



## Meet the Brethren in Ghana

by Paul Moody

As the senior pastor for English-Speaking West Africa, I have traveled regularly to Ghana since 2015. I quickly fell in love with our brothers and sisters there due to their open and friendly demeanor and love for the truth of God.



### Country of Ghana

Within the borders of this West African country reside nine congregations of the United Church of God, totaling approximately 365 attendees nationally. The Church is a vibrant and dynamic group of people who are seeking daily to grow in the grace and knowledge of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, to do the work of preaching the gospel within the country of Ghana, and to prepare a people for the soon-coming Kingdom of God.

Ghana is the second most populous country in West Africa, with over 32 million inhabitants. As a former British colony, English is its primary language of trade and commerce. However, most Ghanaians also speak the tongue of their native ethnic tribe, with Akan being the largest and most common.

Ghana is flanked by the French-speaking countries of Togo to the east and the Côte d'Ivoire to the west. It adjoins the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean to the south and



Burkina Faso in the north. Its coastline consists of a beautiful stretch of land dotted with

quaint fishing villages and port cities. Ghana has a rich traditional and historic culture. The

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## Trip to Turkey and the Sites of the Seven Churches of Revelation

by Darris McNeely

A group of 54 UCG members left for Turkey during the Days of Unleavened Bread to visit the sites of the seven churches of Revelation and other locations. The tour began in Izmir, Turkey, which is the site of the ancient city of Smyrna. From there the group traveled to the sites of all the churches addressed by Jesus Christ in Revelation 2 and 3.

Other cities were visited where churches and events mentioned in the New Testament occurred including Colossae and Heiropolis, both within a short distance of La-



The tour included many famous sites, including the library of Ephesus.



The tour group gathered for a photo in Pergamon.

odicea, where extensive excavation in recent years has revealed the size and wealth of the city.

One of the best-preserved

sites is that of Ephesus. Today one walks through a main street of the city past ruins of government buildings and pagan temples. The amphitheater where

the riot of Acts 19 occurred has been restored. Sitting in the theater, the group heard the words of Acts read aloud describing the riot of the silversmiths and

the chanting of the mob, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

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# 2 Why You Should Come to Ambassador Bible College



Have you been looking for a way to establish a firm biblical foundation, build friendships with people of like mind and cultivate opportunities to serve others? No matter what your age or stage in life, coming to Ambassador Bible College will help you build a deeper relationship with God and His people as you delve into His Word! Students and instructors alike described the benefits of coming to ABC and would like to share the following comments with you, as you consider taking this important step in your educational and spiritual journey.

## Steve Myers, faculty member

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where the Word of God was misunderstood and/or misused? All too often the doctrine of God comes under attack from those who claim to be religious. When your faith is challenged, are you confident of your understanding of God's Word?

The apostle Peter wrote about this saying, "our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things

hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15-16).

When the truth is under attack, it is essential to know why you believe what you believe and to have the ability to explain it. In many cases, as Peter wrote, it is Paul's writings that are misinterpreted.

This is one important reason to attend Ambassador Bible College. At ABC we take the opportunity to study Paul's letters that are some of the most profound books ever written.

The Epistles of Paul class explores the historical and cultural background for each letter. Considerable time is taken to identify, examine, and explain difficult sections of these books to clarify and expand understanding.

If you've ever wondered how Paul's teachings fit with the teachings of Jesus and the other apostles, this is the class for you! This course examines doctrines and practices as they were addressed among God's people in the first century Church and how it applies to us today. The overriding goal is to motivate students to not only understand but to recall and implement these principles in their personal lives.

If you've ever felt "twisted up" or had questions about something in Paul's writings, this class will help you gain a depth of spiritual understanding and the confidence to explain it. I pray you'll consider joining us at Ambassador Bible College.

## Katherine Rowland, faculty member

I'm the administrative assistant for ABC, and I am also a graduate of ABC. Even though I grew up in the Church and was an adult when I attended ABC, I learned so much in just those nine months! I came away with a greater understanding of the unity of the Bible and also a deeper appreciation for the truth we have been given. ABC is a great place to ask questions, gain understanding and get a firmer Biblical foundation in a supportive environment. The faculty and staff at ABC combine a devotion to God's Word with the desire to serve and give God's people more understanding of His truth.

## Dan Preston, faculty member

ABC will give you an immersive experience of studying the Bible. You will cover the entire Bible and learn about the back-

ground of its writings, giving context and making the application of its lessons come alive. It takes the Bible from being a mere book we read and transforms it into a manual for living life. I teach the module on the Post-Exilic period. This covers the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. In them, we find the stories of people who had a task in front of them. Some sought the task out, while others had it thrust upon them. In each of these books, we read about people who faced a problem and recognized they needed God's help. They sought it, worked diligently toward a solution, took action, inspired others to do so as well, and in the end, God was glorified. Esther in particular is an exciting story which rivals any action-thriller novel ever written.

## Jorge de Campos, faculty member

Even though Kathy and I had been baptized and regularly attending Church for over 30 years we found ABC most beneficial as it helped us understand and see how the whole Bible is unified into one book with a single purpose to teach, correct and instruct us in God's Way of life for our good. We recommend ev-

everyone, regardless of age, attend ABC when they are able. I teach the module which covers a number of facts regarding calendric determinations based on God's biblical instruction and why we determine God's Holy Days using the Hebrew calendar. This is an important subject as it has been the source of much division, and God wants us to be one in unity as the Father and the Son are one.

## Ray Winger, student

My wife and I are very glad we came this year. We call it our jubilee year. It has been challenging and fun, getting to know a lot of people in the Cincinnati and surrounding areas. If you think being older than 20-something is a setback, you would be wrong. It's been a good iron-sharpening-iron experience. I challenge you to go to ABC to have an experience of a lifetime.

## How to apply

Are you ready to embark on the journey of a lifetime? Join us for a year of biblical instruction and learning by applying for Ambassador Bible College. Go to [abc.ucg.org/applications](http://abc.ucg.org/applications) to find a copy of the course catalog and application form. We look forward to seeing you there! **UN**

## Trip to Turkey

*Continued from page 1*

The site of Miletus where Paul met with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 has the remains of a massive Roman amphitheater. Again, the group was able to sit on the site and hear a reading of Paul's talk to the elders and then sing a few hymns which included the fitting and poignant, "God Be With You Till We Meet Again."

A *Beyond Today* film crew accompanied the group with filming permits allowing use of a drone. Footage was taken that can be used in future productions including a planned documentary on the message to these churches.

The tour ended with two days in Istanbul, the city with three historic names, which include Byzantium and Constantinople.

On a visit to the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, the group was able to see three historic inscriptions from the land of Israel. Most interesting was the stone that sat on the Temple Mount carrying an inscription warning the gentiles not to venture beyond it into the Court of Israel. To do so could result in their death. This stone was found during the Ottoman rule in Jerusalem and taken to Istanbul. Paul comments on

the division indicated by this stone in Ephesians 2:14 where he said Christ is "our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation." This stone is also historic proof a temple stood in Jerusalem during the first century A.D., something denied by Arab leaders in the tense political standoff between the State of Israel and the Palestinians.

It is hoped that future trips as part of an ABC continuing education program can be made to Turkey and other sites of biblical importance. **UN**



*A view of Heiropolis*

# Operation Manager's Update

## Ministerial and Member Services

We are excited to announce several men ordained into the ministry of Jesus Christ.

On March 1, 2023, Marcus Lucas was ordained into the ministry. He serves as assistant pastor in the Cincinnati, Ohio, congregations with his wife, Lindsay.

On March 18, Pierre Ogoudele was ordained into the ministry serving the Cotonou, Benin, congregation with his wife, Rose.

On the First Day of Unleavened Bread, April 6, four elders were ordained. Dale Bissessar

was ordained into the ministry; he serves the congregation in Trinidad and Tobago with his wife, Indeera. Carl Kinsella was ordained into the ministry; he serves the congregation in Salem, Oregon, with his wife, Kathy. Carl Koester was ordained into the ministry; he serves the congregation in Salem, Oregon, with his wife, Sabrina. Madu Nkwocha was ordained into the ministry; he serves the congregation in New York City, New York, with his wife, Ivie.

We are also happy to announce that Ed Dowd has been named the International Senior Pastor for the United Church of God congregations in Zambia. Mr. Dowd is working with the previous senior pastor for Zambia, Aaron Dean, in the transition for his new role and will

continue to serve as pastor to the Tulsa and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, congregations.

Please pray for God's Spirit and wisdom to guide these ministers as they serve in their new roles as well as for their families and the congregations they serve. **UN**

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## Meet the Brethren in Ghana

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country's terrain is quite diverse, ranging from grassy savannas to tropical rainforests. Located just a few degrees north of the equator, the country enjoys a warm climate year round. Ghana's religious mix is approximately 70 percent Christian, with 20 percent identifying as Muslim and 10 percent practicing either their traditional faith or no faith at all.

The majority of the Church members in Ghana are multilingual. Because of this fact, visitors find it to be an easily accessible country for tourism and travel. I definitely recommend Ghana as a good entry point into English-speaking West Africa. It has been a favorable environment for the Church's Youth Corps volunteers to serve at the United Youth Camp over the years. The brethren there are very friendly and love to receive visitors for the Feast of Tabernacles and other occasions.

