



Council of Elders Names Rick Shabi President

By Peter Eddington and Mitchell Moss

After weeks of prayer and periodic fasting, the Council of Elders selected Rick Shabi to serve as the next president of the United Church of God, an International Association. Mr. Shabi's three-year term began on May 18. The Church's home office staff in Cincinnati looks forward to serving under the leadership of Mr. Shabi and his wife, Deborah.

Rick and Deborah both grew up in the Greater Chicago area, where his parents (Paul and Lela Shabi) and her parents (Glenn and Betty Metz) were active members of the Church dating back to the 1960s. Mr. Shabi attended Ambassador College briefly, but left in order to pursue a degree at Indiana University, where he graduated with a bachelors' of science degree in business with a major in accounting. While at Ambassador, he met his wife Deborah, and

the two were married.

He led a successful and rewarding career with a CPA firm, where he got to grow in experience beyond only the finance aspects of running a business. He then went on to work in corporate healthcare, working for companies that own, manage and administer hospitals. He held various titles and responsibilities over the course of several years that continued his exposure to the operations of an organization at its highest levels.

And for the last 12 years before being hired by the Church as a pastor, he ran his own firm that managed specialty units in hospitals.

In 2011, when then-operations manager for ministerial and member services Roy Holladay called to ask if he'd consider being hired as a full-time pastor, he had already become somewhat disenchanted with the healthcare field and was ready to make the jump (he'd been ordained an elder in 2000).



"The past 10 years as a pastor has been the most rewarding part of my life. I've loved every single minute of it," he says. "When this opportunity for president came up, I wasn't looking for it, because I love the role I'm in; I love the people, I love working with them."

Len Martin, Council chairman, said of his time working with Mr. Shabi as treasurer, "I would describe Rick as thoughtful, introspective and a listener. He likes to ask questions to

gather the facts and understand a matter before making a decision. I have every confidence in his ability to lead the Church forward in the years ahead."

Darris McNeely, associate media producer, also noted Mr. Shabi's proven approach of wise stewardship: "In the early days of UCG Rick and Debbie were original members of the Indianapolis congregations. For several years Rick served as chairman of our board and was instrumental in laying down a

solid financial position of the local congregation. The fruit of those years resulted in the purchase of their own building which now serves many needs for the congregation."

Assuming the office of president, Mr. Shabi's vision is to above all seek God's will and direction for the path forward. "Jesus Christ knows exactly where He wants the Church to go and how He wants the gospel preached to the world. We will seek His will and follow Him. The Church has a tremendous foundation of literature, video, sermons, and a strong web presence—we have amassed a fount of knowledge and truth that is unmatched anywhere else in the world today. Anyone can come to our website and listen to, read, and find the truth. The only place there's more truth is in the Bible!"

He continues, "Our churches are strong, we have pastors

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General Conference of Elders Returns to Form With In-Person Meetings

By Ariana del Signore

EASTGATE, OHIO—On May 14-16, 2022, United Church of God held its annual meeting of the General Conference of Elders at the Holiday Inn Eastgate. After being held virtually for two years due to the pandemic, the more than 250 elders, wives and home office support staff in attendance appreciated the opportunity to spend time together and attend the meetings in person this year.

After a dessert reception on Friday night, May 13, members of the GCE attended a Sabbath morning elders' study given by

Gary Petty. Afternoon Sabbath services were held at the Holiday Inn and brethren from the Cincinnati area joined members of the GCE to worship.

The GCE meeting proper began with a dinner on Saturday evening attended by elders, wives and some home office support staff, after which Council of Elders Chairman Len Martin opened the night by introducing the ministerial recognitions. Elders who had been ordained since the last GCE meeting were announced along with their wives. This was followed by the ministerial recognition for those who had been ordained for 25 years, 40 years and 50 years. The

honorees received gifts of appreciation on behalf of the GCE, and a floral arrangement was also delivered to those who were unable to physically be in attendance.

For those who were ordained 50 years, Len Martin took several minutes for a brief presentation, which included ordination date and reflective comments from those who were honored. Photos of the couple throughout the years were shown on a slideshow as Mr. Martin read comments and background history. Also honored at this ceremony were those who had retired in

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Phoenix elder Scott McKeon hosting a small panel presentation with Brian Shaw and Aaron Dean on the "Truth in Love" concept that has become a guiding light for the strategic plan this year.

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General Conference of Elders Returns to Form

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the past year, and those who received recognitions for being employed 10, 20, and 40 years.

After the recognition, the couples who were honored for 50 years of ordination joined the stage where a group photo was taken with Council Chairman Len Martin and Ministerial and Member Services Operations Manager Mark Welch.

Sunday reports, Balloting and Keynote Address

On Sunday morning Council Chairman Len Martin took the stage to confirm the meetings from the last Council of Elders session before Council Secretary Frank Dunkle began the balloting process. Then-treasurer Rick Shabi presented the financial report from the fiscal year 2021-2022. He commented that God had richly blessed us even through difficult times with COVID-19. He also shared that 45% of our funds so far go towards congregational care, 25% towards preaching the gospel, 9% towards international support, and 21% towards administrative support.

Len Martin returned for his Chairman's address, and noted that the GCE planning committee, which had been formed in December of 2020, had developed activities for the weekend. A change this year was the elimination of a formal Question & Answer session, replaced by an interactive option within many of the seminars using the Kahoot! app.

Truth in Love and the Ephesians Framework

After a break, Council Members Brian Shaw and Aaron Dean gave a seminar about speaking the truth in love. Mr. Shaw noted that people were looking for truth, lovingly applied. Paul helped the Ephesians see how they were part of the Church even though they weren't Jews. Mr. Shaw quoted retired pastor Bob Dick, saying, "We have to become a work before we can do a work." He posed a question to the audience: *How can this concept help us find a path towards maturity as an organization?* The word for truth used in Ephesians 4:15 includes a sense of action—living

the truth, or "truthing." He noted that the mission and vision of UCG haven't changed, but we're working on understanding how to navigate the path, how to provide the best spiritual nourishment to members. They asked questions of the audience throughout the presentation and used the Kahoot! app to receive input from the audience in real time and generate a graph of the results.

After a short break, Scott McKeon took the stage with Darris McNeely and Dan Dowd to introduce the review of the strategic plan, which had been informed by the Ephesians Framework.

Mr. McNeely emphasized that we must be a work before we can do a work and paraphrased Ephesians 2:10. He said, "We want to see fruit being born in the lives of our people, and at various stages of development with people on this ladder of engagement."

Scott McKeon provided some background about the strategic plan, which helps measure how we can best use time and resources.

Dan Dowd commented on the fact that all Christian denominations currently struggle with retention. We try to ground our young people by showing them that God's way of life works. The retention rate of youth in UCG is currently 78%, which is relatively high, but we want to improve and further refine and maximize this number.

After another break, attendees had the choice to attend three interactive seminars. Philip Aust's media seminar covered how elders, members and new or potential members use UCG media. He discussed how content can be improved to more effectively preach the gospel. Mark Welch spoke on congregational care. A major emphasis revolved around mentoring people in congregations to be leaders and possibly future pastors. Ben Light presented a list of five questions that all revolved around identifying and preparing the next generation of the ministry. They noted that due to planned retirements in the next four years there will be 20 pastoral vacancies, so preparing men for the future of the ministry is imperative. The third seminar, focused on UCG governance, was presented by Keith



During the GCE, six couples were honored for 50 years of service in the ministry. From left: MMS head Mark Welch, Mitch & Linda Knapp, Joe & Pat Dobson, Vic & Beverly Kubik, Linda & Anthony Wasilkoff, Council chairman Len Martin. Not in attendance were Harold & Martha Clement and Noel & Becky Horner.



Wilson. The interactive session discussed unity and governance, touching on how Church leadership handled COVID-19 restrictions and varying requirements. Various people offered thoughts and reflections for a beneficial discussion on navigating different situations as leaders.

After another break, everyone gathered back in the main hall for the Tribute to Deceased Elders and Wives, which was presented by Greg Thomas. He ended by saying, "Let us, the living, never forget their self-sacrifice, and follow their examples of loyalty and faith."

Ballot Results

After the presentation, Council Secretary Frank Dunkle reported the results of the balloting.

- International—Jorge de Campos
- U.S.—Darris McNeely, Mario Seiglie, Rex Sexton
- Strategic Plan—Approved (165 yes, 95 no)
- Operation plan—Passed (210 yes, 57 no)
- Fiscal budget—Passed (237 yes, 31 no)
- Constitutional amendment 5.1.1—Passed (207 yes, 59 no)



Upper left: Council Chairman Len Martin addresses the conference. Upper right: Dan Dowd and Darris McNeely explaining the "Ephesians Framework" underpinning the strategic plan to Scott McKeon on stage. Lower left: Philip Aust leading a discussion on the Church's media. Lower right: Ben Light leading a roundtable discussion workshop about manpower needs in the ministry.

Chairman Len Martin gave concluding comments and announcements before Ken Skorseth closed the day in prayer.

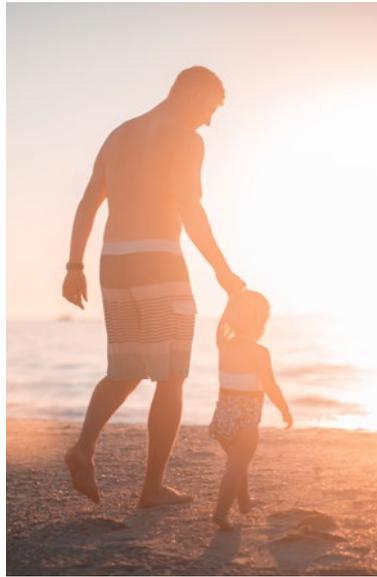
Monday's Breakout Sessions and Discussions

On Monday, media presentations were provided by Dr. Philip Aust and virtually by Dr. Steven Britt, in which they presented the quantitative data from the Kahoot! session the day before. Dr. Britt noted that the vast majority agreed that the Internet was an effective way to

reach people, perhaps more than radio and even TV. Dr. Aust presented word clouds based on the frequency of specific results. He noted that in our Ted Talk world, many members wanted content that was shorter and more bite-sized.

Overall, the 2022 meeting of the General Conference of Elders provided a weekend of connection, growth and cooperation. A spirit of unity was evident and attendees left with a renewed zeal to go forward, preaching the gospel and preparing a people. **UN**

The Important Role of Fathers



Derek Thomson/Unsplash

With the news and headlines dominated by sensational stories and terrible murders over the last several weeks, the news reports that highlight the causes of criminality have been pretty much ignored. The escalating violence in society is a sure sign of disintegration. We have passed the point of no return to a civil law-abiding nation. How did it happen? Consider this truth: more than half of all American babies are on welfare.

The number of babies being born into fatherless homes is rapidly increasing. United Nations Population Fund has found that more than 40 percent

of all births in the United States are to single women. In 1970, the figure was 10 percent.

In an article titled, “The Psychological Effects of Growing Up Without a Father” at education-oriented website owlcation.com, Michael Kismet lists several psychologically documented results identified in many children who grow up without a father: More likely to be aggressive, depressed, have low self-esteem, do poorly in schools, be incarcerated, commit suicide and use drugs.

Being a father as our Creator intended is wonderful and rewarding, however, it is not easy. It requires work and time, plus basic human values of truth and decency to be passed on. The moment a man becomes a father, he’s tasked with being responsible for a whole new being. As tough as that may be, nothing in this life compares to the joy that comes from being a dad. “The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him” (Proverbs 23:24, English Standard Version).

Bishop T.D. Jakes, in an interview with Oprah Winfrey, stated, “Every child has a hole in their soul in the shape of their father if their father is missing.

If it is not filled with a caring and providing father, children will try to fill it with something that does not work.” He listed examples such as promiscuous sex, drug use and attachment to gangs. Many single moms have found a way to fill the void and raise successful children on their own, but a quick look at what is taking place in major cities gives the big picture.

God, in His wisdom, shows us the responsibilities of fathers in many verses. The government cannot provide these. The first is love, the love of a father, “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him” (Psalm 103:13, New International Version). Another is discipline—a main ingredient in character building—“For what son is not disciplined by his father?” (Hebrews 12:7, Berean Study Bible). Teaching about life and how to do things is critical: “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction” (Proverbs 1:8, English Standard Version). A key ingredient is self-control. Fathers

are not to lose their temper and should teach proper self-control to their children, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4, ESV).

Very importantly, fathers are given the responsibility by God to teach their children about God’s laws. “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

The perpetrators of the violence engulfing our cities today are, by a vast majority, young men who have grown up without a father teaching, training, loving and providing for them. Their anger is being vented on society, but society is unwilling to address the causal factors.

Soon that will change. When Jesus Christ rules the earth, all children will have fathers and mothers who love and diligently teach them. “The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets” (Zechariah 8:5). **UN**



Rex Sexton is the pastor of the Portland and The Dalles, Oregon, congregations, and the director of the Northwest Teen Camp.. He and his wife Patty have served churches in Oregon, Washington and Alaska since 1982. He can be reached at rex_sexton@ucg.org.

President’s Letter

Let Us Grow in the Unity of the Faith



Sierka Koder/Unsplash

This is my first column for the *United News* in the position I was appointed to just about a month ago. While many of you know me, many more do not so I will use this first column to share with you some of my thoughts as my wife and I embark on a new chapter in our lives and our service to God and you.

The past month we have been doing a lot of thinking and introspection.

For the past 11 years, we have had the absolute pleasure and honor of pastoring the Orlando and Jacksonville, Florida, congregations. Having had a long, progressively fulfilling career in the business world, primarily in finance and administration in corporate multi-state healthcare settings, then in founding and running a healthcare management company for client hospitals and surgeons, our lives took a turn in 2011 when we received a call, asking if we would consider becoming full-time pastor for four churches in Florida (Orlando, Jacksonville, Ocala and Tallahassee).

