occurrence for Myanmar youth). This would be good as it will provide a safe haven for them during the civil war. However, there has been difficulty getting these work contracts and the required



paperwork from the military government to leave. Interestingly, there is discussion that the military may start extending the paperwork faster to these young people. The reasoning is that if the young people leave, then they won't fight alongside the PDF. But fear of conscription still hangs over our young people. They must be careful navigating this process.

Moving four hours north to Yangon, the largest city in Myanmar, we have UCG members as well as COGWA and Church of God, Myanmar members. Members report that they must be careful both in where and when they go, and what they say on their phones. That later was emphasized on a recent phone call with one of them where I asked a specific question to which they would not reply, citing concerns over monitoring. Death on the streets is a too-frequent occurrence. The military reportedly has solid control of the city at this time and any civil disobedience is quickly quelled. The northern part of the city seems to contain more PDF and PDF sympathizers, and periodic forceful fighting occurs in this area. Thankfully, we do not have UCG brethren in that specific area, but unfortunately, our prospective member does live there. Our brethren and prospective member remain unharmed and are able to carefully go out to purchase necessities. Continued prayers for God's protection are needed.

We do also continue to reach out to our prospective member there. He came to us by writing to the home office more than two years ago. A planned visit during the Spring Holy Days in 2020 was intended when COVID-19 canceled travel into and out of the country. He spends a great deal of time working with the poor, widows, orphans and others who need help. He and we are anticipating the time when we can meet. This man's self-taught English is very good. He



Brethren in Myanmar gather for the Night To Be Much Observed and for Church services.

is a Sabbath-keeper, but is still learning about the Holy Days. When COVID-19 broke out, he lost his job. We hired him to translate the UCG Holy Days booklet into Burmese, and Davidson confirmed his translation was very good. So, we hope to engage him more in this way once we can figure out how to get more money into the country safely—a complex problem, part of which we have covered in other updates.

Our friends at Church of God, Myanmar about four hours north of Yangon also remain safe to date. I was able to have about an hour-long conversation with the elder there this past week. He recently baptized seven young adults who have been attending the school and Church there for many years. We rejoice with our Father, Elder Brother and these young people! The school remains open and they continue to plant and improve

their agricultural land that many UCG members contributed to help purchase. They have also recently acquired a few head of cattle. Of course, they continue to be an example in the community serving all and teaching God's way.

However, their compound is within 10 miles of the third-largest military base in Myanmar and about a mile off the main road upon which the military travels often. While they are okay, it is clear that the constant concern for his family and students weighs heavy on the elder's mind. But their faith and trust in God is strong.

Prayers to our Father and Jesus Christ for continued safety and help for our brethren and prospective members are welcomed and appreciated. Next issue, we will discuss what plans and groundwork have been laid to further the gospel in this part of the world. UN

How You Can Make a Planned Gift

Throughout the history of the modern Church, members and coworkers have supported the gospel message of Jesus Christ and His Church by giving tax-deductible financial gifts. These gifts help individuals and families by reducing their tax burden while also advancing the Church's mission. While some people desire their gifts to be realized immediately—usually through cash, stock or property—others seek to extend their generosity into the future through planned gifts. For additional information or assistance with any of the topics that are discussed, please contact our Planned Giving Coordinator at plannedgiving@ucg.org or by phone or text at (513) 570-2343.

Planned giving is the process and preparation of making a gift during your life or after death.

The easiest and quickest way to implement planned giving is by naming or updating a beneficiary to your existing financial accounts. Many financial accounts we already own such as our life insurance, annuities and retirement plans already have beneficiary requirements. This simplifies distributions to your

heirs when your life has ended. In most cases these types of financial products have a customer service system in place to assist in providing information and assistance to make any changes.

Many things we own, such as real estate or vehicles, generally do not have a method of nominating a beneficiary. This is where a Will or Trust is needed. In most situations these types of legal documents will require assistance from a lawyer who practices law in your state. One way to find a lawyer in your area is to find your state's Bar Association online. Most Bar associations have a Lawyer Referral Service and generally offer ways to find legal assistance for those who need it and cannot afford it.

Perhaps you already have done your Will or Trust, have already chosen your heirs, and are not willing or able to add the Church as a beneficiary, yet still want to remember the Church in some way by starting a personal planned giving program. Here are a few ideas.

- If you are over 70 ½ and have a traditional IRA, you can use a special IRA distribution method called a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) to make

a charitable gift to the United Church of God. The gift comes directly from your IRA with no tax liability. Your IRA provider will need to make the Church the recipient to avoid tax liability.

- When making a gift of publicly traded stock, bonds or mutual fund shares directly from your taxable investment account, a donor is allowed a charitable income tax deduction based the current market value of the security. The donor can avoid the capital gains tax that otherwise would be due by donating the shares directly to the Church.

- Making systematic gifts by using your bank's free bill pay service is a simple way to make regular planned gifts.

- Many people may also want to incorporate charitable giving into their estate plan. For them, a charitable trust may be an effective way to achieve their goals including: to give money to charity, to provide a limited economic benefit to themselves or their heirs, and to potentially receive savings in income, estate and gift taxes. There are two types of charitable trusts that may help: Charitable Remainder Trust (CRT)

and Charitable Lead Trust (CLT). Both trusts can provide a sizable current tax deduction.

For decades, members and coworkers have considered and designated United Church of God, *an International Association*, a California Non-Profit Religious Corporation, as a beneficiary in their wills, retirement accounts, trusts, annuities or insurance policies. The United Church of God is thankful to those with willing hearts who have provided resources for our mission.

Our Planned Giving brochure covers many of the commonly used planned giving methods including Last Will and Testament, Will Substitutes, Qualified Charitable Distributions, Life Insurance as a Planned Gift and Trusts. You can see it at atucg.org/planned-giving or we can send you a copy.

If you are considering designating the Church as a beneficiary in your Will, insurance policy or retirement plans, you can contact our Planned Giving Coordinator at plannedgiving@ucg.org or by phone or text at (513) 570-2343.

*Howard Marchbanks CFP®
Planned Giving Coordinator*



Periodicals Postage Paid
at Milford, Ohio, and at
additional mailing offices



- May 1-7 | **Sardis: Complacency Kills**
Darris McNeely | *Seven Prophetic Signs Before Jesus Returns*
- May 8-14 | **The Trinity Vs. The Bible**
Steve Myers | *Is God a Trinity?*
- May 15-21 | **The Truth About Heaven Is Better Than You Think**
Gary Petty | *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*
- May 22-28 | **The 7 Churches of Revelation: Faith, Trial and Victory**
Darris McNeely | *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*
- May 29-
June 4 | **Point of No Return**
Steve Myers | *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*
- June 5-11 | **God's Holy Day Plan**
Steve Myers | *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*
- June 12-18 | **Russia and Bible Prophecy**
Darris McNeely | *Russia and Bible Prophecy*
- June 19-25 | **Ephesus: The Church That Left Love Behind**
Darris McNeely | *The Church Jesus Built*
- June 26-
July 2 | **Incredible Angels**
Steve Myers | *Angels: God's Messengers and Spirit Army*

BY THE NUMBERS

224 million

Number of print ads for *Beyond Today* to be included in Sunday newspapers across the U.S. from September 2022 to March 2023

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