### Congregations

Accra is the capital city of Ghana and the place where our national Church office is maintained. The Accra congregation's membership is comprised of a number of individuals whose connection with the Church goes back many decades in our history. The other eight congregations of Ghana are largely made up of members who once populated an organization called the Remnant Church of God. That church developed a close relationship with the United Church of God over similarly held beliefs. Eventually, they joined with UCG in 2002. These congregations are a mixture of both city and village-based groups.

The village congregations of Ghana function much like community churches, with most of their members living within walking distance or a short motorbike ride. Their growth over time has been made up largely of others from around their own community who have learned about the Sabbath and Holy Days from our existing members. It's a prime example of the impact our shining light can have on the lives of others. Many of these village members are farmers, ranchers or fishermen who support the food producing industry of Ghana. They often have large families with many beautiful children.

In the larger cities, many of the Church members hold professional jobs in fields such as engineering, teaching, banking and nursing. These congregations tend to be more regional than community based. A number of the young adults from around the country travel to the larger cities each year in pursuit of educational or job-related opportunities. Life in Ghana presents various challenges, financial and otherwise, but the young adults are determined to further their education wherever possible and provide a brighter future for themselves, their families and the Church.

### Preaching the Gospel

When it comes to the public proclamation of the gospel message, two congregations, Winneba and Takoradi, host broadcast programs on local Christian radio stations, with the leadership preaching the doctrines of the Church and the good news of the coming

Kingdom of God. These programs go out largely in the Akan language. Respondents to these broadcasts have a local UCG congregation they can assemble with on the Sabbath in order to learn more about the true teachings of God's Word. Both programs have generated a lot of interest in their communities from those who have never heard such biblical topics addressed before. Many have called the radio stations desiring to hear more.

### Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles is always a major highlight of the year in Ghana. Due to the challenge and expense of travel, this is the one time when the entire Church in Ghana assembles as a single group in the same place. It's a wonderful reunion of friends and family, celebrating the blessings of observing God's Feast days together! In times past there have been two Feast sites, but all agree that the blessing of coming together as one large group outstrips any inconveniences the extra travel and logistics may provide. The rejoicing at such times is great and international visitors are always warmly welcomed!

Several years ago I was visiting Ghana when the UCG president at the time, Victor Kubik, called for a Church-wide fast. The brethren in

Ghana were excited for the opportunity! When I asked them why their enthusiasm for fasting was so high, the response I received was quite humbling. They said that fasting is something they can do together and alongside the whole Church; And when their prayers are going up to God, they're going up alongside everybody else's at the same time. In that setting, the magnitude of what they are able to contribute to the benefit of the entire spiritual body is not limited by their financial status or location in the world. Their sacrifice of praise is just as valuable in the ears of God as anyone else's.

The United Church of God in Ghana thanks you for your love and care for them. They truly feel a deep connection to the greater Church family around the world. They pray for you regularly, thanking God for the spiritual connection He has provided to brethren they have not fully met.

As you finish this article, it is my hope you will be filled with a desire to know more about your fellow brethren around the world. God has called us all to be one body, bound together by His Spirit and His Son. The blessings of that family connection are truly great! If properly nurtured, it's a bond of unity which will last forever! **UN**

## Ambassador Bible College Graduation

Join us online to watch the 2023 Ambassador Bible College (ABC) graduation!

The ceremony will be webcast on Sunday, May 14, starting at 11:00 a.m. EST at <https://abc.ucg.org/webcast/graduation-2023> **UN**



**Declan Dean Lee Baker**

Feb. 21, 2023



**Ellie Rose Dwornik**

March 15, 2023



**Carter Elliott Kinsella**

Dec. 27, 2022



**Henry Joseph Lamoureux**

March 7, 2023



**Evan Maximillion Rains**

March 8, 2023

## Births

### **Declan Dean Lee Baker**

Nathan and Rhianna Baker would like to announce the birth of their son Declan Dean Lee Baker. Declan arrived Feb. 21 this year, weighing 8 pounds 3 ounces and measuring 21 inches long. He is already loved by so many.

### **Ellie Rose Dwornik**

William and Linda (Merrick) Dwornik of Austin, Texas, are excited to announce the birth of their daughter, Ellie Rose. She was born on March 15, 2023 at 10:16 p.m. She was 6 pounds 13 ounces and 20.5 inches long.

Her paternal grandparents Bill and Sherry Dwornik from the Waco, Texas, area are over the moon to welcome their first grandchild. Grandparents John and Kathy Merrick of Northwest Indiana are ecstatic for their first granddaughter (third grandchild).

### **Carter Elliott Kinsella**

Caleb and Natasha Kinsella of the Salem, Oregon, congregation are delighted to announce the birth of their son, Carter Elliott Kinsella. Carter was born at 10:48 p.m. on Dec. 27, 2022, weighing 9 pounds 2 ounces and 23 inches long.

### **Henry Joseph Lamoureux**

Henry Joseph Lamoureux was born to Nick and Megan of Fargo, North Dakota, on March 7, 2023. Henry's older sister, Madison, has been excitedly anticipating his arrival, and is looking forward to playing with him as soon as possible! Nick and Megan are grateful for the birth of a healthy son, and feel honored to have been entrusted with the responsibility of training Henry to become a godly young man.

### **Evan Maximillion Rains**

Kayla and David Rains of the Worcester, Massachusetts, congregation welcomed their son, Evan Maximillion Rains in the early morning of Wednesday March 8, 2023. He was 8 pounds 9 ounces and 19 ½ inches long. Big sister Verity, age 2, loves to help with her new baby brother. Grandparents are Roger and Erica Rains of the Worcester, Massachusetts, area and Alan and Christina Weaner of the York, Pennsylvania, area.

## Anniversaries

### **Don and Laura Peabody**

Don and Laura met at a church social, then learned they lived an hour apart. There were no cell phones or computers at that time, so they flooded the post offices on both ends with mail. When

they first met, Don asked Laura to dance, and they've been dancing 'round and 'round ever since! They shared, "Sometimes we remember Genesis 2:18, telling us the purpose for marriage. Sometimes we remember 2 Timothy 1:7, reminding us that God gave us a sound mind. LOL! And then we dwell on 1 Corinthians 13:4-5, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful" (English Standard Version). Don and Laura still have all those letters and cards from 50 years ago.

### **Marvin and Rita Wright**

Marvin and Rita Wright, of the Poplar Bluff, Missouri, congregation celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary on Dec. 1, 2022. They celebrated with a lovely meal and cake at the Blue

Heron Restaurant at The Landing in Van Buren, Missouri, with their children. They have been baptized members of the Body of Christ for more than 50 years. They are blessed with two children and four grandchildren. They live in the beautiful Mark Twain National Forest on their 120-acre farm, where they have enjoyed farming all these years. To God be the glory! "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD" (Proverbs 18:22).

## Obituaries

### **Jane Ann Odom**

Jane Ann Odom, 83, of the Laurel, Mississippi, congregation passed away on Wednesday, Nov. 23, 2022, at Forrest General Hospital, with family and friends

by her side. Jane Ann was born on Sept. 28, 1939, on a farm near Poplarville, Mississippi. She grew up in a home with no electricity and no running water, but she often told her family that she loved the life she lived as a child—riding horses in the woods, working cattle and sheep and tending the gardens and fields. Just surviving was hard in those days, but she said her family never went hungry.

Jane Ann also had a passion for the game of basketball and was a standout player at her rural high school. Anyone listening to her tell stories of certain games could feel the intensity with which she played. She passed along that intensity and work ethic to her children in teaching them to never give up and to keep their

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## Graduations



**Brandon Gilbert**

Bachelor's Degree

### **Brandon Gilbert**

Brandon Jeffrey Gilbert, son of Jeff and Connie Gilbert (Cincinnati North, Ohio, congregation) graduated from Miami University in December 2022. Brandon earned his bachelor of science in Mechanical Engineering. **UN**

## **Calling All Graduates!**



We plan to feature the high school and university graduates of 2023 in the July-August issue of *United News*! Please take a few minutes to answer the questions below and send a photograph by June 7. Please keep it to 250 words maximum. Also include your phone number or e-mail address in case we need to confirm spellings, etc. (they will not be printed). Send with a recent, appropriate photo of the graduate by June 7. Digital photos should be at least 800 pixels in their smallest dimension to print sharply. Send by e-mail to [un@ucg.org](mailto:un@ucg.org), or send by mail to *United News*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027 (postmarked by June 7). We may edit for clarity and/or length to meet the 250-word maximum length.

Here's what to include:

1. Graduate's name
2. Parents' names (if high school grad)
3. Congregation
4. School, work, internship, co-op or other accomplishments
5. Interests, interesting facts about yourself, Church activities you're involved in, hobbies, unusual skills, etc.
6. Plans after graduation

Congratulations!



**Don & Laura Peabody**

50<sup>th</sup> anniversary



**Marvin & Rita Wright**

55<sup>th</sup> anniversary



**Jane Ann Odom**

Sept. 28, 1939-Nov. 23, 2022



**Joseph Paul Szymkowiak**

July 2, 1942-Feb. 8, 2023

word no matter what. Her family was her life, and she and her husband worked hard to make sure their children had the tools to be successful. She was an excellent seamstress and sewed much of the clothing for the family and even made all of the dresses for her daughter's wedding. She canned enough vegetables from the garden that neighbors and friends would say, "If the world ends, I'm coming to Jane Ann's."