Feeling a bit inadequate for the job, we accepted and began what have been the most rewarding and satisfying years of our lives. We have always loved the

people of God wherever we lived, but serving His people in this role has been fulfilling in a way we could not have imagined.

Through the years, we have shared many joys and happy moments with our brethren. Baptisms, marriages, the birth of children, Feasts of Tabernacles, job promotions, graduations, working with people and seeing them apply God’s way of life and experience the benefits, and sensing the “family spirit” and unity among us are among those joys.

But life as a pastor is not always a “bed of roses,” as we all know. Along with the joys of our spiritual fellowship with God and each other, life can be full of “toils and tears” as one of our popular church hymns says.

Indeed, when we are living God’s way, joy should be in our hearts no matter what we may be going through, as we under-

stand God is working with us, training us, preparing us to fill the roles He has planned for us in His Kingdom. There is no greater calling in life than that which God gives us, and when we keep the vision of what He is doing at the forefront of our minds, there is that “peace that surpasses all understanding” and the energy and zeal to go forward.

Those times of “toil and tears, doubts and fears” can be tough. Like you, we’ve cried with people as they have lost loved ones, seen relationships fall apart, or suffered financial setbacks or lingering illness. There have been tears when some chose to forsake God in order to follow their own ideas and ways. There has been frustration and disappointment when some resist God’s word or teaching. “Was

Ambassador Bible College Graduates the Class of 2022

By Ariana del Signore

MILFORD, OHIO—On Sunday, May 8, 2022, Ambassador Bible College held its 23rd commencement ceremony for the students of the ABC class of 2022. At the start of the ceremony, the 16 students filed through an arch decorated with greenery, flowers and twinkle lights. ABC Coordinator Dr. Frank Dunkle began the formal ceremony with the invocation, before Class President Matthew Rains took the stage to deliver the student body president's address, in which he congratulated his fellow classmates on a year of great growth, and encouraged them to

take the lessons they had learned this year and use them throughout their lives.

The ABC choir, directed by ABC Choir Director Ken Shoemaker and ABC Choir Assistant Chad Browning, sang two songs before Mr. Kubik delivered the president's address, which was one of encouragement and personalized to the class of 2022. Following Mr. Kubik's speech, Aaron Dean, and Jorge and Kathy de Campos joined him on stage for the presentation of the awards. Awards given for exemplary conduct and service were presented to Ariella McNally and Brian Styer.

Following this, the presentation of the diplomas began.

Students crossed the stage to receive their diploma from Mr. Kubik, exiting the stage as graduates of Ambassador Bible College.

During the post-graduation celebration, students gathered on the lawn outside the home office for the annual balloon send-off and group photos. Families and friends followed the students outside for more photos and congratulations. All in attendance also enjoyed sparkling cider, cake and a charcuterie board the size of a large banquet table, courtesy of Kathy de Campos and ABC kitchen manager Micah Gunn.

Ambassador Bible College is a 9-month program dedi-



cated to studying the Word of God and preparing leaders to serve in their congregations and families. For more information

about ABC or to apply, please go to abc.ucg.org or email ABC Coordinator Frank Dunkle at frank_dunkle@ucg.org. **UN**

Updates From Ministerial and Member Services

On April 16, 2022, Luke Banda was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Delphine, serve in the Mufulira, Zambia, congregation. On April 22, Rodrick Epomba was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Patricia, serve in the Solwezi, Zambia, congregation. On April 23, Christopher Ndunguyonga was ordained into the ministry. He serves in the Mufumbwe, Zambia, congregation.

On May 18, 2022, Bill Paz was re-credentialed as an elder by the United Church of God. He and his wife, Cheryl, serve in the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation.

On June 4, Skeets Mez was named the pastor for Columbus and Macon (Georgia). He continues to pastor the Mobile (Alabama) and DeFuniak Springs (Florida) congregations. We greatly appreciate David Mills' service as interim pastor for the Columbus and Macon congregations after the death of pastor Ken Martin. Mr. Mills continues to serve those congregations as an elder.

On May 22, Greg Musgrove was appointed pastor of the congregations in Laurel, Mississippi, and New Orleans, Louisiana, replacing Mr. Mez as pastor for those congregations.

On June 6, Jorge de Campos was appointed pastor of the Dallas and Ft. Worth (Texas) and Lawton (Oklahoma) congregations, transitioning into that role to replace retiring pastor Stan Martin. In conjunction with that change, Kerby Burton was appointed pastor of the Lexington (Kentucky) congregation to replace Mr. de Campos.

We are very grateful for the dedicated and faithful service of these men and their wives.

Chris Rowland

ABC Continuing Education Held in May



The Ambassador Bible College Continuing Education Program was back to full strength this year. 37 students attended classes in the home office, starting Monday, May 23rd and concluding on Friday, May 27th. Participants came from as far away

as Texas, Colorado, and Florida—although some were from the Cincinnati congregation. The oldest was more than 80 years old, and the youngest was 30.

The Continuing Education program gives participants a sampling of classes from the

ABC curriculum. This year's schedule included an exploration of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, examination of Moses' calling and the Exodus, study of the Book 1 Peter, recounting of Paul's travels in what is now the nation of Turkey, and more.

For the first time in three years, there were no COVID restrictions on the program, which improved the social aspect of the program. Along with six class sessions each day, participants enjoyed having breakfast and lunch together and a fair bit of time for conversation. Many of them have said that the opportunity to spend more time with old friends—and to make new ones—is as big a part of the program as are the classes.

Frank Dunkle

Council of Elders Names Rick Shabi President

who are committed to the truth of God, who teach from the Bible in their congregations and who are dedicated to shepherding the people who God calls to His body. We have a state-of-the-art video and recording studio where we can produce any number and type of videos we need, so that door's wide open to us. We have dedicated elders and members whose hearts are with God and who are willing

to serve however they are asked. Physically, the groundwork has been laid and we appear to have what we need in order to get the Work of God done. Now, we need the spiritual leadership and direction of God to lead us, inspire us, and give us the words to preach to this dying world."

Outgoing president Victor Kubik said, "Bev and I wish God's favor on Rick Shabi as he steps into the responsibility of

leading the United Church of God. I believe that the future of the Church is in his best interest as he seeks God's guidance and direction. The Church has been blessed with good income, strong membership and dedicated co-workers along with a strong media presence.

"My prayer and hope are that peace, goodwill, success and charity continue in the same spirit providing positive out-

comes in proclamation and care for transformed lives in what may be the most challenging years ahead."

Mr. Shabi expressed his desire for all to strive toward the vision that God has for the Church: "Jesus Christ said that His will for the Church is that we become one. Let's grow closer to Him, and more diligently, carefully, and earnestly seek, preach, and live the truth, asking God

to hone His vision in us. When we grasp that vision, the zeal to do the Work will increase. Jesus Christ is returning and as we see events in this world leading toward His return in a way we haven't seen as clearly as we have the last few years, that should motivate us. God has called us to a great purpose. Never forget it or neglect it. Let's embrace it and become "one" with each other and Him, as He desires. **UN**

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Stan Martin

The United Church of God (UCG) would like to recognize Stan Martin upon his retirement from the employed ministry in the Church. Stan, alongside his wife Penny, has been serving as a pastor since March 2011, though he has been an elder for more than 30 years.

Ordained in 1989, Mr. Martin was hired in March 2011 to fill a gap in pastoral care. He began his employed pastoral role as an associate pastor in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Rome, Georgia, until July that same year when he was transferred to pastor Knoxville and Kingsport, Tennessee, and London, Kentucky.

He and his wife have served in several capacities during these past 11 years. “My wife

and I have enjoyed the opportunity to be a pastor employed by UCG for the past 11 plus years. Although I have been an elder over 30 years, we have only been employed by UCG since then.

Over the years we have met so many wonderful people and it has been a privilege for Penny and me to have served.”

Roy and Norma Holladay wrote of the Martins, “Stan and Penny served in the Rome and Chattanooga churches. They were greatly loved by all the members. A good example of this is when the Rome church planned to attend the local minor league baseball game. A number of the members were not able to afford to attend. The Martins purchased tickets to give to those members and made sure that everyone was able to attend.

“Stan and Penny both have the heart of a servant and also exhibit great hospitality. They were always willing to do anything they were asked to do.

“Stan and Penny have been our wonderful and dear friends for many years and we treasure their friendship. They will be a tremendous asset in whatever area they retire to.”

In 2016 the Martins were transferred to pastor in Tampa, St. Petersburg, Ocala and

Vero Beach, Florida, where they served two years before transferring again to pastor in Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas, and Lawton, Oklahoma.

Rick and Deborah Shabi commented: “We have known Stan Martin for 35 years, dating back to the time we both lived in the Nashville, Tennessee, area. Stan is an outgoing, warm, friendly man who is a pleasure to be around. We shared many good times together with him and his family and other couples who were in Nashville back then.

“It was a pleasure to be in Nashville when he was ordained an elder by Mr. Kellers. We knew he would fill that office well, as he has demonstrated over the years.

“Our families didn’t lose contact over the years, and back in 2011, Stan and we were hired into the full-time ministry at the same time. It was wonderful to have the same calling and to be able to share the ‘ups and downs’ and get advice from one another. Stan and Penny served their congregations well, and now they are retiring. Well done, Stan and Penny! We count it a blessing to have you as friends. Thank you for your service to God and His people. Enjoy your new life in retirement, and keep in touch with all of us!”

Stan and Penny (Smith) Martin have been married for 11½ years. Stan comments, “I have two grown children: Margie, who lives in the Kansas City area with five children (married to Taylor Jones); and Stephen, who lives in Houston with one child (married to Cayla Loper). Penny has one son, Tyler Sterban, who lives in the Nashville, Tennessee, area and one deceased son, Zachery Sterban.”

Besides serving as a pastor, Stan has been steadily serving in other ways. Namely, he served as festival coordinator for five years between Jekyll Island and in Gatlinburg; he served at Camp Woodmen teaching Christian Living and serves on the expelled elder appeal committee of the General Conference of Elders.

Gary Smith says, “Stan Martin and I became friends while being in a dorm together at Ambassador College, Pasadena in 1974. Since that time we have remained friends as we have gone through the years. We have been able to reconnect at the Feast of Tabernacles and through attending the GCE gatherings since 1995.

“From 1974, Stan has been a faithful member and servant in the Church of God. His faithfulness has allowed us to enjoy

many memorable times together.

“I think that Stan’s faithfulness is wonderfully illustrated by the willingness of him and his wife, Penny, to enter the ministry instead of retiring. After finishing up as a medical rep, he was offered the opportunity to serve in the ministry. He willingly chose to serve the people of God rather than enjoy a leisurely retirement. To put God first in this way is a wonderful tribute to the faithfulness of Stan and his wife.”

In his leisure time, Stan says “I love to read, enjoy most sports (although now it is mainly watching) and golf (which thankfully I can still play). We also enjoy traveling and getting to know people.”

Although they’re retiring from the employed ministry, the Martins will continue serving as elder and elder’s wife. “Although we are retiring from employment, we still plan to be active serving in every way possible. An elder never truly retires from service, just as a Christian never retires from being a Christian. We are moving to the Huntsville, Alabama, area where we have seven churches within approximately two hours from where we will be living. We look forward to our next area of service in the Church.” **UN**

Mindanao, Philippines Feast of Tabernacles Site

Our Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day 2022 for Mindanao, Philippines, will have a new site at Hotel De Susana and Resort at Purok 2, Patag Bagontaas, Valencia City, Bukidnon.

Bukidnon is labeled as the highland paradise in the heart of Mindanao. While it derived its name from the Visayan term

“bukid” for “mountain,” it is predominantly a rolling grassland plateau with an average elevation of 915 meters. The rolling uplands, deep canyons, and valleys alternating with low plains create a refreshing vista for dwellers and travelers alike.

One of the most striking and impressive features of Bukidnon is its breathtaking mountain

landscape—with some areas still covered with forest. Significant portions, however, are grasslands planted with corn, pineapple and sugarcane as the soil and climate render the area highly suited to agriculture.

Bukidnon is the primary source of agricultural products and raw materials that feed the processing plants in the prov-

ince and the primary processing centers of Northern Mindanao. Hence, Bukidnon is tagged as the region’s “Food Basket.”

Since this year’s Fall Festival season is fast approaching, we need to prepare viable plans which will enable us to faithfully observe these God-ordained feasts.

If you’d like to register to

attend the Feast in Mindanao, please visit feast.ucg.org and find the page for the site, where you’ll find instructions for registering to attend.

Let us all work and pray together that God will grant us again a blessed, spiritually rewarding and successful Feast of Tabernacles and Eighth Day this year! **UN**

President’s Letter

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there something more we could have done or were there better words we could have said?” Our hearts ache when people choose to leave the fellowship.

We learn patience, we learn respect, we learn to look to God for answers, and we learn to love the way God loves. He never gives up on us. He is patient. He is merciful. He loves (Greek *agape*) us and is not willing that

any should fall by the wayside.

We must do that, too, as we grow in “one-ness” with each other and in the unity of the Spirit and faith.

The term “pastor” in the Bible comes from the Greek word meaning “shepherd.” While we have not been shepherds in the physical sense of the word, over the years, we have come to understand that Jesus Christ, *the Head of this Church*, is our “Great Shepherd.” He knows what we

need. His Spirit guides us into all truth and understanding. He teaches, He leads, He feeds, He knows the way to the Kingdom where He is leading us.

He is the way, truth and life.

We must learn to yield, follow, trust and rely on Him. We must diligently seek His will and what is “well-pleasing” to Him.

We learn many things in the various areas and responsibilities God gives us during our physical lifetimes—both in

service in His Church and in the world in which we live and work. Truly, God is preparing all of us in His special, loving way.

Let Him, through His Holy Spirit, lead you.

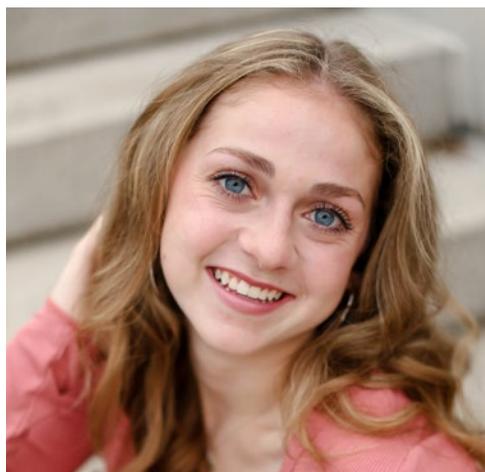
As my wife and I embark on this new chapter of our lives, we will seek His will and are asking for wisdom that we may serve Him and you well.

The road ahead will bring some difficult times and trials. People will not want to hear

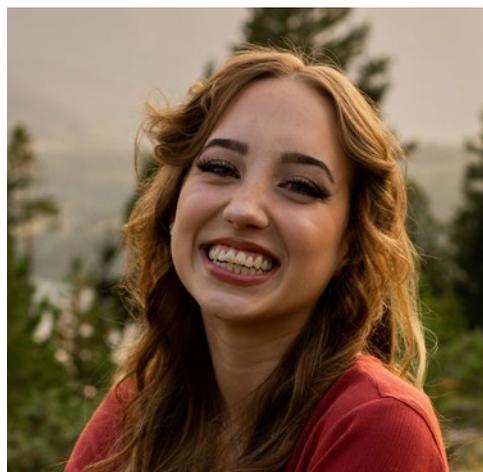
God’s message of truth. As recorded in 2 Timothy 3:13, “evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse.” Now is the time for us to be preparing our hearts for those times. Commit to God, build trust, reliance and our hope in Him.

Let’s all join together in seeking God’s will and what is “well-pleasing” to Him, then doing His work and bringing glory to His name forever. Amen (Hebrews 13:20-21). **UN**

6 Congratulations Class of 2022 Graduates!



Lindsey Barnes



Cadence Franke



Nathan Hendrickson



Logan Holladay



Gabriel Holzworth



Anne Jorgensen



Reagan Mango

High School Graduates

Lindsey Barnes

Lindsey Barnes, daughter of Michael and Rita Barnes (née Kosior), graduated from O'Fallon Township High School in May. She attends the Metro East, Illinois, congregation. She enjoyed taking art, ceramics and pottery classes, and was on the varsity lacrosse team. She was elected Treasurer for the National Honor Society and was involved in many extracurricular clubs. Lindsey graduated Summa Cum Laude, was an Illinois State Scholar, and a Scholar Athlete.

During high school, she earned college credit hours while enrolled at Southwestern Illinois College. She was on the Dean's List and she became a member of Phi Theta Kappa, the official honor society for two-year colleges. Lindsey loves being with children and is a math tutor at a local math tutoring business, plus she is a camp counselor at the local YMCA. Lindsey will be attending Southeast Missouri State University, entering as a sophomore. She is a recipient of the President's Scholarship and will be studying finance, economics and business analytics.

Cadence Franke

Cadence M. Franke, daughter of Shawna L. Franke of the Ann Arbor, Michigan, congregation, graduated high school and will be attending Washtenaw Community College before ultimately transferring to the University of Michigan to study business. She currently works at Tropical Smoothie, was offered

an internship in an event planning business, and participated in numerous volunteer opportunities such as community park clean ups and 5K races for blood drives. She was on the honor roll all four years of high school and was awarded the Morris B. Barker Memorial Scholarship for academic achievement. She earned her black belt in Tang Soo Do and is an accomplished pianist.

Cadence loves reading, art, baking, exercise, organizing, picture taking, to name a few. She has participated in teen club and earned awards for her speeches.

Cadence is continuing to work, enjoying her summer break and looking forward to starting college in the fall.

Nathan Hendrickson

Nathan Hendrickson, son of Tim and Carla Hendrickson of the Bellevue, Washington, congregation, graduated from Bothell High School in June. He is a valedictorian and National Merit Scholarship finalist. Nathan is planning on attending Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, this fall.

Logan Holladay

Logan Holladay, son of Craig and Loreita Holladay, attends the Dallas/Fort Worth congregations. He's been homeschooled since fifth grade and has now completed his grade-school studies. He currently works at Kroger and is interested in a career where he can use his creativity, such as graphic design, music production, etc. As for hobbies, he plays a lot of video games, along with playing piano, and

talking to friends. But most of his time is taken up by work. He plans to attend ABC in the next few years and hopes to move to Cincinnati next year.

Gabriel Holzworth

Gabriel Luke Holzworth of Hazel, South Dakota, graduated from Faithfarm Academy April 24, 2022. He attended public school through second grade and then homeschooled at Faithfarm Academy from 2011 through 2022. He graduated Valedictorian and was student of the month every month for 10 years running.

Gabe has enjoyed 10 years of swimming competitively for the Watertown Area Swim Club Dolphins, earning his letter five times. He is a talented musician, playing piano and composing many original pieces. He also plays the ukulele and sings. He has a passion for learning more about the world God has created and getting outdoors in all its forms, but has yet to visit Boston in the fall.

While he has not had a lot of job experience, he has been blessed to work for his dad on their farm and, more recently, with his brother washing windows in the Watertown area. When he has a little time to himself, he loves settling down at the piano, curling up with a good book or bingeing on *Adventures in Odyssey*.

Gabe has been accepted to Ambassador Bible College with plans to enroll there this fall and then follow where God leads him from there, whether that be college for an engineering degree, farming or something that has yet to be revealed.

Gabe is the son of Luke and Kim

Holzworth. They have attended the Watertown congregation for the past six years.

Anne Jorgensen

Anne Jorgensen, daughter of Ben and Gina Jorgensen of the Clearwater Valley, Idaho, congregation, graduated on May 27 from Nezperce High School. Anne was Valedictorian and received an Idaho STEM diploma as well as the Career Technical Education diploma. She was also the recipient of the distinguished Idaho Governor's Cup Scholarship.

While maintaining a 4.0 GPA all four years of high school, she participated in Business Professionals of America, National Honor Society, Knowledge Bowl, Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, Service Club, Girls' Club, and held several Student Body Government positions. She also worked part-time at the community library.

In her spare time, Anne enjoys reading.

The next chapter of her life will begin at Boise State University this fall, where she will major in accounting in preparation for a financial-related career.

Reagan Mango

Reagan Thomas Mango (daughter of Joseph and Kelly Mango) graduated from the Medina County Career Center on Thursday, May 19. She attends the Cleveland, Ohio, congregation and graduated high school with certifications in Early Childhood Education. Reagan plans on attending Ambassador Bible College next fall. She previously worked at the Goddard School and currently volunteers at a local therapeutic horseback riding facility. She is an avid songwriter who also enjoys boating and horseback riding.

Arianna Massie

Arianna Marie Massie, daughter of Ben and Sabrina Massie of the Raleigh, North Carolina, congregation, graduated from Cary Christian School. She worked one year as a counselor for her school's after-care program, and another year as a part-time nanny. Arianna also participated volleyball and track during her school career. Over her four years of high school Arianna was able to make Dean's list and



Arianna Massie



Kelsey Phelps



Katarina Reinoso



Kennedy Scout Richardson



Ryder Riggs



Elaina Robbins

complete her senior thesis with the topic of why Christians should keep the Sabbath.

Arianna loves participating in all church camps and activities. She also loves spending time with her family and friends.

After graduation Arianna plans to attend Central Carolina for two years and then transfer to UNC Chapel Hill. She plans to then complete four years in dental school, and become a certified dentist.

Kelsey Phelps

Kelsey Phelps, daughter of Michael and Laura Phelps of the Ann Arbor, Michigan, congregation, graduated as Valedictorian (4.16 GPA) at Charyl Stockwell Preparatory Academy (summa cum laude). She achieved Academic Letters four years, was a National Honor Society member, completed AP and IB (International Baccalaureate) classes, served as Secretary of her high school's Executive Board (Student Government), and coordinated a Blankets for Love service project at her school. She was recipient of the Saginaw Valley Founder's Scholarship, Thompson Family Scholarship, Robert A. Leonard Jr. Scholarship, and Livingston County Women's Club Human Services Scholarship. She works as a Team Lead and Trainer at Panera Bread. She played on the varsity basketball team and performed with the Honors Chorale. She loves music and plays the piano, cello, guitar and ukulele, as well as painting.

Kelsey is interested in the fields of Neuroscience and Healthcare. She has

been a member of the Michigan Teen Speech Club for five years.

The highlight of her teen years have been UYC camps. She plans to serve at pre-teen Camp Nacome and attend Camp Pinecrest and Northwest Camp this summer. She's served at pre-teen camps Buckeye and Ironwood and attended Winter Camp in past years.

Her favorite scripture is 2 Timothy 1:7: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

After graduation, Kelsey plans to attend Saginaw Valley State University this fall, majoring in Neuroscience. She also plans to attend ABC after her Bachelor's degree before obtaining a Master's Degree to pursue a career as a Physician's Assistant.

Katarina Reinoso

Katarina Amelia Reinoso, daughter of Pedro and Jeannette Reinoso of the Dallas, Texas, congregation, graduated from Wylie High School as a Distinguished Scholar (4.0 GPA), in the top 10% of her class, with endorsements in multidisciplinary studies, arts and humanities, and public services. Her passion for making a difference in others' lives is reflected in her service in her local congregation and as staff at preteen camps and in her school's clubs: Family, Careers, Community Leaders of America; the National Honor Society; and Society for World Languages.

In her free time, Katarina enjoys making handmade gifts, singing, danc-

ing, creating art, writing, playing frisbee, roller skating and going on walks. On a recent road trip with friends, she discovered a new talent: throwing axes! Katarina hopes that her artwork and other service in her Church and community and the way she lives her life, ultimately encourages, inspires and helps others to draw closer in their understanding, appreciation and commitment to the Lord. Her favorite song is "You're the Inspiration" by Chicago, and her favorite Scripture is Philippians 4:6-7, which has played an integral part in her spiritual development.

Katarina was awarded three scholarships, which will fund her studies at Collin College. One of these was from the Tibbals Family, whose motto is: "God first, family second, education third." To obtain her goal of becoming a bilingual (Spanish/English) therapist, Katarina plans to earn a bachelor's degree in Psychology and Spanish and a master's degree in marriage and family therapy.

Kennedy Scout Richardson

Kennedy Scout Richardson, daughter of Tommy and Kiersten (Spraker) Richardson of Cave Creek, Arizona, is a 2022 graduate of Cactus Shadows High School in Cave Creek, Arizona.

Kennedy attends the Phoenix Northwest congregation with her parents and older brother, Jacob. Kennedy has maintained a 4.4 GPA during her high school career along with many academic achievements along the way. She was a member of the swim/dive team where she participated in both events, as well as a member of the tennis team her sophomore and junior years. Kennedy enjoyed taking art and ceramics since her freshman year and joined the Art Club her senior year.

Kennedy is working as a barista at a local boutique coffee shop, and as a math tutor during her senior year. Kennedy enjoys all outdoor/indoor sports. She has recently taken up golf and plays often with her family. Kennedy enjoys overseas travel with family and going to the beach with friends. She enjoys visiting family in Alabama during her summers and in between summer camps. She enjoys reading and loves F. Scott Fitzgerald. She experi-

ments with new recipes and loves baking and posting her recipes to her Instagram.

Kennedy has been attending United Youth Camps since age 13 and has also had the privilege of working as staff at the pre-teen camp Nacome.

Kennedy will be headed to the University of Arizona this fall on a full academic scholarship. Her studies will focus on medical sciences with plans to continue on to medical school for her M.D.

Kennedy's favorite scripture is Joshua 1:9: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Ryder Riggs

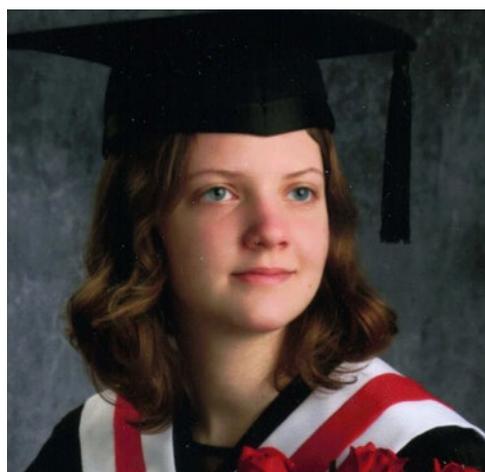
Ryder Riggs, son of Brandon and Laura Riggs of the Ann Arbor, Michigan, congregation graduated from Summerfield High School. He made the Honor roll all four years of high school and played golf on the high school team and some football. Ryder has a second-degree black belt, enjoys Martial Arts, working out, and is an avid reader. He also enjoys playing basketball with his siblings and cousin. He enjoys spending time with his grandparents. Ryder will attend Monroe Community College with the possibility of pursuing a degree in business.

Elaina Robbins

Elaina Robbins, daughter of Nick and Karla Robbins of the Metro East Saint Louis congregation, graduated in the top 10 percent of her class at O'Fallon Township High School, making her an Illinois State Scholar. Ending with a GPA above 4.0, she received the Summa Cum Laude recognition as well as National Honors Society and Rho Kappa Social Studies National Honors recognition.