Jane Ann made contact with the Worldwide Church of God in the early 1970s having remembered that her father had listened to Herbert W. Armstrong on the radio and had told her, "That man has it right." She worked her way through the Bible Correspondence Course and began

attending services in New Orleans, Louisiana, almost a two-hour trek each way. A church location soon opened in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, cutting the distance to services significantly. She attended the Feast with her husband and children for the first time in 1972 in Big Sandy, Texas, camping in a borrowed tent. Her family enjoyed many more Feasts together and used those opportunities to travel and see the country. She always felt blessed to be called into God's Church.

Jane Ann was preceded in death by her son James "Jamey" Odom; parents, Lawrence and Cornelia Dedeaux Ladner; and brother, Lester Ladner. Her memory will be forever cherished by her husband of 63 years, Levi

Odom, of Poplarville, Mississippi; daughters, Ann Brackett (Mike) of Maryville, Tennessee, Patty Odom of Poplarville, Blythe Odom of Perkinston, Mississippi; a brother, Hershel Ladner (Billie Sue) of Poplarville; two grandchildren, James Brackett and Jenna Brackett; and a host of nieces, nephews and extended family.

#### **Joseph Paul Szymkowiak**

Joe was born in Batavia, New York, to Vincent and Constance (Cyran) Szymkowiak, the oldest of five children. He was baptized into the Church in 1965, leaving home shortly after for Ambassador College, Big Sandy, Texas. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1969, was assigned to the New Orleans, Louisiana,

area and reassigned to the Akron-Canton area in 1972, where he spent most of his life.

Joseph worked in sales, winning numerous awards until his retirement in 2018. He was a loving husband, father and grandfather as well as a faithful and loyal friend. He was dedicated to serving God, family and the Church.

Joe is survived by his wife, Rose; siblings, Vincent (Carol) Szymkowiak, Maryann (Ed) Rae, Constance (Frank) Rehor and Virginia Segaloff; children, Ben Szymkowiak, Brenda (Brian) Krueger, Stephanie (Ryan) McNeely and Brian Szymkowiak; two grandchildren and nieces and nephews.

Joe was larger than life with a big heart and was loved by all

who knew him. He will be sorely missed.

#### **John Ward**

The Southeast England branch of the United Church of God lost one of its oldest and most faithful members, John Ward, on Wednesday, Feb. 15, which was John and his wife Jacky's wedding anniversary. John was 86 years old on his death, having lived in Hailsham, East Sussex just outside Eastbourne, for over 70 years. John moved to Hailsham from Darlington in 1944 as a 9-year-old boy. John was 55 years old when he had three heart attacks, and 57 years old when he had a triple bypass and valve repair and was fortunate to have survived and lead an active and fulfilled life since. John's wife Jacky died in 2019, and he was cared for by his daughter, Deborah, for the last eight years, with the support of his granddaughter, Leila, who lives locally.

John was a talented and ardent keyboard player and enthusiast and was a kind and good friend. He was a skilled electrician by trade, working all around East Sussex with his own business. John was a student of the Bible with a specific interest in prophecy relating to Great Britain and the USA. He studied secular history books as well as Church literature on the subject. **UN**

## Honoring Deceased Elders and Wives

### **Claudia Oettel**



Claudia Oettel of Bellingham, Washington, died peacefully in her home after suffering a heart attack a couple of weeks earlier. Several of her children were able to be with her, and all her family and friends surrounded her with love, honor and gratitude for the exemplary life she lived. Having proved for herself that there truly are no obstacles in life that Jesus cannot see us through, under, over or around, she left us the precious gift of how to

trust God in all things, in the worst of times and the best of times. She was baptized into the Body of Jesus Christ in 1959 and never looked back! She attended Worldwide Church of God from 1959 until the mid 1990's and then United Church of God until her passing.

Claudia was born in San Francisco, California, to Claude and Vera Gilmore. She had one younger sister, Shirley Larson (deceased 1978) and one younger half-brother, Bob Gilmore of Snohomish, Washington. Her father became a highly skilled welder working in the shipyards at Swan Island (Portland, Oregon), Boeing (Seattle, Washington) and Paine Air Field (Everett, Washington).

Claudia (age 10 at the time) and her sister (age 7) were sent to live with their beloved grandmother, Laura "Nanny" Gilmore in Portland, who owned and managed a boarding house there. This is where Claudia received her best education in how to navigate through the realities of life. A struggling widow who now had to raise all three of her grandchildren while managing a boarding house and her boarders, Nanny had little personal time to give to anyone, but she led and taught by quiet, steadfast, godly example, which proved invaluable to Claudia throughout her life.

Claudia graduated from Washington High School in Portland in June of 1949 and married Walter Geo Baer in December of the same year. They had eight children: Steven (deceased 2016), David (Arizona), Shirley (Washington), Alice (deceased 2016), Gary (deceased 1978), Rich-

ard (Idaho), Dan (Oregon) and Kathy (California). In 1964, Claudia was left alone to raise their eight children.

As anyone could imagine, these years were some of the most difficult and challenging years of her life, yet God saw her through them all. After raising her children and being single for several years, she married Robert Moore in 1981, but he died six months later. Again, after several more years alone, she married Dick Case in 1989, long-time member and Church elder in WCG and later, UCG. They shared 11 happy years together before Dick passed in early 2001. Yet, one more time after several more years alone, Claudia married Rich Oettel in 2009, also an elder and long-time member of WCG and later, UCG. They shared six happy years together before Rich passed in 2015.

Claudia loved experiencing new adventures, like learning to ride a bicycle at age 50 or kayaking—on the ocean! She had a passion for dancing, gardening, studying biology, nutrition and all things health-related. She loved playing Chinese checkers with her nephews. In her younger years she enjoyed swimming, waterskiing, hiking and roller-skating.

Claudia was a champion of God's way of life and a very devoted and hardworking lady. You will live your whole life and meet someone like Claudia only once. She was an incredibly beautiful lady and will be a real asset to our God as His plan continues. She was and will always be greatly loved and missed until we are all reunited. **UN**

## 6 Perspective on Prayer

by Don Lamoureux

Perhaps my questions about prayer have been running the circuit in my mind for far too long. Now, it seems, my merciful and loving Father—the same God we all pray to—has found the perfect situation to allow me to address them.

I grew up on a farm as a rather self-sufficient, independent individual; so, seeking help with my problems isn't exactly second nature to me. I generally can float my own boat and take care of myself; or so I thought. Some of the thoughts that floated through my head when the subject of prayer came up included:

- Do I need to let people know what I am going through?
- Do I need to ask for prayers?
- I don't need your prayers . . . or do I?
- What makes me think that I am special and need prayers when others have been suffering for years, often without an obvious answer?

- Do I need an immediate sign to believe my prayers have been heard?
- Is prayer really helpful?
- Could others really care that much about me?

Do I need to know someone to ask for prayers from them? Or could it be that I am too prideful and not humble enough to ask for prayers and show my vulnerability?

Perhaps, like me, others out there have struggled with some of these same questions. If that is the case, maybe some of my recent realizations may be of some value to you.

Until very recently, I didn't think I would ever need the prayers of others. But now, after having my own medical experience and being on the receiving end of people's prayers and phone calls, the answer is a resounding, "yes!"—I do need other people's prayers! Reality has hit me in a most profound way, showing me the love-in-action of others with like-minds.

I can now thank God for this new perspective and for inspiring me to understand that "the effec-



tive, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). It is clear that by sacrificing time to pray for another's concerns, I am actually laying down my life for someone else.

I know people interceded for me in prayer, because of the swift changes that occurred after I returned home from the hospital. I don't think these changes just happened by themselves. God intervened for me, relieving the pain when the pain meds were not working. I now realize that intervention came because my brethren cared for me and sacrificed their time and faithfully prayed to God on my behalf.



I am convinced that there are many reasons for the trials we go through—whether health, finances, lack of understanding, relationships or other issues. I am also convinced that God is the only One who knows the end from the beginning; however, I now know that prayer can change things. That's not to say that we can force our will upon God, but He is concerned with our happiness and well-being. Although I have prayed for others and kept in contact with God on a daily basis, I am now convinced—more than ever—that God is listening all the time! I am also sure that it puts a smile on His face when He sees us

give freely of our time and effort in fervent prayer for one another.

Take a minute to meditate on the word, fervent, for a moment. Perhaps all of us have not considered enough the meaning packed into that one word. Consider the words associated with it in the dictionary: moved by, or showing great warmth or intensity of emotion; enthusiasm; ardent. I now have to ask myself: how well do my prayers fulfill this explanation? How well do yours?

In closing, I would like to thank everyone that took the time to pray for me during this trial with my hand—and please continue! I also will pray for my brethren with a clearer heart and mind than ever before. You see, the healing that comes from a health trial is not always the physical part, but God often uses physical circumstances to impart a greater spiritual lesson in our lives. All glory to God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God..." (Philippians 4:6). **UN**

## The Stories We Tell Ourselves

by Tanya Winger

I've been thinking a lot about stories recently. Primarily, the stories we tell about ourselves and others that shape our reality. These stories can either expand or limit what we can achieve in our minds. This is true for individuals, groups, classes and a choir. Allow me to share my story about joining the Ambassador Bible College choir, and for that matter, singing in a choir for the very first time ever!

When my husband and I decided to come to Ambassador Bible College, it was a big undertaking. I had to quit a job I loved, and we had to pack up our stuff, say goodbye to our family and friends and drive over 2,400 miles across the country. We had to find housing, get the pets ready, prepare and plan savings to live on, change Feast plans, find a part-time job and basically uproot our entire comfy life to make this dream a reality. During all this planning and preparation, there was one thing that sat consistently at the top of my "worry" list. Was it the packing? The move? Putting my career on hold? Nope. It was the very real possibility of joining a choir.