In her home church area and often times at the Feast, Elaina offers her musical talent in playing the violin.

This summer Elaina will be helping at Preteen Camp Ironwood and enjoying her last year as a camper at Woodland. Her plan for the Fall is to attend South Western Illinois College. She wishes to major in biology and eventually pursue a career in the medical field.



Alissa Schaly

Alissa Schaly

Alissa Schaly, granddaughter of Evelyn and the late Ted Brunski of Bothell, Washington, and daughter of Albert and Bonita Schaly of Bowen Island, British Columbia, Canada, graduated with Honors with Distinction from West Vancouver Senior Secondary, B.C. She also received the West Vancouver Firefighters–Gary Hunter Memorial Scholarship. Alissa plans to study Psychology at Capilano University before pursuing a Nursing Degree at BCIT (British Columbia Institute of Technology).

She lives on Bowen Island, off West Vancouver. During Grades 8–12 she had to catch the school bus at 6:40 a.m. and take the 7:30 a.m. ferry to West Vancouver. Then, she took a city bus to arrive at school by 8:30. She was lucky to be home by 4:30 p.m.



Sophia Schwartzrock

Sophia Schwartzrock

Sophia Schwartzrock is the descendant and homeschooled student of Shawn and Heather (Kerr) Schwartzrock of Northern Illinois (which is incidentally the same place they attend church). She is a Cadet in her local fire department and takes lessons in fencing and swordsmanship. In 2020, her state-winning speech represented Illinois in the National Voice of Democracy Audio Essay competition, sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Her hobbies include playing the violin, reading (especially anything by Lemony Snicket), creative writing, archery, watercolor painting and filming/editing short movies. In addition to playing lacrosse, Sophia enjoys rock climbing, kayaking and participating in teen and preteen church camps. She hopes to obtain her pilot's license before heading to



Kate Stephens

Kate Stephens

Kate Stephens, daughter of Shawn and Susan Stephens from Pass Christian, Mississippi, graduated from Pass Christian High School on May 13, 2022. They attend the New Orleans, Louisiana, and Mobile, Alabama, congregations. Kate will be attending Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College next and plans to work toward a product design and marketing degree. She has attended Camp Cotubic and will be enjoying it again this summer.

Seamus Washburn

Seamus Washburn, son of Bill and Kate Washburn of the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation, graduated with Academic Honors in the top 10 of his class



Seamus Washburn

Southern Adventist University to study film production this fall. where he was the Senior Class Treasurer. During his high school career, Seamus was a member and Student Advisor for the FFA. He was awarded the Outstanding FFA Member Service Award. He also participated in soccer (making Academic All-Conference), Speech and Debate (earning honor cords), and the National Honor Society (acting as the Historian). During each year of high school, Seamus earned the Academic Excellence award.

Seamus loves hiking, wood and metal working, soccer, pep band, and UYC camps. He loves playing his baritone at his local congregation and various Feast sites. He especially enjoys opportunities to blow his shofar on special occasions.

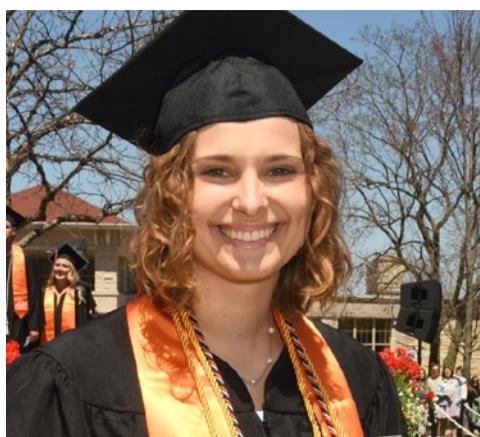
After graduation, Seamus plans to attend Oregon State University for Forestry Engineering. He hopes to work closely with the U.S. Forestry Service as a steward of our natural resources.

University Graduates

Jeremy Barnes

Jeremy Barnes

Jeremy Barnes graduated with Honors from Southwestern Illinois College. He received an associate's degree in applied science, majoring in marketing. He was on the Dean's List and was a member of the honor society Phi Theta Kappa. He attends the Metro East, Illinois, congregation. Jeremy enjoys studying the Bible, Church literature, and also participates in Bible studies that are offered by the Church. His hobbies include cooking ethnic foods and



Elly Conger

taking karate lessons. He earned his blue belt and is currently working on his brown belt. Jeremy is pursuing a career in advertising or sales.

Elly Conger

Elly Conger of the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, congregation graduated with honors with a degree in Nursing from Carroll University in Waukesha, Wisconsin, Summa Cum Laude. She was a member of the Delta Sigma Nu, Carrol University's hon-



Marissa Fike

Marissa Fike

On May 6, Marissa Sail Fike, age 22, graduated Summa Cum Laude with her Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education and a minor in English. During her final year of college she enjoyed teaching 10th grade honors English classes at her local high school. She is now continuing her education at Tennessee Technological University, working towards her Master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. Marissa's end goal is to earn her Licensed Professional Counselor certification and to open up her own private practice.

In her spare time, Marissa loves to write, and she was able to publish her debut Christian fiction novel (Edified) last year. It was a year of blessing for her and her husband, Brian Fike, as they were able to purchase their first home in Cookeville, Tennessee, allowing them the space to welcome a brood of chickens to the family and to cultivate a beautiful garden. It's from this garden that Marissa harvests an abundance of fresh ingredients to hand blend her own herbal teas, which she enjoys sipping on while in-

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GN

The Good News

5 Keys to Good Mental Health

The Bible has much to say about mental health. Here are five principles of mental health to stimulate discussion, reflection, prayer and meditation.

By Tim Pebworth

It's no secret that in today's world, mental health is a major cause for concern. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the percentage of adults in America with anxiety or a depressive disorder increased substantially. Youth mental health worsened as well, with the proportion of those seeking help increasing 9 percent between 2019 and 2020. If you followed the Olympics, you probably saw Simone Biles decide to drop out of all but one of her competitions, citing mental health reasons. Folks everywhere are grappling with how to deal with stress, anxiety and the pressures of life.

Sadly, there's still a stigma around opening up about mental health challenges, with many people feeling too ashamed or hopeless to get help or support. What shame might we feel here in God's Church around sharing that we suffer from things like depression or thoughts of suicide? We may think that as God's people we shouldn't have those problems.

I'm not an expert on this topic, but I'm a long-time student of these discussions, having witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of untreated mental disorders within my family as I grew up and into adulthood. Thankfully, I don't have to pretend to be an expert in this area as the Bible has so much to say.

In this article, I want to share five principles of mental health. And more than anything, as opposed to a listing of clichéd responses to a complex topic, I hope this stimulates discussion, reflection, prayer and meditation.

1. Jesus cares about our mental health

Our physical, mental and emotional health is at the core of Jesus Christ's message. In Luke 4:18, Jesus reads from Isaiah, "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



Our physical, mental and emotional health is at the core of Jesus Christ's message.

proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed . . ."

Christ says He came for a purpose. He came first to preach the gospel to the poor.

Why? Because in this life the poor don't have much. He came preaching another world, a world to come. If you are rich, you likely don't yearn for a new world to come. Your world is okay. But if you are poor, this physical life doesn't offer as much. And in biblical times, a person's chance of rising out of poverty was near zero.

Many in the United States have grown up in an environment where hard work plus time equals success. But it isn't that way with everyone. The coordinator of a social program in the tenderloin district of San Francisco (a neighborhood with a high rate of homelessness and poverty) talked about his experiences at an orientation I attended. He shared that there is a great sense of hopelessness that leads to depression, anxiety and helplessness in those who experience poverty. Jesus Christ came first of all to preach good news to the poor—those without hope; those without resources or help.

Next, it says He came to heal the brokenhearted. These are people who have been so damaged emotionally and physically that their very being has been crushed and shattered. Christ came to heal those whose backgrounds and circumstances have scarred, shattered and irrevocably destroyed their hearts. This

is about physical and emotional abuse. This is about suffering from trauma before we even knew we were suffering. Many people live 18 years with their families growing up and then spend the next 60 years trying to overcome the trauma that occurred in childhood.

Luke 4 then says He came to preach deliverance to the captives. This includes those who were in slavery physically, but also mentally, those who have no escape. He also came to give sight to the blind. Literally, He gave sight to the blind, but He also healed those with many different physical infirmities. And lastly, He came to set at liberty those who are oppressed. He freed those who lived under oppressive masters, or who lived under the tyranny of a world ruled by the great adversary.

I believe this verse shows we must begin with the premise that Jesus Christ came to address our physical, mental and emotional trauma. He cares about our depression and mental anxiety.

If this is true, then why do we still suffer from depression and mental illness?

We find one explanation in 2 Corinthians 12. Paul had a physical ailment that he called a "thorn in the flesh," which God used to develop in him the mind of Christ. Mental ailments can also provide us strength through God as we grow to better understand our own weaknesses.

"Concerning this [thorn in the flesh] I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).

That doesn't mean we can't or shouldn't get help. It just means that God may allow some suffering (rather than instantly healing any infirmity) for the benefit of our longer-term spiritual growth. In other verses, the Bible shows there are things we can do to strengthen our mental health and lessen feelings of depression or anxiety.

2. Reach out and connect with others in God's Church

One way to counter mental health struggles is to reach out to others. We are not alone in this fight—we are part of the Body of Christ. Ecclesiastes 4:10 shows the danger of isolation, "Woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up."

Why do we, as God's people, suffer in silence with depression and mental illness when there are people we can call? Many times, specifically in the Church, we are too afraid to admit we have a problem. We don't

Please see next page

5 Keys to Good Mental Health
Continued from previous page

want to appear weak; we don't want to show our vulnerability.

I would like to tell you that I'm not moody, that I don't get depressed and that I'm perfectly calm all the time. But I'm not. I'm not perfect and neither are you. And it would be great to think and believe that because we come to Church every week and pray and study our Bibles, we won't have mental health problems—but that's *just not reality*.

The fact is, we all suffer from some sort of anxiety, worry, fear or depression. And the sooner we start being able to share our feelings openly, the sooner we have a chance to bounce back from the mood swings that plague us all.

We tend to think about the “iron sharpens iron” analogy in Proverbs 27:17 in terms of a sharp sword sharpening a sharp sword, but sometimes our sword is pretty dull. That's why we have some strange ideas about ourselves and what's best for us, and we need to learn to take advice. We need to learn to listen to others: our parents, ministers and mentors in the

God crafted a calendar of rest to help us recover and gain perspective. We know that God created the Sabbath and three Holy Day seasons (spring, summer and fall) to break the routine of our regular weekly pace.

Church. Especially in the teenage years, it's easy to lack perspective, and sometimes this can lead to disastrous consequences, like finding yourself in an abusive relationship or making life decisions that negatively affect your future employment or finances.

3. Take the time to rest and gain perspective

Another way to boost your mental health is to make sure you have time for rest. God crafted a calendar of rest to help us recover and gain perspective. We know that God created the Sabbath and three Holy Day seasons (spring, summer and fall) to break the routine of our regular weekly pace.

Besides the Sabbath and the Holy Days, we should take the time to get away. Find some way to rest, even if it's just for a little while. In Mark 6:31, Christ said to His disciples, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” We should follow this example.

This resting should also include exercise that helps get ourselves out of our heads and connects us with our physical body. Regular exercise and rest are well documented to regulate moods and behavior.

4. Go beyond self-control and trust in God's promises

Self-control is one of the fruits of God's Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and God expects us to exercise self-control over our mind. Self-control is important in managing negative self-talk, the brain chatter and the defeatist emotions that sweep over us. So, self-control is important, but our own willpower is often not enough when it comes to mental health. For this we need to go beyond self-control and trust in

God's promises.

We should be encouraged to know that God has promised to care for us. Look at Deuteronomy 6:8-9 and see that God commanded Israel to bind the law as frontlets between their eyes. We should be printing key verses and placing them in our homes to read and be reminded. We also know that we should write the law in our hearts. We should be memorizing key verses that will help us when we need to control our thoughts.

Consider His promises in these verses:

“When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:17-19, English Standard Version).

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

“Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer and the peace of God, which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7, J.B. Phillips New Testament).

In the next verses (8-9) Paul makes it clear that we must meditate and focus on the positive, the noble, the true. This is our part.

5. There is no shame in seeking professional help

How we view mental illness in ourselves and our brethren is important. We need to consider carefully our mental model about mental illness.

A fairly well-known Christian blogger, Frank Viola, shared three mainstream Christian views about mental disorders (<https://www.christianpost.com/news/3-christian-responses-to-mental-illness-which-one-is-most-biblical.html>):

“Throughout my years of being involved in various and sundry Christian movements and denominations, it seems that Christians understand mental disorders in one of three chief ways:

1. “Mental illness is demonic in origin. So, the antidote is to cast out the demons that are causing it.
2. “Mental illness is psychobabble. There's no such thing as a ‘mental disorder.’ All so-called mental illnesses are just sinful behaviors. So, the antidote is for the person to repent and get right with God.
3. “Mental illness is a physiological disorder. The brain is a physical organ just like the heart, the thyroid, the joints, etc. Thus, if someone has panic attacks or bipolar disorder or schizophrenia or chronic depression or ADHD, they have a chemical imbalance in the brain, not dissimilar to a hyperthyroidism or high blood pressure or arthritis.

“I cut my teeth [or began my career] on a movement that promoted #1. I've met many people who believed #2. But I believe #3 is often the case.

“Yet it's not so simple.”

Frank Viola's comments are very much on point. We understand that there is a spirit realm which exists and that it is possible for sin to affect us mentally and emotionally as well as spiritually. But churches can fall into the trap of attributing all mental illness to spiritual forces or sin, ignoring good research on mental disorders or throwing up their hands and saying it's unknowable.

Be proactive if you are suffering and seek help. If you see someone suffering, don't ignore it; go and

get help for them. God's hand is not slack to save. He doesn't want anyone to suffer unnecessarily.

There are no easy answers, but God is merciful. There are biblical principles that we can hang onto; there are actions we can take; we can reach out for help.

Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” When I become anxious or worried, I remember this verse and that Christ said to not worry or be anxious, but to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). We can take heart that our God is the ultimate Comforter, and Christ came to heal the brokenhearted. **GN**

Tim Pebworth is the senior pastor responsible for the French language work for United Church of God.

Habakkuk's Dilemma

After years of preaching a strong message of repentance, the prophet Habakkuk became distressed since most people refused to heed His God-given words. Learn what God told him and discover how it applies to the Church and its people today.

By John LaBissoniere

Jesus Christ gave His disciples a critical mission to perform. He declared that, “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). Furthermore, He called on them 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).

Jesus' early disciples and others who followed them carried out those duties diligently. And here in the 21st century His Church steadily implements that identical mission. But what has happened over recent decades as these vital responsibilities have been executed? Hasn't sinfulness and irreverence toward God continued on relentlessly, and actually grown worse? Doesn't it seem as if most people have no interest in learning the truth of God, and therefore His teachings and warnings through His Church go unheeded?

If you have ever thought this way you're not alone. About 2,600 years ago, God's prophet Habakkuk had comparable thoughts and expressed them in a prayer to His Creator by means of a question. Although God answered his query, Habakkuk didn't really like what he heard and it left him perplexed. So later, he boldly asked God another question and in due course, he be-



Adam Birkett/Unsplash

Doesn't it seem as if most people have no interest in learning the truth of God, and therefore His teachings and warnings through His Church go unheeded? If you have ever thought this way you're not alone.

gan to understand.

Habakkuk prophesied in Judah from 640 to 609 B.C. during the reign of King Josiah. As the nation experienced a period of relative material prosperity, idolatry flourished and God's way of life was rejected. Although Josiah instituted various spiritual reforms, crime and violence still prevailed. Moreover, the wicked prospered, widows and orphans were forsaken and lawlessness was pervasive. As a result, God raised up Habakkuk and other prophets to call the people's attention to these escalating sins. He warned the country's leaders and citizens that God simply wouldn't tolerate such behavior and unless change occurred, He would have to punish the nation.

Habakkuk's urgent prayer to God

What was the result of Habakkuk's many years of conscientious preaching and warning? Well sadly, little if anything since most people refused to heed his God-given words. After experiencing this condition Habakkuk became disheartened and sought to know why God didn't take immediate action to deal with Judah's sins. In a prayer he said, "O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You 'Violence!' And you will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me. There is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds" (Habakkuk 1:2-4). So, everything Habakkuk witnessed, with nothing happening to stop it, built up distress within him. Can we perhaps identify with Habakkuk's painful dilemma as we see rapidly increasing violence, perversion and lawlessness in our society (Ezekiel 9:4)?

In response to Habakkuk's prayer, God explained that He was fully aware of Judah's iniquities and would chasten the nation if its people didn't repent. He said that unless this occurred, the country would be invaded, conquered and its people removed from the land

by an exceedingly cruel and violent nation—the Chaldeans—also known as the Babylonians (Habakkuk 1:6-9). After hearing this, Habakkuk was utterly stunned! Just the thought of his people being vanquished by such a despotic, depraved nation completely horrified him! With this knowledge, Habakkuk's dilemma grew even greater! While at first, he wondered if God would even punish Judah at all, now he became distressed that his nation might be entirely wiped out (Habakkuk 1:12)! Although deeply troubled, this faithful prophet waited patiently for God to provide him with more information (Habakkuk 2:1). Soon God did just that and He asked Habakkuk to write down what he heard so that others could also understand (verse 2).

The prophecy is also for a future time

God then told Habakkuk that He certainly knew that the Chaldeans were arrogant, idolatrous and ruthless (verses 8-14). But He further revealed that in due time, they would be sorely punished and their kingdom entirely demolished (verses 16-17). This happened in 539 B.C. when the Chaldeans' capital city of Babylon was overthrown by forces of the Medo-Persian Empire. But there is more to the story since Bible prophecies are often dual in nature. God then told Habakkuk, that, "This vision is *for a future time*. It describes *the end*, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will *surely* take place. It will not be delayed" (Habakkuk 2:3, New Living Translation, emphasis mine throughout).

This statement was a vital key to solving Habakkuk's dilemma. God showed him that what he was doing in warning Judah was *not for his time alone*. As other biblical prophecies explain, it was *also* for a future period—the "time of the end" (Daniel 12:4)—meaning the period leading up to and including the 3½ years of horrendous world trouble prior to Jesus Christ's second coming. But of course, Habakkuk didn't understand this *at first*. It was only *after* God helped him see *beyond* the limited focus of his own day and time.

And yet, can we perhaps understand how Habakkuk felt? He simply wanted his world to be made right and his people brought to repentance *then and there!* Honestly, isn't that how *we* feel at times? Don't *we* sometimes wish that our society would not have to undergo the violence and suffering that Bible prophecy reveals are coming? Like Habakkuk, there is no way we would ever *really* want our nations to be overrun and defeated—with cities, towns and rural areas in flames—with starving, suffering and dying people everywhere. Even though God may indeed protect the brethren of His Church from this horrible disaster, it will conceivably affect our own family members, relatives, friends and neighbors.

But sadly, unless repentance occurs, those dreadful punishments will continue speeding toward our nations. As prophecy reveals, near the end of the age God will permit human leaders, influenced by Satan the devil, to form the most tyrannical and cruel empire to ever rule on earth (2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 13:1-4). Bible prophecy discloses that shortly before Christ's second coming, this powerful Babylonian-type world governing system will arise in Europe (Revelation 18:3). Described as the "Beast" (Daniel 7:6-7), this great superpower will inflict terrible punishment upon the nations of modern-day Israel—meaning the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and others—due to their flagrant and continual disobedience of God's commandments (Leviticus 26:18, 24, 28). This devastating period is referred to in scripture as "Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:5-8). The prophecies of Judah's fall were a *forerunner* of what is to come—which Christ said will be the worst time in all of human history (Matthew 24:21)! And later, like its ancient Chaldean predecessor, this end-time bestial global power will itself be destroyed (Revelation 18:9-11).

What should we do?

So, God's words to Habakkuk about "the end" apply to the time *just ahead of us!* Considering this, what should we do? Besides staying personally close to God, we need to strongly support the Church's media work of preaching the gospel to all nations. Plus, we can pray that God would open *additional* media doors so that many more people can be reached with His message of witness, warning and repentance (Matthew 24:14; Isaiah 58:1). Furthermore, we can pray, as did Habakkuk, "O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2). And just as importantly, we can personally emulate Jesus Christ as living examples of the gospel message by our godly behavior—so others may also give glory to God (Matthew 5:14-16).

Finally, through God's great help, Habakkuk's dilemma was resolved. Afterward he continued preaching repentance, living justly by faith and giving honor to his Eternal Creator (Habakkuk 2:4; 3:19). He did this while knowing that God was in complete control and would handle everything in His good time. Therefore, let's follow Habakkuk's trusting example by growing spiritually strong, preparing diligently for Jesus Christ's return and supporting God's great work throughout the world! **GN**

John Labissoniere is an elder in the Cincinnati East congregation and senior writer for Beyond Today.

Christianity: A Cult for Jesus? Part 2

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

When we hear the word “cult,” we often think of a group of people who follow a deranged and charismatic figure, who abuses them under the guise of divine revelation. Their followers are often convinced of strange and nonsensical ideas, and act in ways that outsiders of the cult—sometimes even belonging to the same “faith”—are left bewildered and deeply concerned about.

In the time that Jesus was alive, the respected religious leaders of the Jews challenged the claims that Jesus made about His identity and feared what would happen if His following kept growing. If a man was fanatical and blasphemous enough to claim to actually *be* and act as God, then they concluded He must have been led by demons, and needed to be stopped immediately (Matthew 12:22-28). One might even suggest that they viewed Him as a cult leader, if we were to put a modern lens on top of their worldview.

So, was Jesus a neurotic individual who was so disillusioned about His identity that He deceived others into believing His own unorthodox beliefs about *being* God? How do we know that His claims aren't comparable to what we might expect from a cult? In part one, we looked into how Jesus substantiated His claims to be God in the flesh through His historically corroborated resurrection from the dead. In part two, let's look into the character and works of Jesus and see if His life fits the mold of our modern understanding of cult leadership.

A madman or something worse

First, we have to lay the cards on the table. There is no doubt that Jesus taught and believed that He was the Son of God, incarnate. Jesus overtly claimed to be divine, and taught those who followed Him to believe in His identity in order to receive forgiveness and eternal life (John 3:16). Claims such as these were a criminal offense according to the Hebrew faith, and were punishable by death. So, either He was a deranged leader of His religious faith, or He truly *was* who He claimed to be. There really was no in between.

As C.S. Lewis expressed so well in his book, *Mere Christianity*, “[Let us not dare to say,] ‘I'm ready to ac-

cept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but [not] accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher . . . Either this man was, and is the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse . . . let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He didn't intend to” (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 52, 40, 41).

The persona of a cult leader

While a cult leader often appears to be harmless, time reveals what lies under the surface of the deceitful individual. A cult leader typically displays mental instability and narcissism; and their obsession for worship and blind obedience often isolates their followers from society, and conceals the types of abuses being perpetrated on them from the outside world. However, when we look at Jesus, nothing about His temperament, character or actions seemed to fit this typical persona of a cult leader.

For example, instead of controlling His self-image, Jesus allowed the Pharisees (a sect of the Jews) to openly and publicly criticize Him and did not retaliate in return for their insults. To those who loved Him and worshipped at His feet, He treated them without a shred of egotism or partiality, which is not the nature of cult leadership.

Instead of estranging and alienating His followers from the world, He also commanded them to love and serve all of humanity. He set the example Himself and cared for everyone—including the “inferior” individuals in His society and those who committed crimes against Him personally. Even up to His death, when His enemies accused Him of being a fraudulent blasphemer, He paid the ultimate price for who He was claiming to be and offered to forgive those who killed Him wrongfully. By contrast, someone who is leading a cult might have taken their followers away and killed them alongside their own selves, for fear of the truth being exposed.

The expression of His character was unlike anything humanity has ever seen. “His unworldliness was free from indifference and unsociability, His dignity from pride and presumption . . . His self-denial from moroseness, His temperance from austerity . . . absorbing devotion to God with untiring interest in the welfare of men.” (Schaff, PC, 63; as quoted in *Evidence for Christianity*, p. 422). Even when tried under Roman law, He couldn't be charged for anything wrong He had ever done. He was condemned by the Jews only for whom He claimed to be. He was perfect—and that was a trait not even the greatest con man would have achieved.

Miracles, prophecies, and existence

Aside from His perfection being a self-evident expression of His divinity, let's look at other ways in which Jesus demonstrated His identity: through His fulfillment of prophecies and performance of miracles. There are at least 300 prophecies that were written about whom the “Messiah” would be, centuries and millennia before Jesus entered the world scene. Somehow, Jesus fulfilled them all.

These were prophecies which no person could pre-arrange in order to manipulate a new cult following. For example, “If you calculate[d] the improbability of any one person fulfilling, sheerly by chance, all of the Old testament Messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled, it would be astronomical as winning the lottery

every day for a century” (Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans*, p. 264).

No one could “have the power to arrange the time, place, events, and circumstances [which] surrounded their birth or events after [their] death” as Jesus did (Louise Lapides, *The Case for Christ*, p. 248). Yet, we

Though there are many avenues to investigate the divinity of Jesus, perhaps His greatest miracle—being perfect—says it all.

see countless scriptures laying out every detail of these events which took place in Jesus' life, which are corroborated by biblical and historical accounts alike. “Even though the Jewish Talmud refers to Jesus in derogatory ways, it never once makes the claim that the fulfillment of prophecies was falsified. Not one time” (Louise Lapides, *The Case for Christ*, p. 248).

When Jesus claimed to be God, He also backed up those claims with powerful healings and command over nature itself. Events such as curing lifelong blindness or leprosy, calming the sea, turning water into wine and raising people from the dead cannot be so easily explained away from a naturalistic worldview. Although the Western world might reject any notion of a miraculous event being credible, we can't fairly weigh the evidence Jesus presented if we are only willing to examine it with the bias of an anti-supernaturalistic mind.

“If miracles,’ writes Bernard Ramm, ‘are capable of sensory perception, they can be matters of testimony. If they are adequately testified to, then the recorded testimony has the same validity for evidence as the experiences of beholding the events’” (Ramm, PCE, p. 140 as quoted in *Evidence for Christianity*, p. 419). And, not even His greatest critics could deny the supernatural events they had seen. Instead, they concluded that His power had come from demons, but in all actuality, it'd be more likely that His power, abilities, and love came from being God.

Who do you say that I am?

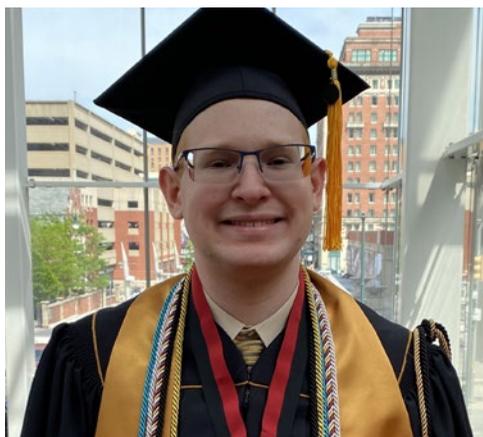
Though there are many avenues to investigate the divinity of Jesus, perhaps His greatest miracle—being perfect—says it all. Endless books could be written on the nature and teachings of Jesus, and *have* been written for the past two millennia. And perhaps that's the point. His divine nature was and is self-evident to anyone who comes to know Him, unlike a cult leader.