I had heard: "everyone joins

the choir at ABC," and this was a looming, intimidating monster in my mind, waiting to get me the second I wasn't watching. You see, I knew I couldn't sing. I couldn't carry a tune in a bucket, and the only possible description of my singing would be a generous comment of a "joyful noise" during Sabbath song service. This was the story I had in my head, the one I had told myself my entire life, and the one that was on repeat as I made my preparations for ABC.

I was worried about being forced into it. I was worried about making a fool of myself. I was worried about being humiliated by being kicked out once they discovered my lack of any talent. So much worry. So, with this narrative on repeat in my brain, I simply decided that choir was the one thing I was not going to do at ABC. I closed off that part of my heart to "a new experience." So there, it was settled. Whew! With this newly defined boundary safely in my mind, I set out to enjoy my year at ABC.

Then something quite unexpected happened. As I started those first few days of class and met everyone, my stony heart started to soften about choir. The story quietly started to change in my mind. My classmates and instructors were so welcoming and kind. This

was a year for adventure and possibility!

Quite suddenly, choir tryouts were scheduled, and I remembered that I didn't want to look back over my ABC year and have any regrets. Still confident in my knowledge that I couldn't sing, I told myself, "I will try it out, then I can say I tried." I filled out the paperwork they requested by simply writing "I'm terrified." Then the actual day to sing was upon me! The tryout was a blur—Chad Browning and Mr. Shoemaker asked me to sing a few notes and match the piano—and they then proclaimed that I was a soprano. Wait, what? You have got to be kidding me!

With that sudden proclamation, I was in the choir. Those first few practices were immensely scary, and I came close to tears every practice. But slowly, as those around me sang and laughed and smiled, I felt safer. My story about choir began to transform into something new, something hopeful, something possible. As we sang together and grew together each week, my confidence slowly grew. I could hit notes that I thought were impossible before, I could sing louder and not be ashamed to be heard (even when I made those inevitable mistakes). I could even



encourage others who were feeling nervous too. The story I told myself about my classmates was that "you were on my side," and that was true. We are all on each other's side. Choir is a huge trust fall. We have to put ourselves out there and firmly believe that our fellow singers will "catch" us. Only when we work together does something beautiful happen. Harmony. Melody. Praise!

As our first performance ended, I remember being so enthusiastic and joyful to sing all together. We did it! We were able to give an offering of song! This was an amazing moment that I will hold in my heart forever. Something that I once told myself was an insurmountable challenge was now a beautiful reality in praise to God.

As I write this, we are over halfway through the school year and I'm happy to report that I love singing in choir. It is one of my

favorite parts of the week. With the choir tours on the near horizon, I know we have a lot of work yet to do and more to give in our praise and singing, but I'm confident that we will continue to grow together and truly be able to offer more than just a "joyful noise."

God is writing our story day by day. He is working everything together for our good, that we may glorify Him. He's given each of us gifts to glorify Him, but we must be willing to use them. And He's already told us the ending of our story—we will be His Spirit-born children! Thankfully, the story He tells about us is reality and will be here before we know it.

I hope that by me sharing my story of joining choir, you may remember that your stories become your truth and the truth is that you can do more than you ever imagine if you keep a soft heart and trust God! **UN**

# GN

## The Good News

### Are You a Welcoming Church?

One of the things that draws us back to Church each week is warmth.

by Dan Preston

Why do you go to church every week? There are a lot of answers that probably pop into your head right away. First, God commands us to keep the Sabbath and assemble (Exodus 20:8-11; Hebrews 10:24-25). Perhaps it's because you know it's where you can get good, biblically sound advice on living life. Or maybe it's just to learn more about God's ways and you recognize the need to live your life in a manner that pleases God. All of those are good reasons. But if some were to give a totally honest answer to this question, it would be that they value the social opportunity or feel pressure from family to continue attendance.

Jesus Christ will return to this earth and establish the Kingdom of God, and the gates of hell will not prevail against His bride, the Church. But in the meantime, people like you and I benefit greatly from being with others of like mind. We can offer emotional support to one another during trials, and Church offers helpful and informative sermons that help us on our journey to the Kingdom of God. And there are things like Feast sites and camps that need to be organized, staffed, run and paid for in a very physical way. In order for all of this happen, we (that includes me) need there to be an organization that helps get it done. So, for the purposes of the rest of this article, we will be referring to that organization as "your church."

With that being said, consider the question again. Why do you go to your church—the specific church you go to every week? If you're having a tough time answering that, maybe ask the question a different way. What do you value about your church?

#### A sense of belonging

In a word, one of the things that draws us back to church each week—regardless of age—is warmth. It's that welcoming feeling of being at home. It's comfortable. Like your home, it might not be perfect, maybe

Adrianna Geo/Unsplash



Be the warmth for others.

it's even a little messy at times, but it's home. You feel welcome there. Being there gives you a warm feeling.

In their book, *Growing Young*, Kara Powell, Jake Mulder and Brad Griffin assert "...you may think young people are staying because of beliefs, but it's more often about finding an experience that feels like family. For teenagers and emerging adults, depth of relationship opens the door to deep exploration of belief. First relationship, then formation. First belonging, then belief. And eventually, these blend into one fluid movement."

This might shock or upset you if you've been in the Church a long time. For old-timers like us, we think, "God's Word is the most valuable thing. Learning it and practicing it leads to a feeling of belonging." That is true, but it's a truth we usually don't realize until after we've been doing it a few decades. The question here today is, what kept you coming to a church where God's Word was being taught, so that you could grow to that understanding that abiding by God's laws and living by His Word brought you warmth? Warmth is not just an effect in our Christian journey, it is a cause as well.

#### Family, despite faults

Consider God's calling of Abram, it is recorded beginning in Genesis 12 and starts with these words, "Now the LORD had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will

bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" (verses 1-3). God's instructions don't start off with a list of do's and don'ts, but rather an invitation. God invites Abram to come to a new home. A place that will bring the gift of many blessings. In addition, God promises to be Abram's friend and support him, helping him and the people Abram is friends with, and being on his side when Abram finds himself in a bad situation. In short, God offers Abram the love and warmth associated with being a part of God's family.

Interestingly enough, very shortly after that, Abram sinned. He was worried he would be killed and his wife, Sarai taken from him. He concocts a story to try and save himself, but fortunately, God intervened before anyone got too hurt. Yet Abram did sin by bearing false witness about the true identity of his wife.

Not long after that, Abram ran into a potential family squabble with his nephew, Lot. There were a lot of people and resources were limited to provide for them and their flocks. So, Abram wound up offering a compromise. "So Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole

land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left'" (Genesis 13:8-9).

After that, Lot got into a bad situation in Sodom and Gomorrah. Abram was able to intervene and save

#### Depth of relationship opens the door to deep exploration of belief.

Lot, and afterward offered tithes to Melchizadek. But it's not until after this, that we really see what God thought of Abram.

In Genesis 15:2-3, Abram expresses a little frustration with his life, "But Abram said, 'Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' Then Abram said, 'Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!'"

After all he had been through—Abram's lies, family squabbles, war—Abram lashes out at God a bit. And what was God's reaction?

"And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.' Then

Continued on next page

*Are You a Welcoming Church?*  
Continued from previous page

He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be’” (verses 4-5). Instead of dropping fire and brimstone on Abram’s head, God promises a very special, very personal blessing—a child.

So, what’s the lesson here? Lie, kill and throw a tantrum until God gives you what you want? Of course not. The lesson here isn’t about Abram’s actions, but what God was doing. God was giving Abram His time and attention. He offered him the warm, loving embrace of family, in spite of his faults.

God did require obedience from Abram. Abram would have to pay for the mistakes brought about by his sins. He would have to endure trials and more strife in his family. But nowhere along the line did God stop loving Abram, or retract His offer to be Abram’s friend. Abram trusted God as his Father, and God loved Abram as his son. They were family.

### **Nowhere along the line did God stop loving Abram, or retract His offer to be Abram’s friend.**

This yielded something truly special. After receiving the promise of his own children, notice that God says something about Abram. “And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (verse 6). God counted Abram as being righteous. Not because he had paid tithes or obeyed commandments perfectly, but because he believed God. He had faith. Had God not been the warm, inviting Father He was, Abram would have never had faith, and God would have never counted him as righteous. Warmth was the cause first, long before it became the effect.

### **Embracing your Church family**

What do you value about your church? Even if the sermons are good and the location is convenient, if it weren’t a warm, inviting, place where you felt comfortable enough to share with others your struggles and mistakes, you probably wouldn’t go there very long.

So, what is it that makes it warm to you? Is it the smiles and the hugs of those who patiently listen to your questions? Is it the freedom to express your feelings in an open and honest way? Is it the brutal honesty others express to you when you need to be held accountable? Is it having someone to share with when you’ve been delivered through a particular trial, and the sheer joy others share with you at the news?

Whatever it is you value—however it is you feel that warmth, be that warmth for others. Don’t forsake or minimize God’s expectations of us, but be warm to others. Let them know you are a safe space for them to be themselves. Some, particularly newer members, may not have that at home. Their newfound understanding of God’s Word may have led to some feeling of separation from their biological family. While we don’t want to encourage division on the home front, they may be in need of a place they can go to get a warm feeling that is missing in their lives at the moment. Be their family.