By the same token, Jesus backed up His divinity not only with His resurrection from the dead, but also with His fulfillment of prophecy, and by the miraculous events He performed. These events were done publicly, which grants Him exceedingly more credibility than a cult leader, because this left himself “open to scrutiny and investigation by anyone, including skeptics” (*Evidence for Christianity*, p. 419). And we know that if one couldn't accept that He was God, then they could only explain away His acts by some demonic spiritual power.

So, when we consider Jesus' life under the lens of cult leadership, let's consider the evidence that Jesus provided to back up His divinity, and ask the question Jesus posed to His own disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15).

Next time, we will look at the history and cultivation of Christianity to see whether faith in Jesus was made by authentic design or cultish forgery. **GN**

Amanda Miller is a member in Sugar Creek, Ohio



Bryan McClain



Lili Parman



Patricia Remo



Rachel Richards



Katrina Santos



Jesse Scrivner

Marissa Fike bio continued from page 8

dulging in a good book. Her passion for making tea and other all-natural items such as soaps, bath salts and beauty oils have come together into the culmination of her own wellness business, with which she is grateful for the chance to serve others. Ultimately, she feels that God has given her these assets to steward for His glory, a reason she delights in the opportunity to open up their home to small groups where young women can find community, share cups of tea, and openly discuss life and the Bible in a relevant and applicable way.

Bryan McClain

Bryan Andrew McClain graduated from Indiana University—Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) in December 2021 with a dual Bachelor of Science in computer science and applied mathematics. Bryan was a member of the IUPUI Honors College, Computer Science Club, and belonged to two honors societies: Alpha Lambda Delta and Phi Eta Sigma. He was also a recipient of the School of Science Chancellor's Scholar Award, Outstanding Senior Applied Math Major Award, Computer Science Major Promising Freshman Award, and was consistently on the Dean's Scholar list for maintaining a 4.0 GPA.

Throughout his entire collegiate career, Bryan worked as a part-time software developer at several tech companies, including Time Compression Strategies, Mimir, and OneCause. He also participated in two 10-week full-time summer internships through the Xtern program. In addition to his work experience, Bryan did a variety of

interesting programming projects, such as designing his own 3D game engine, building a pipelined multiprocessor simulator, and implementing a cryptographically secure electronic voting protocol (for his senior capstone project).

Bryan is currently in graduate school at IUPUI pursuing a master's degree in computer science. After his planned graduation in December 2022, he hopes to go into industry as a full-time software developer. Bryan is a member of the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation where he serves on sound crew.

Lili Parman

Lili Parman graduated summa cum laude from Northwest University with a bachelor's degree in psychology. She received an award for highest academic honors, maintained her 4.0 grade point average, and received the 2022 Psychology Award for the highest GPA in her major. Lili was a teacher's assistant, life group leader, took honors classes and was a member of a research group attempting to solve campus issues. During her school career, Lili also enjoyed working part-time as a hostess at Poquitos Bothell. This summer, Lili will continue working, attend UCG summer camp and volunteer at a crisis line.

Lili enjoys spending time with close family and friends, traveling to warm locations and participating in sport and outdoor activities. Currently, her favorite sports are basketball, skiing and thrifting.

The 2022-2023 school year will be spent accumulating more volunteer and work hours in the fields of psychology and mental health. After a year of practical and relevant work experience, Lili

will return for her Master's in Counseling, with the goal of becoming a mental health counselor. Lili is on track to graduate at age 22 with her master's degree, and will then apply for Washington state licensure.

Patricia Remo

Patricia Joyce Remo, daughter of Adolfo (Bong) and Grace Remo of the Manila, Philippines, congregation, graduated from high school as a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) student from the Manila Adventist College, with high honors. She was a student council officer and served as class secretary. She received awards for outstanding performances in various disciplines, including biblical studies, communication and media arts. She also received recognition for bringing honor to her school by winning in the first international extemporaneous speech competition conducted by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Her interests include outdoor activities such as hiking and art such as lettering and painting landscapes. Her other interests include reading and weightlifting. She plays the piano for offertory and special music in church services. She works part-time as an English as a Second Language tutor teaching Japanese students and as an aide at her sister's dental clinic.

Patricia plans to attend the upcoming United Youth Camp in Mindanao, Philippines, as an assistant counselor. She plans to apply for ABC before pursuing a degree in dentistry.

Her favorite Scripture is 1 Corinthians 16:14: "Let everything that you do be done in love."

Rachel Richards

On June 12, Rachel Richards from the Central Oregon congregation graduated Summa Cum Laude from Oregon State University—Cascades campus with a first-generation bachelor's degree in Energy Systems Engineering (a combination of mechanical, electrical and industrial engineering), and a minor in Business and Entrepreneurship. Rachel was among only five students from her campus graduating with an honor's degree.

Among her accomplishments, Rachel was a member of the Tau Beta Pi Engi-

neering Honor Society, TRIO, and she was chosen as one of six seniors (out of 7,500+) to be awarded the OSU Outstanding Student Award.

The college selected Rachel among a few students to feature in their social media and acknowledge during commencement. These stories of graduating seniors spotlighted students who have excelled or overcome odds or followed their academic passion into research of professional, volunteer or community work. Rachel's thesis was focused on exploring ways to design and manufacture an all-terrain wheelchair that costs less than the current co-pay for a standard wheelchair.

During Rachel's college career, she worked as the Computer Lab Coordinator's assistant helping students with technology, running lab meetings and training employees. She interned at Meli-Wraps, a growing small eco-friendly business where she learned business principals and provided manufacturing consultation. She also worked as an undergraduate student researcher in the Water and Energy Technology Lab working on a federally funded desalination project.

The next chapter will include the FE exam, attending her sister's wedding, and some much needed rest before diving into her master's degree.

Katrina Faye Nicole B. Santos

Katrina Faye Nicole B. Santos of the Manila, Philippines, congregation graduated from iAcademy with a Bachelor of Arts in Multimedia Arts and Design. She was the recipient of the Outstanding Intern Award and was included on the First Honors Dean's List. In her spare time, Katrina loves to bake, embroider and paint!

Jesse Scrivner

Jesse Jane Scrivner attends the London, Kentucky, congregation. She graduated from Asbury University in May, and she earned a bachelor's degree in middle/high school English education. She loves singing, classical guitar and her cats. She will be attending the University of Arizona on a full ride scholarship to earn her master's degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in August. As a part of her scholarship, she will be teaching Freshman Composition to undergraduate students. She is excited to meet new brethren in Arizona!

Portland Women's Enrichment Weekend Convenes With Theme "Be Anxious For Nothing"



Rebecca Loucks

A small group performance for special music at the Portland Women's Enrichment Weekend

PORTLAND, OREGON—The Portland congregation hosted their annual Women's Enrichment Weekend over the weekend of March 24-27. This year, the theme was "Be Anxious for Nothing" based on Philippians 4:6-7. The purpose of the event is to encourage and strengthen the women of God's Church, both younger and older alike, to help one another grow to greater spiritual maturity and to fulfill our unique role as women of God.

More than 90 ladies attended from the Oregon and Washington church areas, as well as a few from neighboring states. In addition to the ladies onsite, the weekend was also attended via Zoom by 26 women in Reno and Sacramento who gathered together in unity.

The weekend was hosted at Canby Grove Christian Center where the ladies were surrounded by nature, with beautiful mature trees gracing the property and a river that flowed nearby. Guests arrived on Friday afternoon and the weekend began with dinner, followed by a welcome "Fast Friends" mixer activity to get to know one another quickly.

Sabbath services included beautiful special music and Mario Seigle as guest speaker. The message given was on how to deal with stress and anxiety

in our lives. Very fitting after coming out of two years of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges that brought on. His wife, Caty Seigle, was guest presenter in the afternoon. She shared her personal experience of dealing with anxiety, and how to look to God in every situation that comes our way. Four panel presenters contributed to the weekend with their personal stories of turbulent times and how they learned to lean on God when troubles come.

After sundown the popular and exciting not-so-silent auction began. This year the money raised from the auction went to Women's Empowerment Center in India to help them buy much needed sewing machines. The initial goal was to raise at least \$2,000 but, with the generosity of our ladies and a loaves and fishes act of God, the silent auction brought in \$2,634, plus \$1,200 from additional sales of quilting fabric from last year's event, totaling \$3,834!

On Sunday, the ladies from the Spokane area led us through a relaxing activity that called for us to *cast our cares upon God*. Sandy Cafourek-Miller presented a hilarious, yet touching, closing presentation and encouraged us all to lean on God in our trials.

Katlyn Slocum

Phoenix Congregation Hosts Dinner, Dancing and Hiking Weekend



Above: Hikers pose during the Phoenix Spring Holy Day weekend. Right: UCG's most beloved puppet Jelly made an appearance.



PHOENIX, ARIZONA—The Phoenix, Arizona, church family kicked off the 2022 Holy Days with a Feast to remember. The 276 people gathered to observe the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread at the Phoenix Sheraton Crescent Hotel came from around the United States, and made the festivities all the more joyous.

After sunset, 184 participants enjoyed dinner, dancing and fellowship. Brethren of all ages got a chance to socialize and boogie, and a special visit from UCG pal Jelly made a memorable night for everyone.

On Sunday morning, 36 adventurers hiked through the nature trails of Piestewa Peak. The blooming desert landscape and

rolling rockscape in the Phoenix Mountain Preserve created a beautiful scenic environment. The mountains made for a memorable time, especially for those from out of town. We are grateful for all who embraced the opportunity to fellowship and consider God's great plan during the Feast days!

Zoey Gabbard & Jordan Vargas

Portsmouth & Prestonsburg Retreat to Strengthen Bonds of Fellowship



GREENBO LAKE, KENTUCKY—During the weekend of May 20-22, 65 brethren from the Portsmouth, Ohio, and Prestonsburg, Kentucky, congregations had the opportunity to gather for their annual spring retreat. We met at the beautiful Greenbo Lake State Resort Park in Kentucky and focused on how to "Get Out of the Boat!" with attention on Matthew 14:22-33. Activities started with an interactive Bible study Friday evening in which the participants took the acronym BOATS and came up with a multitude of words and scriptures related to

the topic of faith.

Saturday morning, we gathered for a seminar and roundtable discussion on the focus scriptures. This was followed by an escape room activity in which teams were competing for a position as a disciple! (The winning team with 1 minute, 52 seconds to spare was composed of Lisa McKinney, Shyanne Call, Reggie Warren and Seth McKinney). Sabbath school was held prior to Sabbath services, both of which were about the various aspects of faith. After services, all of the brethren met for a delicious turkey dinner prepared by

the resort.

During the Sabbath evening, people joined together for three service projects: making sock cupcakes for a local women's senior citizen facility, painting "Kindness Rocks" to be distributed around our communities and cutting out denim shoe pieces for people in Uganda. This was followed by a movie and fresh cookies.

The next morning, people packed up and prepared to go home. We're already looking forward to next year!

Zoey Gabbard & Jordan Vargas

Columbia, Maryland, Yard Sale Raises More Than \$1,300 for Good Works



COLUMBIA, MARYLAND—At a member's home on Sunday, May 22, the Columbia congregation executed on a plan first proposed at a Men's Leadership Club meeting in January. At that meeting, we excitedly debated about possible uses for the proceeds, before ultimately deciding on a conclusion at our meeting on April 2, when God made the path clear for us. We had just viewed the Good Works program video about Hurricane Dorian relief during the sermonette time that Sabbath before the meeting. We were moved by what we had seen, and the Men's Club decided that Good Works would be the recipient of whatever we would raise at the yard sale.

The home hosting the yard sale has a high visibility front to a busy intersection, which made the location ideal: cars stopping at the light couldn't help but peek over at our spread. We had only a few short intervals of rest with no shoppers over the entire five hours! As we told shoppers about the Good Works program and what the money would be used for, many generously donated above the agreed cost of the items they were purchasing.

With this being our first yard

sale of this kind, we felt much uncertainty about how it would go. We did not know if we would have enough volunteers onsite or enough merchandise to make it worthwhile. As the day approached, with the yard sale scheduled for the morning until 1 o'clock, the weather forecast showed thunderstorms starting right at 1 p.m.

David Bageant, who proposed and hosted the yard sale, summarized how God answered his prayers: "It could not have been better. I asked for no rain until 3 p.m.—God gave us until 6! I asked for \$1,000, God gave us over \$300 more! I asked to have a few extra volunteers . . . and God blessed us with a great crew. I had so much fun today! Thank you to our Father and may He bless you all for your love to others."

The yard sale allowed our congregation an important opportunity to work together, including the many brethren who searched their homes and generously brought out what they could contribute in the days and weeks beforehand. For those volunteering onsite, it was a special learning and bonding experience as we busily and joyfully worked together under the hot sun, first

scrambling to get the items from the garage to the curb by the minivan-full as eager customers arrived, then arranging/organizing the items (as well as ourselves!). We all took frantic shifts greeting people to tell them about Good Works, conferring about pricing, and doing whatever was needed. Before we knew it, hot dogs and hamburgers were on the grill for lunch!

Since the rain held out and there was a steady flow of customers, we pressed on until 3 p.m. before taking down. We were already excitedly talking about "next time" as we transferred two remaining minivan loads of donated items down to the basement. It was a rewarding day of hard work!

After sending in our donation, Lena VanAusdler, program coordinator for Good Works, wrote back, "What a generous donation. I'm continuously blown away by the generosity of God's people and the care that God has shown in providing for His people."

The full amount raised was \$1,365.55. May God bless this contribution we've made to provide relief for His saints in their need!

Steven Britt

International News

61 Gather For Young Adult Camp In Zambia



COPPERBELT, ZAMBIA—For the first time, Zambia held a Young Adults Camp with the theme "Dare to Win." Youths and young couples from 18 to 35 years had an opportunity to learn both spiritual and physical lessons to help them in their day-to-day activities. These young people, from all parts of Zambia,

traveled to the Copperbelt, with Isoka covering about 850km, Chipata 843km and Zambezi 664km. Though these were long distances, they all made it to the camp.

The six days were characterized with joyous and peaceful moments as reunions and new friendships were created



for those who met for the first time. Bible studies in the evening and other activities made the six days appear to be short, but above all the eagerness and participation in all lessons made the camp so enjoyable and this really shows how willing the young adults are to know more about the truth of God and

learning the doctrines of the Church of God. A lot of topics were covered.

Pastor Derrick Pringle gave talks on sermonette and speech training, integrity and character, and entitlement and gratitude. He explained that success is how high you bounce when you hit the bottom and to seek the Lord

while He may be found; also that those who trust in God and sow a seed will reap a harvest.

We had two professionals join us one day. James Mwansa gave an introduction to first aid and fighting gender-based violence. Blessings Mwansa spoke on sexual reproductive health, which included five topics. Jonathan Litaba discussed marriage from the Old Testament, marriage in the New Testament, divorce and remarrying. His other subject was the Mark of the Beast according to Revelation. Subjects by Rodrick Epomba included knowing someone before marriage, the Sabbath, the authority of the Bible and one titled "Character is Everything."

We are grateful to our Creator for giving us such a wonderful and safe environment for our program to be a success and look forward to having more of such programs.

Cherry Pringle & Rodrick Epomba



Duane & Pat Straub
50th Anniversary

May 7, 2022

Anniversaries

Duane & Pat Straub

The Fargo, North Dakota, congregation had the great pleasure to recognize the 50th wedding anniversary of Duane and Pat Straub on the Sabbath, May 7. That happened to be the very day of their anniversary, which made it extra special. Duane and Pat are long-time members of the Church and they currently attend in Fargo. They were married on Sunday, May 7, 1972, in Fargo at the YMCA Community Room. The reception was also held there. The ceremony was performed by Wayne Luginbill, the pastor of the Worldwide Church of God at the time.

Duane and Pat have three children, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. He commented: "Fifty years sounds like a long time, and it is, but it seems like just a short time ago." All of the congregation celebrated with the Straubs enjoying cake and coffee.

Obituaries

Judith Anne Bittner

Judith Anne Bittner, 78, of the Murfreesboro, Tennessee, congregation, died April 13, 2022, at her home in Murfreesboro after a two-year battle with cancer.



Judith Anne Bittner

Feb. 27, 1944–April 13, 2022

She was born on Feb. 27, 1944, in Camden, New Jersey, to her late parents, James William Edgar and Helen MacGregor (Morrison) Edgar, eight months after her husband Bob was born in the same hospital!

Judy attended Haddonfield Memorial High School, in Haddonfield, New Jersey, graduating in 1962. She and Bob married June 12, 1965. In November 1971 they were baptized together! They kept their first Feast together at Mount Pocono seven years after they were married.

About 1986 she was ordained a deaconess in recognition of her selfless serving attitude of being involved in church activities, including a stint as the children's choir director. She was an awesome sacrificing mother, often driving her children on Sundays to Y.O.U. events requiring a five-hour round trip!

A wonderful wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, she doted on her family and spent a lifetime putting the needs of others above her own, including a 10-year period working at Haddonfield Home, an assisted living facility, which she thoroughly enjoyed. She had a wildly green thumb which she put to use as a volunteer tending the greenhouse at the home before becoming a paid employee.

She is survived by her husband, Bob; three children, Jennifer, Stacey and Andrew; four

grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; her sister, Linda Edgar; many extended family members and countless friends and lives she has touched throughout her life.

Among many other wonderful characteristics, Judy was intelligent, modest, loving and sacrificing. Her love for her family was unconditional. She was a faithful servant of her Savior. She was not afraid to die, faithfully confident she would be resurrected to eternal life helping Him in God's Kingdom!

During one of Judy's hospital stays, a nurse heard of her history of dealing with this disease, trusting God all the while, not being afraid to die and told her, "You're amazing!" My wife said, in her characteristically humble way, "If there's anything amazing in me, it's because God put it there."

Comments from some who knew her well and loved her much:

Brenda Coceano: "Knowing Judy was both an honor and a privilege. Judy was a model of love, compassion and great generosity. Her mission on Earth was one that made a great difference in the lives of many. She sincerely touched everyone she encountered. She was the type of person who would genuinely listen. She always had an ear that would hear without judging or condemning."

Dianne Seab: "Judy Bittner was a true friend and offered her friendship and sincere kindness to all. She was a wonderful example of a lady following the biblical principles of a virtuous woman."

Sue Niederhuber: "Judy was always very caring and loving, always ready to listen and help



Larry Cortelyou

July 29, 1946–March 21, 2022

in any way, a great source of advice as she knew much about many things."

Terry Cole: "It seems impossible to have a thought of Judy Bittner that is anything but positive. Beautiful both inside and out, she had a heart of loving service. So soft-hearted and caring, she could also be as tough as nails if the situation required. Intelligent, well-read, and knowledgeable about so many things, Judy nevertheless exhibited a calm humility that engendered respect from all who knew her. She could be counted on for a considered opinion when asked, tempered with love and concern, but always based on the unvarnished truth. Judy was valued by those who preached in her church area, because she was a barometer in the congregation. She listened intently and reflected the impact of the message back to the speaker in her body language and facial expressions, which so often included a smile. She epitomized the concepts expressed in Proverbs 31, truly a virtuous woman. Judy was, without question, trustworthy, hardworking, caring of others, strong, generous, well-prepared, dignified, wise, kind, industrious and God fearing. The world is surely a poorer place for the loss of Judy Bittner. She will be sorely missed in this life, but at Christ's return will no doubt pick up right where she left off, helping those who will live through the Millennium and beyond. Sleep well, sweet lady—your caring, serving heart will be needed again soon."

Larry Cortelyou

Larry Cortelyou of LaHarpe, Illinois, died peacefully in his sleep on Monday, March



Shawn Cortelyou

Feb. 1, 1972–Feb. 16, 2022

21, 2022, after a few months of health issues, at the age of 75.

He was born in LaHarpe in 1946, the youngest of three sons, to Doren and Florence Cortelyou. In school, Larry was active in 4-H, FFA, football, basketball and baseball. After high school, he earned an associate's degree in mechanical engineering.

Larry was called to God's Church through his brother, Robert, and was baptized in 1967. He was very active in the Church, serving as a local elder for many years.

Larry married Terri Pirog, from Chicago, on Oct. 4, 1970. They lived in Pekin, Illinois, where he ran his own window-washing business. Their only child, Shawn, was born in 1972. In 1974, Larry moved back to LaHarpe to work on the family farm with his dad.

Larry traveled all over the world and never met a stranger! He was instrumental in the LaHarpe Summer Ball Program for over 35 years. Even last summer, he was at the park, preparing the baseball diamonds for games. Larry started a school supply cooperative in the early 1990s. When his son moved to LaHarpe in 1995, they worked together farming and in the co-op.

Larry never had idle time. If he finished one task, he started something else right away. He loved fishing, golfing, softball and working on projects with his grandchildren. Some of his favorite projects were his house, a treehouse built with the grandchildren, the front porch he designed and built with his son, and the dock and bridge on his pond.

Larry is preceded in death by his parents, brothers, Roger and Robert Cortelyou, and son,

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.



Michael Allen Rose

Aug. 14, 1953–May 29, 2022



Lee Stolley

May 3, 1935–Dec. 14, 2021



Fannie L. Wilson

Oct. 13, 1948–April 28, 2022

Shawn Cortelyou. He is survived by his wife, Terri, daughter-in-law, Beth, granddaughters, Megan (Jake) Crouse, Emma and Heather Cortelyou, and nephews, Jon and Aaron Cortelyou.

Shawn Cortelyou

Shawn Cortelyou died unexpectedly on Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2022, at the age of 50. He was born on Feb. 1, 1972, to Larry and Terri (Pirog) Cortelyou in Peoria, Illinois. He was an only child. Shawn lived most of his life in LaHarpe, Illinois, a small farming community. He graduated from Ambassador College, Big Sandy, Texas, in 1994 with a computer science degree and then spent a year in Amman, Jordan, with the Ambassador Foundation. He married Beth Corbitt on Aug. 6, 1995 and together they raised three daughters.

After college, Shawn owned a window-washing business, worked on the family farm and operated a school supply cop with his dad. He was called into the ministry in 2008 and moved to LaPorte, Indiana. After moving, he and Beth started homeschooling their daughters and continued until their youngest graduated in 2020. He pastored the Elkhart and Munster, Indiana, United Church of God congregations for 13 years and served as camp director at Camp Woodmen, Alabama, for seven years.

Shawn preceded his father, Larry, in death by a month. He is survived by his mother, Terri, his wife, Beth, and his daughters and son-in-law, Megan and Jake Crouse and Heather and Emma Cortelyou.

Michael Allen Rose

Michael Allen Rose, 68, of Vassar, Michigan—a beloved husband, father, teacher, and servant—died while visiting his happy place at a family cottage on the shores of Lake Michigan, May 29, 2022. His last trip began with a happy heart because of his rapid recovery from knee replacement surgery. He went out on a high note, with dignity, joy, and a wonderful legacy of being a kind, loving, generous, talented, and a joy-giving man who loved God and his family with all his heart. Michael was born on Aug. 14, 1953, to Jack and Peggy Rose in St. Joseph, Michigan. He attended Michigan State University where he obtained a Master's degree in Art Education and also met the love of his life, Amy Smith. They were married on March 17, 1979, and built a beautiful life together, serving God and many others over the years. Michael worked as an elementary school art teacher at Vassar Public Schools for many years. His joy, enthusiasm, singing and sense of humor made him beloved and well remembered by his students and colleagues. He also coached basketball and volleyball, and was a necessary fixture at all theater productions due to his resounding and ready signature laugh. Michael was unendingly proud of his children, Sera and Corbin, and of his wife, Amy, and always tried his best to support and encourage them. Among many things that brought him joy were art, music, giving anonymous gifts, serving others and God's way of life. Michael would burst into

song or create a beautiful calligraphy or drawing at the drop of a hat. Or he would drive to the ends of the earth for seven kinds of juice if someone mentioned they were thirsty. But above all, he was dedicated to learning and living what he read in his Bible. He loved looking at beautiful pictures and listening to beautiful music, but he also loved to create them both. Always willing to tackle projects around the house and yard, he made the world a more beautiful place with all that he did. His creativity extended to storytelling as well—as any who are familiar with him will remember. Even if it was the 47th time you were hearing a story, you had to smile at his delivery! Michael was a pillar in the Flint, Michigan, church area where he had served as the board president, deacon and in various other roles. His artwork and handiwork can be found all around the Flint church building. Living on in his legacy are his wife, Amy; children, Sera (and Stan) Grabowski and Corbin (and Kur) Rose; and his sister, Pamela (and Ed) Maslak. He finished his earthly race having fought the good fight, having kept the faith, and having been assured of God's promises.

Lee Stolley

Lee Stolley, of Big Sandy, Texas, died Dec. 14, 2021. Lee was born in Round Rock, Texas, in 1935 and grew up on a ranch in central Texas.

Mr. Stolley had been a member of the Church of God since 1963 and served as a deacon for many years in southern and east Texas congregations.

Several years after high

school, in the early 1950s, Lee became a highway patrolman with the Department of Public Safety in Texas and was stationed in the Rio Grande Valley. In 1963 he was called into the Church. Lee later became a Texas Peace Officer and Supervisor with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, stationed at Lake Corpus Christi State Park in Mathis, Texas. In 1981, when Ambassador College was re-opened in Big Sandy, Lee was hired to become the Director of Security for the newly opened campus, and he served in that position until the college closed in 1995. Lee finished his professional career as a Lieutenant with the Big Sandy Police Department, until his retirement in 2007.

Lee was known for his humorous anecdotes and stories from his law enforcement background, as well as his colorful sayings. In describing an escapee from prison from another state who was tracked to the Big Sandy area in the early 1990s, Lee told a local TV affiliate that the fugitive was “meaner than a snake, and uglier than a burnt rope!”

Lee was a strong believer in church and public service, and in 2003, the Big Sandy Chamber of Commerce named him “Man of the Year,” and hosted a special recognition dinner for Lee and Peggy Stolley.

Lee was preceded in death by his wife of 60 years, Peggy, and is survived by his daughter Terri Buchanan of Tucson, Arizona; son Daniel Stolley of Trophy Club, Texas; daughter Vicki Ditto of Big Sandy; seven grandchildren: Steven Lee Douglas Buchanan, James Buchanan, Lindsey Knights, Danielle Stolley, Victoria Shoemaker, Jaxson

Ditto and Preston Stolley; and seven great-grandchildren: Lacey, Leanna, Timothy and Mark Buchanan, Haleigh Knights and Jameson and Dean Shoemaker.

Fannie L. Wilson

Fannie L. Wilson of San Angelo, Texas, died in the early morning of Thursday, April 28, 2022 at home at the age of 73 after an extended illness. Fannie was known by her warm, friendly smile, positive attitude and deep love for her family, friends and her church.

She was born in Pioneer, Texas, on Oct. 13, 1948, to Evans and Addie (Jones) Watkins. She is survived by her husband Albert “Butch” Wilson, two sons, three grandsons and three granddaughters. She was preceded in death by her parents, two sisters, one brother and youngest son who died at age 42.