When it comes to the future and the growth of the Church, we should always pray for God to bless that according to His will. And as we wait to see how He grows His Church, let’s be the kind of warm, loving Church that He can do His work in! **GN**

## **Rejoice!**

It’s easy to get caught up in the things that are going wrong—but what are some things we can rejoice about?

by Heidi Braun

“Rejoice always” (1 Thessalonians 5:16). It seems simple enough at first glance, but our human tendency is to do just the opposite. Psychologists have often commented on how humans tend to let negative influences outweigh the positive inputs, memories and experiences in their lives. We might have three wonderful experiences but find ourselves dwelling on that one negative event that seems to overshadow it all. How can we cultivate a joyful mindset in a world full of negativity? What does it look like in our daily lives? When we look at Scripture, we find there are so many things we can rejoice about!

### **Rejoice in the LORD**

First and foremost, we are instructed to rejoice in the Lord. “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). The word “always” is key, because our rejoicing in God should not be based on our circumstances. For instance, in Habakkuk 3:17-18, the writer says he will continue to rejoice in the LORD despite hard times, such as famine. What are some practical ways we can rejoice in the Lord? Psalm 97:12 pairs rejoicing with thankfulness: “rejoice in the LORD you righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.” Psalm 33:1-3 adds that praise and singing are important ways to rejoice in the LORD. We can rejoice in our prayers to God, and we can rejoice in Him by how we speak of Him to others.

### **Rejoice in salvation**

We have so much to be thankful for, and the gift of salvation is one that should fill us with praise and rejoicing. Consider these words from the book of Isaiah, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10).

Jesus taught that even one sinner’s repentance is cause for rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:7, 10). Since bringing new sons and daughters into the family of God brings Him great joy, it should bring us joy too! We can rejoice as the gospel is spread, delighting in the knowledge that more will hear of God’s wonderful plan (Philippians 1:18).

### **Rejoice in the Holy Days**

God’s annual Holy Days (and weekly Sabbath) are times of great rejoicing! For example, referring to the Feast of Weeks, Moses relayed God’s instruction to “rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to

make His name abide” (Deuteronomy 16:11). That is to say—everyone is to rejoice! In another example, the Jews who had been released from captivity in Babylon began to learn about God’s Holy Days, which had been forgotten by them. As Ezra the scribe read from God’s Word, on what turned out to be the Feast of Trumpets, the people wept, knowing that they had forgotten God’s commanded festivals. But instead of being told to make this a day of mourning, they were instructed to rejoice, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep” (Nehemiah 8:9). They were told to “go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength” (verse 10). God designed these Holy Days as times His people would rejoice!

### **Rejoice in blessings**

There are many daily blessings that we may take for granted, but which are still important to rejoice in. Each day is a gift from God (Psalm 118:24). We often forget to recognize God’s protection in our lives until we find ourselves in trouble and come to Him with a specific request, but it’s important to rejoice in God’s protection. “But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You” (Psalm 5:11). We can rejoice in the blessings God has given us, but we can also celebrate the gifts He has given to others. Romans 12:15 reminds us to “rejoice with those who rejoice.”

*Scripture reminds us to rejoice always and there are so many things we can praise God for!*

### **Rejoice in suffering**

While it’s easy to be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives, do we remember to be thankful for the challenges as well? The apostle James wrote to the early Church, reminding them to “count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (James 1:2). Although these times of hardship are certainly difficult, trials can help cultivate godly characteristics, such as endurance (Romans 5:3-4). Most importantly, as Christ said, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12).

### **Rejoice in our hope**

This leads us to an upcoming time that can bring us great cause for rejoicing! Jesus told His followers, “Rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). God says we can rejoice in His coming Kingdom, that He rejoices in it and that it will be a place of rejoicing: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people” (Isaiah 65:17-19). We can rejoice in this hope (Romans 5:2; 12:12).

Scripture reminds us to rejoice always and there are so many things we can praise God for! Let us cultivate a positive mindset as we look forward together to God’s coming Kingdom, the ultimate time of rejoicing! **GN**



# Jesus, Feasting and Philosophy Part 1

Paul's letter to the Colossians has often been interpreted as saying that the Holy Days and Sabbath are no longer important. Was this the case, or was he making an entirely different point?

by Amanda Miller

When Jesus lived on earth, He received some of the most critical threats to His personhood and ministry because of how He taught and experienced the weekly Sabbath and annual festivals. He performed healings and good works that were unacceptable under the regulations of the Pharisees in His day, and claimed that He was the ultimate authority for the interpretation and expression of these sacred times (Luke 6:7; John 5:16; Mark 2:27-28).

Under a pending threat of arrest for healing someone on the Sabbath, Jesus “stood up and cried out,” on the Eighth Day following the annual fall festival, known as the Feast of Tabernacles, and said: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37-38, English Standard Version). Amazement and rage filled the crowd because “no one ever spoke like this man” (verse 46).

Likewise, in the New Testament we see that the early Church and apostles of Jesus celebrated these Sabbaths and festivals, and regarded them as having a higher spiritual reality found in Jesus (Acts 18:4; 13:42-44; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8). So, how did these sacred festivities get lost to the traditional practices of the Christian faith? Beginning with Paul's day through the end of the ante-Nicene church fathers, let's examine some

***The gnostic teachings in Paul's time supposed a myriad of beliefs about our inferior physical bodies and how they should relate to the spiritual world.***

of the biblical and historical texts to see how their philosophical and political movements reshaped the heritage of Christianity.

## Paul said, “don't judge me.”

Just a few decades after Jesus' resurrection, the apostle Paul wrote to a predominantly non-Jewish (a.k.a. gentile) congregation in Colossae that they were not to let anyone “pass judgment on [them]... with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath”

(Colossians 2:16 ESV). This quotation from Paul is often taken to mean that a Christian shouldn't be concerned about these special times and seasons, because they are no longer relevant for believers today. However, this interpretation of Paul's letter to the Church is rather presumptuous and clumsy, because the context of Paul's message wasn't in regard to whether these festivals were necessary for a non-Jewish Christian, but rather how a Christian should treat these festivities.

The gnostic teachings in Paul's time supposed a myriad of beliefs about our inferior physical bodies and how they should relate to the spiritual world. In one vein of gnostic thought, it was believed that you could only discover hidden spiritual mysteries in the world by denying the basic needs of your physical body (a practice known as asceticism). In this view, the physical enjoyment of festivities, especially in regard to food and drink, were entirely wrong for a believer and Paul was pleading adamantly against this gnostic practice entering the Church.

In A.D. 50 Philo, a Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, described some of the ascetic practices of a

empty deceit...let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but [their] substance belongs to Christ...[Therefore, regulations such as] ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch’ [have] an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (Colossians 2:8, 16-17, 20, 23, ESV).

He took this even further, and said that just as the Church (a.k.a. the Body of Christ) is “nourished and knit together” by Jesus as the head of the spiritual body, so also can we celebrate the festivals with food and drink physically (verse 19). Ironically, rather

***Paul made an appeal for these special times and seasons using philosophical imagery that the Gentile congregation could understand.***

er than intending to teach a disregard for the Sabbaths, new moons and festivals for Christians, Paul was making a case for these non-Jewish congregations to enjoy them thoroughly—judgment free.

## Physical shadows and spiritual realities

What's also fascinating about what Paul wrote to this gentile congregation is that he made an appeal for these special times and seasons using philosophical imagery that they could understand. When he said that the festivals of God were a “shadow” of things to come, he was pointing out that these physical celebrations had a greater spiritual reality.

So, when Paul said that the “substance” of these things had a higher existence in Christ and that they are still “shadows” of things to come, He meant that Jesus demonstrated the meaning of the Sabbath days and shed light on their future prophetic fulfillment as well. And, to those who respond to Jesus' cry—to hunger and thirst after Him—He will satisfy their needs, fill them with His Spirit, and bring them to God's ultimate rest (John 7:38-39).

So, now that we've briefly explored the earliest perspectives of Paul in regards to the Sabbaths and festivals, as well as the practices and teachings of Jesus, let's look at the glimpses of history to see how these festivals were left behind by the early Church, and see what traditions became adopted by Christianity as substitutions for these sacred festivities. Join me for Part 2!

If you'd like more information on how Jesus fulfilled the meaning of these days, in the past and for the future, read our free study aids, *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. GN

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*When he said that the festivals of God were a “shadow” of things to come, he was pointing out that these physical celebrations had a greater spiritual reality*

religious sect throughout Egypt and Greece like this:

They “perform all the mysteries of a holy life, bringing in nothing, neither meat, nor drink, nor anything else which is indispensable towards supplying the necessities of the body.” They replace their physical body's needs with studying “the laws and the sacred oracles of God enunciated by the holy prophets, and hymns, and psalms...”

For “six days, each of these individuals [retire] into solitude by himself” and “will scarcely at the end of six days taste even necessary food.” “But on the seventh day they all come together as if to meet in a sacred assembly...No one of them may take any meat or drink before the setting of the sun, since they judge that the work of philosophizing is one which is worthy of the light, but that the care of the necessities of the body is suitable only to darkness...and they eat nothing of a costly character, but plain bread and a seasoning of salt...” (Philo Judaeus On Ascetics, c. 30 CE, as reproduced by Ancient History Sourcebook).

So, in A.D. 60, Paul wrote to the Church in Colossae and on to the surrounding gentile areas: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and

## Lessons From a Pencil

Many today may view a pencil as a little old-fashioned—an heirloom of bygone days, perhaps. But there are several ways a pencil can illustrate aspects of Christian growth.

by *Stuart Hull*

Often relegated to the back of drawers, the garden shed or a workspace, pencils remain useful for sketching, making notes of measurements or other information that will be used later, maybe in a craft or do-it-yourself project, and for practicing handwriting.

Christ extrapolated everyday activities into parables and I am not the first to look at the potential teaching value of a pencil.



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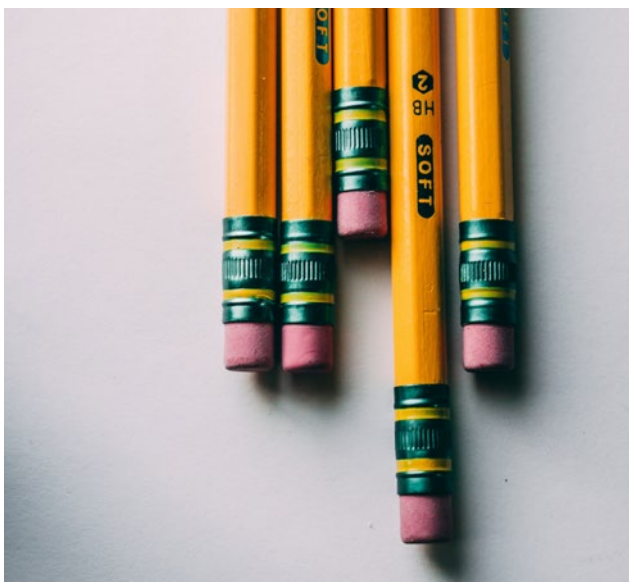
*To remain useful, a pencil requires frequent sharpening.*

### Learning from others

A pencil that is blunt or broken cannot perform its allotted task. To remain useful, it will require sharpening many times. If a pencil could feel, it would be the subject of a painful existence, being cut at regular intervals by either a knife, or the blade of a pencil sharpener. In some ways the Christian walk can be likened to repeated sharpening.

This is what happens when we spend time studying the Bible, with God in prayer or with others of like mind. We can sharpen ourselves, be sharpened by God or be sharpened by one another. Proverbs 27:17 states, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (New International Version). We can discuss and listen to one another with empathy and love in our hearts like our Father. When we pray to Him, He listens intently, and with mercy and grace, He gently molds or, depending on the need, sharpens us into the son or daughter He wants us to be.

I have personally been through many resharpening circumstances in my life and without my family, friends and congregation I might have failed to recover. Yet all these events were a blessing from God to help me grow.



David Pennington/Unsplash

*Some pencils feature erasers, allowing one to correct mistakes.*

Through these experiences which sometimes can be so painful, we grow little by little, so never lose your sharpness and zeal for God’s way of life. When Christ returns in glory all you have learned will prove useful!

### Correcting errors

On the end of some pencils is an eraser which is used to correct any mistakes one has made. Our lives are filled with mistakes and sins, whether words, actions or attitudes, but just like all those who have gone before us, if we repent and each day work on the things that we may be doing wrong, with God’s help and mercy we can correct them and overcome.

James, Christ’s half-brother, wrote: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4 NIV).

Our calling and experiences now are preparing us to be kings and priests under Christ during the Millennium, and then in the Great White Throne Judgment period when we shall be able to teach all those who never heard of Christ or who never understood His calling in this present age of mankind’s rule. You will be able to comfort and teach and help each person to see what life should really be without the blinding of the nations that Satan has caused.

### *Like a pencil we leave a trace wherever we go.*

Our destiny is to be literal Spirit-born children of God. During this present physical lifetime God’s Spirit helps us overcome human nature and become more like Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:2-4). At His return and the first resurrection, we can help Him rebuild this broken world.

### Leave a positive impression

Like a pencil we leave a trace wherever we go. We are always on public display and should leave a positive impression on everyone with whom we interact. We are to reflect our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ with our conduct and speech every day of our lives. This can prove difficult.

To be able to teach the people who will rise in the resurrection of judgment we will need to understand how marks can hurt and stain a person and we

will need the greatest power God has to give to help them: His love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 reads, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (NIV).

### A soft center

The most important part of any pencil is what is inside. Often referred to as the lead, pencils actually contain graphite. This naturally occurring form of crystalline carbon can also be manufactured from coal. It is extremely soft, and splits with light pressure, as when writing with a pencil on paper.

Every time we pray or study the Bible we learn how better to emulate Christ. Every Sabbath day we are being molded into a godlier person through the verses read and explained from the Bible. Philippians 2:1-4 states: “Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make



Halima Bouchouicha/Unsplash

*The most important part of any pencil is what is inside.*

my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (NIV).

When Christ returns, we will need all these attributes to help right the wrongs in this world and teach the people who will have the opportunity to know God and Christ, and be taught, nurtured and saved by Christ. So, let us continue to sharpen ourselves and one another in love, repent of past mistakes and move forward in grace and knowledge of God’s love. Wherever we go and in all we do or say, let us leave a positive impression on others, reflecting God’s love. Above all, let us mirror the shining example of our Savior Jesus Christ and fully embrace His character. What we are in our hearts is what God sees. **GN**

This article appeared in the March/April 2023 British *Beyond Today* supplement. To read more of these excellent articles, please visit <https://ucg.org.uk/beyond-today-british-supplement/>

## Medford International Night



On Jan. 21, the Medford congregation gathered together for a trip around the world! The evening started with an amazing potluck with all sorts of international cuisine. When the sun set, the activities began! As is our custom, the youngest of our world travelers, the oldest and all ages in between, worked together in the relay races where we were given the task of packing our suitcase. We had two teams, each having a list of items to include. There was a gigantic pile of random items to dig through in or-

der to find the items to pack into the team suitcase. It was more challenging than it sounds!

In addition to the relays, we had several international games available, including a giant-sized Jenga game. We also participated in some world trivia, as well as a game of congregational trivia, which tested how well we know our brethren. There was tasty food, great costumes and an adventurous time for all! We challenge everyone to “Go into all the world.”

*Jeff Richards*

## Lexington Has a Ball—Bowling



STRIKE! With this particular ball game, the whole team cheers! Sunday afternoon on Feb. 26, found five lanes filled with 27 of our bowlers along with additional observers at Galaxy Bowling in Richmond, Kentucky. Plenty of pizza and fountain drinks were consumed, giving everyone the energy to give it their all. Participants ranged in age from 5

to over 70, with one dear lady so motivated she even bowled with her foot in a special “shoe” due to a broken toe! She said it only got in the way of her follow-through slide. It was a perfect group activity for a lovely winter day, with temperatures in the mid-50s, making for easy travel. We all agree it was a wonderful social event.

*Sue Whitlark*

## Central Oregon Western Night



The Central Oregon congregation came together on the evening of Feb. 11 for a chuck wagon-themed social. After the members changed into their western garb, they chowed down on a feast fit for a cowboy on the range. Tables were decorated with red and white checkered tablecloths, while the dessert table was a replica of a Conestoga wagon. There was also plenty of sarsaparilla to quench one’s thirst.

The first event was a chili contest in which everyone taste-test-

ed and voted for their favorite entry in several categories. After dinner the games began with a cow-milking contest using latex gloves filled with water, a variety of “counting the contents” games using various sized containers, and photos against a scenic western backdrop with hay bales, ropes and saddles as props. Prizes were given out for the chili contest and games. The evening wound down with a talent show in the main hall. Individual members sang, played guitar

and read poetry. Carol and Jonathan Hill brought the evening to a close with their rendition of “Happy Trails to You,” inviting the entire audience to join in for the last verse.

As we rode off into the sunset, we gave a hardy thank you to all the cowgirls and cowboys who contributed to the decorating and special effects, and a proper “thank you, ma’am” to those who helped facilitate the games and entertainment.

*Jeff Richards*



## Wamatochick Young Adult Weekend



We had a wonderful Young Adults' Wamatochick Weekend Feb. 17-20, with 42 of God's people coming together to consider how we might apply His Word to our lives. The theme of the weekend was based on Hebrews 4:12, "The word of God is living and powerful." This theme served as the basis for the messages and discussions, which were led by the young adult participants and the local ministry.

We began on Friday night with a discussion on how we should not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. We discussed how to study the Word, when we might study the Word, what to study and even where to study. If we are going to have a meaningful personal

relationship with our Creator, it is critical that we have a pattern of turning to Him for direction, protection and correction.

Sabbath services were a split sermon format in which Brent Fogelson presented the spectrum of well-being from doing well to holding up to struggling to needing help. He pointed out that Jesus Christ went through the range of human emotions and experienced time in each of these categories while on this earth. Hope was the subject of the second split sermon presented by Scott McKeon, the local pastor. He discussed the critical nature of hope in our lives, founded on the promises of God, and how that hope is transformational in the lives of those who count on

the promises of God. It is this hope that causes us to purify ourselves to become like Him, where those who have no hope or vision cast off restraint.

Sessions in the afternoon included "Preparing the Heart" by Keith Lippincott (Seattle), focusing on the admonition in 1 Peter 3:15 in which we are encouraged to give a reason for the hope that is in us. Nathan Blaes (Phoenix Northwest) presented his first-generation experience of learning the First Commandment and how it changed the entire trajectory of his life. "What if marriage is designed to make you holy more than happy" was the provocative question pondered in the third session, from an unmarried member,

Kyle Bacher of western Colorado. Sunday's session by Nathan Griffith of western Colorado helped stitch the sessions and sermons together by exploring meaningful Scripture on how God's living and powerful Word applies to our everyday lives.