As a young child her mother became interested in the Radio Church of God through a neighbor who was listening to Mr. Armstrong and joined a small group who were keeping the Sabbath. She met the love of her life, Albert “Butch” Wilson when he was visiting family while on leave from the Navy. On Aug. 10, 1968, they began a marriage that lasted 53 years!

Fannie made a career of being a homemaker. She was a talented seamstress, quilter, cook and gardener, and was always ready to serve others. She and her husband were long-time members of the Worldwide Church of God, then the United Church of God congregation in Coleman, Texas. She was loved by all and will be greatly missed. **UN**

A Summary of the Most Recent Requests for Prayers to Advance the Gospel

In September 2021 a new feature was added to the Ministerial and Member Services *e-News* titled “Pray for the Gospel to Have Free Course.” Since then, numerous reports have been published highlighting challenges and opportunities in spreading the gospel encountered by the home office, the international offices and senior pastors. Having been also published in the *United News*, these reports are made available so you can not only be aware of what is taking place, but can add the needs described to your daily prayers. Below are summations of the most recent messages published in the *MMS eNews*.

1. Vanuatu

Derrek Lewis, office manager for the United Church of God-Australia, wrote about the work of God on Vanuatu, a nation of small islands in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. Overseen by the Australian office, Mr. Lewis stated that most of the country’s 50 brethren live on the main island of Efate. A webcast of the Brisbane, Australia, Sabbath services is made available for the congregation each Sabbath as well as on the Holy Days and during the Feast of Tabernacles. While Church literature is provided for visitors at Sabbath services, congregational growth has occurred mostly by word of mouth. It is hopeful that an elder can be located in the country for much of the year. This would be valuable for the brethren and interested individuals since there is great potential to reach many people on the islands. Please pray for our brethren and for the growth of God’s work in Vanuatu.

2. Philippines

David Dobson, senior pastor for the Philippines, announced that the *Beyond*

Today television program began airing nationwide in the Philippines over GMA-7 TV. The contract involved one season of thirteen episodes to be aired on Sunday mornings at 5:30 a.m. He explained that, “The Philippines is still largely a religious nation but secularism and religious skepticism are creeping in, especially among the younger, progressive generations. Your prayers are requested for God’s blessing on this effort in sharing the gospel.”

3. Paper Shortages

Scott Ashley, managing editor of *Beyond Today* magazine, described ongoing impediments in obtaining paper for *Beyond Today* magazine and study aids (booklets) due to economic and supply chain difficulties in the paper market. 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. 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 are requested that God would provide the paper needed to carry on the work of God.

4. Italy

Carmelo Anastasi, senior pastor for Italy, wrote about an experimental “proclamation workshop” that began several months ago. It was designed

to give baptized members practical instructions on how to effectively proclaim the gospel. He wrote, “Through this effort, we provide careful pastoral and editorial instruction and guidance on how to advertise our Church’s magazines, brochures and video-sermons along with their personal comments on Facebook and other social networks. The result? Many new people have contacted us for the first time and have asked to participate in our midweek Bible studies and our church services every Sabbath. The number of participants today has risen to over 100. Your prayers for God’s blessing on our new proclamation effort would be greatly appreciated!”

4. New Zealand

Michael Fike, senior pastor for New Zealand, wrote that, “The nation’s border is now open to foreign visitors and the Feast of Tabernacles will be held and visitors are welcome. This is good news after the local brethren had experienced a difficult time for two years of the COVID-19 pandemic when many total lockdowns occurred and the economy came to a virtual standstill. Regarding the work of God in New Zealand, the Church supports a weekly *Beyond Today* telecast in Zealand but the members have not had a full-time minister for the past two years. Please pray for our brethren in terms of their encouragement and unity and that the gospel can be preached in greater power.”

6. Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe

Lewis VanAusdle, pastor for Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, wrote about the challenges the brethren in these nations face. Among the difficulties are rough roads, increasing transportation costs in coming to Sabbath services

and the rising cost of reliable Internet connectivity which makes communicating difficult. Despite these issues some pastors and deacons have used social media to spread the word of God in local languages—sometimes accompanied by live radio broadcasts on local stations. In Malawi and Eastern Zambia, some translations of church literature have taken place but it is time-consuming and expensive. The brethren in Zimbabwe have also researched the possibility of translating material into local languages. For example, short audio recordings of *BT Daily* episodes were translated into the Shona language. Several of these recordings were sent to a national radio station as samples and were played nationally at no charge during a prime time slot. Please pray that God will continue providing for the needs of our brethren in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe who, despite many challenges, continue doing God’s will while helping to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God.

7. Latin America

Mario Seiglie, Senior Pastor for the United Church of God in Latin America wrote that within this huge Spanish-speaking region, 600 brethren mainly live in ten countries including Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina. Throughout the region there is a total circulation of 16,618 subscribers to *Beyond Today* magazine—called *Las Buenas Noticias*. God’s work has an active Internet presence with 627 Spanish-language sermons posted, 361 blogs, 33 booklets, 669 articles and 4,500 Bible study resources. Moreover, 249 *Beyond Today* video programs and 106 *BT Dailies* have been dubbed in Spanish. In

2021 alone, the church’s Spanish-language website reached an average of 128,000 monthly unique visitors. There were also 1,868 YouTube subscribers and 1,627 Facebook followers. Mr. Seiglie wrote: “While we are doing all we can with the resources available, please pray that God will continue to bless the efforts to spread the Gospel message and to care for God’s people throughout Latin America.”

8. Australia

United Church of God-Australia Office Manager, Derek Lewis writes: “The Church in Australia has been blessed with strong finances in recent times. With all the turmoil these past two years perhaps it’s not surprising that God’s people have a renewed focus on supporting the work of the Church. *Beyond Today* television and digital marketing have been fruitful. Short video ads on *Facebook* have brought great results and we’ve just filmed six new ads that we hope will be even more successful. Even with all this as good news, we must be mindful that the Gospel message could easily be thwarted here in Australia without God’s protection. There are growing obstacles to preaching the gospel. State and Federal legislation is increasingly an issue as is public opinion which is more and more anti-God. We often wonder how much longer we can air *Beyond Today* where enough complaints about a program could see television station management take us off the air. Please pray for the work here in Australia, as well as in New Zealand and our neighbors in the South Pacific. Most especially pray that our increased media efforts bear fruit.”

Peter Eddington,
Operation Manager, Media and Communications Services, and John Labissoniere

Plans for the Future

By David Bensinger,
U.S. Coordinator for Myanmar &
Davidson Leh Bey, U.K. Coordinator

In this second of two parts, in this second article, we discuss our plans for the work in Myanmar. While it seems futile to make plans in a country held in Civil War's grip, we are doing just that. We prepare for the time when God opens the door to make a big impact. We continue to be careful of listing certain names or places that might bring harm to our brethren.

MYANMAR—We have taken guidance from two areas of the Bible as we plan. First is Christ's direction to His disciples in Matthew 5-7. In these chapters Jesus outlined key messages of His ministry and what membership in the new Kingdom that John the Baptist introduced in Matthew 3 meant. In chapter 5, He taught the disciples the proper attitude to have as they went out to teach His way; true spiritual understanding of the law; and how to deal with difficult people and situations. Documented in chapter 6, they learned how to interact with the Father, how to take care of the poor and how to deal with stress. Finally in chapter 7, they learned about judging, treating others and false teachers. These chapters likely served as the basis of the disciples' first ministries when Christ sent them out chapter 10.

We also take guidance from Paul's approach as he described it in 1 Corinthians 9:18-22. The Corinthians had some problems that Paul needed to address, which he did. But his approach, likely tempered by the memory of his authoritarian, self-righteous and unreasonableness in persecution of believers before he was called, was one of gentleness and logic based on the truth. This approach works well in Southeast Asia where people tend to be less direct in their human affairs. Often what isn't spoken is more important than what is spoken. No doubt, there is a time to be direct. Paul certainly was in many circumstances. But he seemed to always consider where the person or group was in their thinking and created a path to get them to the truth that they could understand.

Right now in Myanmar, and in all of Southeast Asia and the world, a message of hope and peace is needed. In addition

to their own internal turmoil, Myanmar sits next to the largest communist country and second largest economic power in terms of Gross Domestic Product ("GDP") in the world—China. Not far away is North Korea with nuclear power and unstable leadership. To the south and west lie the four countries with the largest Muslim populations—Indonesia, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Many Muslims in this part of the world are peaceful, kind and generous. But for Buddhist countries of South-east Asia, it becomes a concern to their societies. These types of outsized and nearby influences have a direct impact on the internal workings and struggles of smaller countries in the region.

The Father and Christ have *the only* message of hope and peace that the world needs so badly, and They use all of us in the Church to deliver it. These thoughts guide us as we plan.

Plans for the Future

God has been working in Myanmar for six decades. We have a small, faithful group that has had to operate largely on their own with few visitors over the years.

When the country started opening up about 10 years ago, Aaron Dean was able to travel to see our United group, ordain a local deacon and baptize several young people. His visit also led to the Church purchasing about six acres of rice paddy for some members of the Church to work.

A few years later, prior to the Feast of Tabernacles in 2019, UCG leadership in Myanmar along with leadership from our friends in Church of God, Myanmar met in Yangon to discuss the future of God's Church in the country. We hired a well-respected attorney to join us for about three hours to discuss matters related to Church registration, how the law views businesses and non-profits, government school requirements on the Sabbath, types of land and land ownership, etc. This helped us understand why what was working for our United brethren in the south wasn't necessarily working with our Church of God, Myanmar friends in the north and vice versa.

On the practical side of things, with the help of a Church member in Boise, Idaho, we established a website: ucgmm.com.



The website is in three languages: Burmese, Karen and English. Davidson Leh Bey, along with help from some of our members and one of our prospective members, have been translating the Church's materials into Burmese and Karen. To date, this team has translated 12 booklets, more than 15 *Beyond Today* articles, and more than 40 sermons. The ability to conduct meaningful SEO work is minimized right now, so the website functions primarily as a centralized and public repository for translated content in those languages.

Through our prospective member, we have been in contact with a group of seven families located in a village far in the Northwest of the country who state they are United Church of God members! None of us knew about them. It appears they came across the UCG website, read the material and have followed God's way. They would like us to visit them when we can come. It is always humbling to realize the Father and Jesus Christ are getting their work done even when we are not involved!

An important consideration for our brethren and God's Work is developing our young people. Even before COVID and the civil war, jobs and incomes were hard to find. We have several young people with aptitudes in mechanics, computers and programming, and languages, but need more training. To that end, as technical and other schools open up, we intend to help pay for tuition to get these young people trained to make a living and serve God's Work.

In the south, we are very excited about the recent purchase of a new plot of land in the village which will be, according to God's timing, a new community center for our UCG brethren there. The UCG brethren still meet in Sol Leh Bey's home from the 1960s, but it is falling into disrepair. We intended to raze the home and build a new



Clearing the land and building a fence at the new plot of land the Church in Myanmar has purchased, which will be used as a site for a future center for United in Myanmar.

building in its place in 2020. But the pandemic broke out, travel stopped, and funds raised were returned to their donors. In a way, this may have been God's direction. The lot on which Sol Leh Bey's home is located is not ideal as it is behind other homes in the village with no direct frontage to the main road. This new lot, just a few hundred feet away, is larger and directly on the main road. Thanks to contributions from Davidson Leh Bey's family, and LifeNets, we were able to purchase the land in February. The brethren have been clearing the land in preparation for construction.

In the spring of 2020, we intended to find a suitable office location in Yangon in the region near the airport. This would function as a central meeting place for services for the brethren

in Yangon, as well as a place to begin coordinating printing and mailing literature, a location for visitors to stay, etc. It will be high on our list once travel opens again.

There are several other initiatives we continue to plan for in Myanmar. What is exciting is that by the time we can return, there will likely be major changes to government, laws, etc. that may provide even more opportunity for our brethren and God's work in Myanmar.

God clearly has started a work in Myanmar and has a small, but faithful group of individuals serving Him there. Your continued prayers for the brethren's physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being are appreciated. And as God wills, we look forward to advancing God's work in Myanmar. **UN**

BEYOND TODAY

July 3-9 | **The Ten Commandments: From Obedience to Virtue**
Gary Petty | *The Ten Commandments*

July 10-16 | **Christians Surviving in a Non-Christian Society**
Gary Petty | *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*

July 17-23 | **Smyrna: Faith Under Fire**
Darris McNeely | *You Can Have Living Faith*

July 24-30 | **Watch Out!**
Steve Myers | *What You Need to Know About Baptism*

July 31-
Aug. 6 | **You Become What You Think**
Gary Petty | *Tools for Spiritual Growth*

Aug. 7-13 | **Pergamus: Where Satan Dwells**
Darris McNeely | *Is There Really a Devil?*

Aug. 14-20 | **Great Conspiracy**
Steve Myers | *Who Is the Antichrist?*

Aug. 21-27 | **Questions God Asks You**
Gary Petty | *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*

Aug. 28-
Sept. 3 | **Thyatira: Seek First the Kingdom of God**
Darris McNeely | *The Gospel of the Kingdom*

United Church of God Israel 2023 Festival Tour Announced

After several years of COVID-19 restrictions and challenges in travel we are now happy to announce we are proceeding with plans for a “specialty” Feast tour in Israel in 2023! We hope many can join us and you can find an overview of details including cost and a “Book Now!” button at the following website: travelgallery.com/ucg-israel-2023

The capacity of the tour is limited. Those interested must complete registration by Sept. 30 of this year, however, the site might fill prior to that.

Please book now!

Charles Melear, UCG Conference Planner



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