Monday morning's discussion was about the interworking of the membership and how all the generations play a special role in the Body of Christ. We went through Titus 2 and noted how Paul instructed Titus to develop relationships between the different age groups in the congregation(s). There is tremendous value gained by sharing perspective with those that have had more time on this earth and have developed character as a

result of living by God's laws over the course of their lives.

It was a wonderful weekend filled with fun and fellowship, amazing food prepared by the Woods and Meidingers of Albuquerque, cobbler by Barb Anderson and horseback riding for all interested. A fire outside in the crisp air surrounded by snow was a highlight of Sunday evening. We had a fire burning in the lodge during all the sessions adding to the cozy atmosphere.

We look forward to next year already. Thank you all for your prayers and support as we focused on the next generation of the Body of Christ.

Please mark your calendars for the last weekend of Feb. 2024.  
*Scott McKeon*

## Shrewsbury and St. Jacobs Ladies' Luncheon



On March 5 the Shrewsbury, Missouri, and the St. Jacobs, Illinois, congregations enjoyed a combined ladies' luncheon. Hope was the theme of the event and the topic of a speech given by Carol Szymkowiak, with Jeremiah 29:11 as a reminder of the hope we all share. The event was held at and catered by C. J. Mugg's, with a buffet offering a wide range to choose from and plenty of food for all in attendance. Fellowship flowed freely between old and new friends.

Hats and jewelry, shared with those who had an interest, added an opportunity to dress up and have some fun. Toward the end of the luncheon, the ladies played a short game to select those who would take home the centerpieces. Before leaving, a giftbag with a pen, notebook, bookmark and a few pieces of candy were given to each woman in attendance.

A great time was had by all, and many expressed a desire to make it an annual event

*Sherrie Giddens*



## Southern Minnesota Honors Graduates



*The Southern Minnesota congregation celebrated the accomplishments of two recent graduates, sister and brother Hannah and Dylan Riess.*

The Southern Minnesota, congregation honored sister and brother, Hannah and Dylan Riess for their educational accomplishments.

Hannah received her bachelor's degree in education and looks forward to teaching elementary school this fall.

Dylan received his master's degree in accounting. Dylan also recently passed all levels of the CPA examination and

is now employed by a Certified Public Accounting Firm in Rochester, Minnesota.

Both Hannah and Dylan grew up in the Southern Minnesota, congregation and their Church family is extremely proud of their hard work to complete their studies after attending Ambassador Bible College. Congratulations Dylan and Hannah—well done!

*Jolinda Schreiber*

## Three Congregations Combine for Three Events



Chili cook-off winners, L-R: Chris (holding Nathaniel) and Katelyn (holding Ashton) Hall (Michigan), Heidi Pingel (Missouri) and Tim Hall (Arkansas)



Pie-baking contest winners, L-R: Cletus Pingel, Dee Shell and Marguerite Pfluger, all from Missouri.



Dianne Collison (angel), Doug Collison (donkey) and Jack Leasure (Balaam) perform skit, "Balaam's Talking Donkey."

On the Sabbath of March 11, 2023 three congregations (Cape Girardeau, Missouri; Poplar Bluff, Missouri and Paducah, Kentucky) combined for services in Sikeston, Missouri, along with guests from other areas (as far away as Arkansas, Michigan and Georgia). Services were followed by a chili cook-off, a pie contest and a fun

show. The 64 people in attendance sampled as many of the 13 pots of chili and eight pies as they wished and voted for their favorite in each category. Trophies were awarded to first-place winners and medals were presented to the second- and third-place winners. Heidi Pingel took first place in the chili cook-off, Tim Hall took second

place and Katelyn Hall (unrelated) took third place. In the pie contest, Dee Shell's cherry cobbler took first place, Cletus Pingel's peach cobbler took second place and Marguerite Pfluger's strawberry pie came in third. After the awards were presented, everyone filled up on their favorite chili, pie and other delicious potluck foods.

With full bellies, everyone settled in for an evening of live entertainment as the brethren presented an annual fun show consisting of 15 different acts. Dianne Collison and Patrice Miller were emcees for the evening. There were stories, poems, songs, dancing, quizzes and skits. One skit told the story of Balaam's talking donkey,

featuring Dianne Collison as the angel, Doug Collison as the donkey and Jack Leasure as Balaam. Chris Hall narrated this performance.

The evening ended all too soon, and everyone headed home with chili in their bellies, smiles on their faces and joy in their hearts.

Greg Dullum

## Looking Backward, Still Moving Forward



After a three-year hiatus due to COVID-19, the ladies in Springfield enjoyed hosting the Missouri Women's Enrichment Sabbath on March 18, 2023. The one-day event was held at the Springfield congregation's regular meeting hall at the VFW in Ozark, Missouri. After such a long wait, the 46 ladies in attendance were excited to meet together once again. The theme was "Looking Backward, Still Moving Forward" and this thought was apparent in all the messages given that day.

We had ladies and their spouses arrive from at least six states outside Missouri. Our event started with Sabbath services. Local pastor, Lonnie Johnson gave a sermonette focused on how we can only come to Christ if God calls us. We then enjoyed the special music of Jamie Bettes as she beautifully played "You Raise Me Up" on her saxophone.

Guest speaker Mark Welch from Cincinnati, Ohio, gave a two-point sermon focused on learning from our past and moving forward to a greater day! After services everyone enjoyed a provided lunch and enough potluck desserts to feed an army!

One of the wonderful things aside from the women's Sabbath was that all the gentlemen in attendance were invited to a farm owned by one of our local deacons. Warren Ott hosted a special fellowship day for the men including chili and hot dogs. It was so nice that the men were able to have an enriching outing as well! One gentleman mentioned that as well as some general chit-chat, there were also some deep conversations happening.

After introductions by our Springfield moderators, Merna Eppick and Jamie Bettes, we heard another delightful clarinet melody of "Allegretto Grazioso"

by Wanda Cook. Our keynote speaker was Barbara Welch, who in a speech called "Looking Back to Leap Forward," gave us some tools to rid the chickens running around in our head—which many of the speakers later referred to in their speeches. This was followed by Kathleen Urbom's, "Oh That Men Would Give Thanks to the Lord!" She reminded us that "Human loss does not compare to God's loss of the Word."

Later in the afternoon, Merna Eppick read some notes sent by Carol Symkowiak (who could not attend as planned) for her interactive discussion, "Continue to Celebrate!" It focused on joy and how it is essential to us all. Lorelei Nettles talked about her life leading up to finally having a child, in a speech entitled, "Nothing New Under the Sun." After everyone sang "Daughters of the Lord," our final speaker was Linda Wasilkoff. She could not attend in person but

joined us via Zoom from Canada. Her speech, "I Remember" was a moving and often funny reminder that we often do not find joy in our trials at the time, but looking back we see the benefits the trial brought and that brings us joy.

Merna concluded the evening meeting with "Reflection," remembering some that were no longer with us, and sharing some stories from the past. During the day, we were all given a form to fill out regarding our thoughts on the weekend. Some of the comments read:

"I benefited from this year's Women's Enrichment Sabbath by learning ways to motivate and grow in my Christian walk."

"The presentations were insightful and interesting. It was a good reminder of filling our brains with God's words to shove out Satan's subtle suggestions."

"I loved the Memorial board!" (Several commented on this.)

"This event helped inspire growth in me."

After a light dinner we closed in prayer and while we fellowshiped, we held a silent auction. Interest was high and there was excitement about what might be up for auction. Included were some lovely handmade and new items. Proceeds from the auction will be used for a women's enrichment weekend in Zambia and toward a scholarship for an international ABC student.

After a wonderfully full day many of the ladies decided to stay over Saturday night at a local hotel and get in a little more fellowship. A room was reserved at the hotel by the Tulsa, Oklahoma, ladies for a Sunday morning fellowship drop-in. Finally getting together after so many years, all were looking forward to another awesome Missouri Women's Weekend next year!

Lorelei Nettles

## Growing in the Faith Weekend



From Jan.13-16, a group of 30 young adults excitedly gathered in Stewartville, Minnesota, for the 2023 Growing in the Faith weekend. Because of the weekend's cancellation in 2021 and 2022, everyone was eager to be together again and explore the theme of "Preparing for a Godly Marriage."

The weekend's discussions were facilitated by Mr. Brian Shaw, Mr. Dave Schreiber and Mr. John Elliott. In contrast to the typical seminar format of previous years, a discussion-based platform was utilized, allowing young adults to study the questions given and base their answers on the Bible. The young adults tackled misconceptions about marriage and explored the sanctity of marriage and why it is important to marry within the faith. The roles of the husband and the wife were studied and pre-



sented by the men and women. The topic of divorce and the importance of commitment wrapped up the weekend.

In addition to the edifying discussions, the young adults were able to spend a relaxing Sabbath day together, hearing Mr. Elliot give a sermon titled "A Godly Marriage." The evening Q&A was equally enriching, allowing multiple difficult questions to be discussed amongst the pastors and young adults.

The weekend also facilitated quality time in various forms such as tubing on a snow-covered hill, boogieing on the dance floor and sharing meals together in the cafeteria.

The 2023 Growing in the Faith weekend was an overwhelming success! We look forward to having this opportunity again to fellowship and grow closer to God and each other. We hope you'll join us next year!

*Emma Cortelyou*

## Teen/Young Adult Service Project



COLUMBIA, MARYLAND— For several weeks, the young adults and teens of the Columbia, Maryland, congregation asked local brethren to donate toiletry items for personal care bags to support a local community shelter that temporarily houses homeless families with children. After services on March 25, the youth assembled around 130 individual care packets for the families in the shelter. In addition to the personal care bags, the congregation also donated new and

used clothes, sheets, blankets and pillows.

Those in the family shelter were elated by the outpouring of love by the youth and brethren of Columbia, Maryland, and made the following comment: "We truly appreciate the donation of much needed items that the United Church of God gave to the guests at the shelter. We truly needed everything you supplied and the families appreciate the caring hearts of you all."

*Rhonda Diggins*

## Dallas-Forth Worth Family Regional Weekend



The Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, congregations hosted a Family Regional Weekend, with the theme, "Planted By the River," from March 10-12. Nearly 300 brethren from 11 different states (Arizona, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and Utah) and Ontario, Canada, gathered to forge new acquaintances, renew old friendships and participate in the activities.

The weekend was kicked off by a service project at Feed My Starving Children, followed by a delectable dessert social on Friday evening. On the Sabbath, teens and young adults gathered for separate hospitality hours, followed by interactive preteen, teen, young adult and general Bible studies related to the theme. Jorge de Campos facilitated the general Bible study related to spiritual implications of the tree of life. Mi-

cah Gunn explored with young adults the role of apologetics and ways to "plant" themselves in God's Word and Steve Parker addressed how teens can practice Kingdom living in our fast-paced environment.

After lunch, Scott Delamater's sermon, "Practices of a Fruitful Tree," addressed different techniques for deepening our understanding of Psalm 1:2. Musical highlights included hymn accompaniment by a

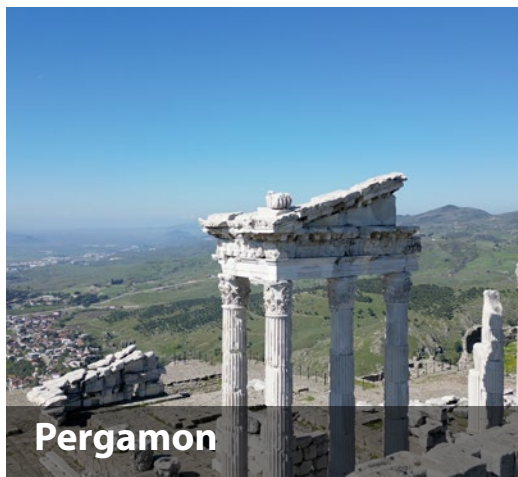
multigenerational instrumental ensemble and special music by teens and young adults from various states. Graduating seniors were honored in a slideshow presentation. Members also interacted more with all four speakers in a discussion panel after services.

The Shimmering Forest themed prom was attended by 70 teens, who enjoyed a catered dinner, photo booth and dancing amidst greenery and the

lighted ballroom. Meanwhile, young adults gathered at a house party. The remaining brethren dined together at the church hall, and preteens enjoyed activity stations and a glow dance party. On Sunday, brethren gathered to fellowship, learn line dances, and play volleyball, basketball and dodgeball.

Thanks to God and to all who attended and contributed to make the weekend a success!

*The Reinoso Family*



Pergamon



Lunch in Istanbul



Presentation in Smyrna



Inside the Hagia Sophia



Restaurant in Istanbul



Sabbath Services



Filming in Ephesus



Inside the Hagia Sophia



Tour Bus

## New Beyond Today TV Series and Advertising Campaign



The *Beyond Today* production team has been working on three, new, five-part video series—the first of which has aired April 23 and 30, will continue to air on May 7, 14 and 21.

The first series, presented by Darris McNeely, is on the subject of “Joseph’s Birthright.” Why did millions of people around the world watch the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II? Why in a modern world are people fascinated by the person who wears the crown in Great Britain? Could it be there’s something more than celebrity

and glamour that’s connected with this ancient structure called the British Monarchy?

This five-part *Beyond Today* video series will show you how that monarchy relates to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. You’ll see how God guides history, and how this story explains much in today’s world. You can watch the entire first series at [ucg.org/tv](http://ucg.org/tv).

In addition, a comprehensive advertising campaign will launch next week and run for 14 weeks to advertise each five-part series as it begins. The first five weeks will be advertising the “Joseph’s Birthright” series on The WORD Network and 18 broadcast TV stations in these cities:

- MyNetwork Ft. Smith-Fayetteville, Alabama
- CW Network Huntsville-Decatur, Alabama
- ABC Springfield-Decatur-Champaign, Illinois
- ABC St. Louis, Missouri
- CW Network Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota
- CW Network Grand Rapids-Kalamazoo, Michigan
- CW Network Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- MyNetwork Birmingham, Alabama
- MyNetwork Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

- MyNetwork Corpus Christi, Texas
- MyNetwork Omaha, Nebraska
- MyNetwork Wichita-Hutchinson, Kansas
- MyNetwork Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania
- MyNetwork Greensboro-Winston-Salem, North Carolina
- MyNetwork Cincinnati, Ohio
- MyNetwork Dayton, Ohio
- MyNetwork Indianapolis, Indiana
- MyNetwork Chattanooga, Tennessee

We will also be advertising each series on YouTube, Google and Roku. You can view the 30-second ad on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/m24UAmKp3-c>.

The second series is titled “Unmasked,” and will be presented by Steve Myers. The third series is titled “The Unknown Jesus” and will be presented by Gary Petty.

Please pray for the success of each series and the corresponding advertising campaigns that are designed to draw people to the *Beyond Today* television program, our [ucg.org](http://ucg.org) website and the global work of the United Church of God, an International Association.

*Peter Eddington*

# BEYOND TODAY

- May 7–13 | **Joseph's Birthright: Blessings to Joseph**  
Presented by Darris McNeely  
Literature offered: *United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*
- May 14–20 | **Joseph's Birthright: Ephraim and Manasseh in the Last Days**  
Presented by Darris McNeely  
Literature offered: *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*
- May 21–27 | **Joseph's Birthright: God's Unfinished Business with Israel**  
Presented by Darris McNeely  
Literature offered: *United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*
- May 28-  
June 3 | **Unmasked: Satan Goes to Church**  
Presented by Steve Myers  
Literature offered: *Is There Really a Devil?*
- June 4-10 | **Unmasked: Religious Pretenders**  
Presented by Steve Myers  
Literature offered: *The Church Jesus Built*
- June 11-17 | **Unmasked: Who Controls the Message?**  
Presented by Steve Myers  
Literature offered: *The Gospel of the Kingdom*
- June 18-24 | **Unmasked: Satan the Identity Thief**  
Presented by Steve Myers  
Literature offered: *Why Were You Born?*
- June 25-  
July 1 | **Unmasked: Satan and the Beast of Revelation**  
Presented by Steve Myers  
Literature offered: *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*



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

## BY THE NUMBERS

# 69.9K

Beyond Today YouTube channel  
subscribers as of April 2023

## Reminder: Planned Giving and Stock Donations Assistance Available Online

At the home office, we receive inquiries from members and donors asking how they can include the Church in their will or trust—how a donation of stock, mutual fund, real estate, IRA disbursement or other asset can be made to the Church—or how to include the Church as a beneficiary on a life insurance policy. We appreciate those who consider making such a “planned gift” to the Church when they are reviewing their last wills and estates, or reviewing their portfolios.

This type of giving, separate from tithes and other offerings, is called “planned giving.” The term generally refers to gifts made to the Church from the assets one accumulates during his or her life-time and is separate from tithes and regular offerings. Such gifts are planned and designated during life, but are in many cases distributed to the Church after the donor’s end of life.

This is just a reminder that if you have questions or would like assistance as you consider donating to the Church, you can simply go to [ucg.org](http://ucg.org), type “Planned Giving” in the search box, and you will find articles and a brochure to help guide you through this process. You can also email us at [plannedgiving@ucg.org](mailto:plannedgiving@ucg.org) or call the home office and let us know that you would like to speak with someone regarding this subject. **UN**

## Colorado Women's Enrichment Weekend

The Colorado Front Range churches are hosting a Women's Enrichment Weekend beginning Friday evening, July 7 through Sunday afternoon, July 9. The location will be the Highlands Presbyterian Camp, just 15 miles south of Estes Park, Colorado. The theme this year is “Women of Faith: Standing together.” The weekend sessions will use Titus 2:3-5 to focus our attention on godly elements to help us stand together as women of faith.

The cost of two nights of lodging and six meals will be \$175.00 per person. There will be inspiring presentations, a campfire on Friday night to open our weekend, fellowship with our sisters and service opportunities. Please make plans now to join us!

Information and registration forms are posted on [www.denver.ucg.org](http://www.denver.ucg.org) and <https://women.ucg.org/enrichment-weekends/colorado-2023>

For more information, feel free to contact Beth Bradford at (303) 805-0089 or email at [beth.bradford@comcast.net](mailto:beth.bradford@comcast.net). **UN**

## Gear Grinder Classic Bike Ride



Registration is now open for up to 50 riders to participate in the inaugural bike ride along the beautiful shores of Lake Superior on Sept. 10, 2023. This fully supported ride will begin and end in Gooseberry Falls State Park (40 miles north of Duluth, Minnesota). Riders can choose one of three routes (28, 37 or 46 miles).

For more details about the ride and to register for this event, visit <https://www.eventcreate.com/e/geargrinderclassic>. **UN**