



Meet the Caribbean Brethren

by Chuck Smith

We call it our Caribbean family. God called the UCG Caribbean brethren into His work to be shining lights even in the sunny tropics. Life can be hard on the islands, but the members' positive vibe helps them to carry on. Your Caribbean brothers and sisters live on 10 different islands and in two countries in South America.

If you are thinking of getting away to a Caribbean Island, “don't worry, be happy,” as the song says, and visit your UCG island family. Let me be your guide through some of the most beautiful scenery in the world and encourage you to meet some of the most beautiful people God has called to preach the gospel and prepare a people in the Caribbean.

Going north to south, you can start in Freeport, Grand Bahamas. The brethren are always happy to have visitors. Each week our Sabbath services are followed by an interactive discussion of the messages with food and friendly fellowship.



Brethren at the Feast of Tabernacles in Dominica



Brethren at the Feast of Tabernacles in Tobago

Through hurricanes and tropical storms, God's people have endured it all. With breathtaking beaches and our loving brethren, you will feel like you are home.

Next you can travel down to the island of Jamaica, mon! Our two churches will welcome you with open arms and share the fruits of God's Work in either Kingston or Montego Bay. If you travel by ship or plane, there are

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A picnic with brethren in Jamaica



Special music performed in St. Lucia

Manila Conference Begins Round of International Meetings



Brethren at Sabbath services in Hong Kong

by Rick Shabi, Steve Myers and Darris McNeely

The last week of December 2023 saw a major gathering of elders and other leaders along with their wives in Manila, Philippines, for a training conference, the first in more than three years. The 69 attendees included people from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Hong Kong and Myanmar.

International senior pastors David Dobson and David Schreiber, plus Darris McNeely, Steve Myers and United Church of God President Rick Shabi conducted meetings which discussed various topics of interest, focusing heavily on the truth of the Bible, the responsibilities of teachers, ensuring the congregations are well-shepherded, understanding prophecy, applying the Word of God in today's world and discussing how all can bet-

ter and more effectively preach the gospel to the billions who live in this area of the world with all of its diverse languages and religions.

Mr. Shabi commented, “It has been an inspiration to all of us, I believe, to have this opportunity to get to know and better understand each other and the circumstances and conditions in which we live,

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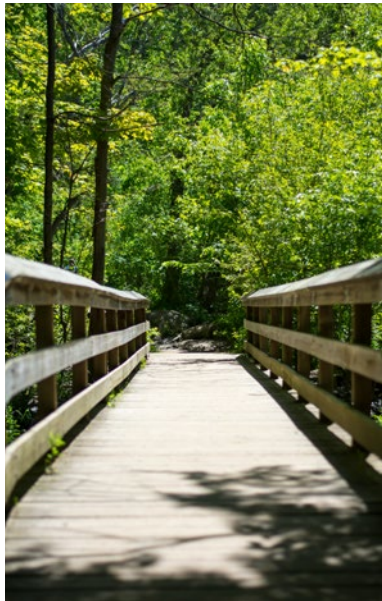
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2 Upcoming Events

Mammoth Cave National Park Camping Weekend



The Bowling Green, Kentucky, congregation is excited to announce that the annual camping weekend at Mammoth Cave will be held from April 11-14, 2024.

The weekend starts with fellowship around the camp-



fire on Friday evening. There is even live music at some campsites! We will have campfire-side Sabbath services at 2 p.m. Central Time. Dress for services this day will be modest camp casual. There are several cave tours you can reserve to do on your own or with others. To reserve other tours, call (877) 444-6777 or visit <http://recreation.gov/>. Bring your bikes—there are great riding areas for kids and adults.

On Saturday night we will have an optional huge potluck. Bring hotdogs, sides, desserts and drinks to share.

The bathrooms have electricity. The bathhouse is a “pay shower,” so bring quarters and flip-flops! You will need to purchase firewood from the store at the entrance to the campground (we are not allowed to bring in firewood from outside the park).

The Mammoth Cave Campground keeps several campsites reserved for “same day or first come, first served”—so do not be discouraged if you are unable to reserve a campsite. There will be plenty of sites available for camping. Each campsite has a fire pit ring and picnic table.

We have some families com-

ing on Thursday, and some not able to arrive until Friday. Come for all or part of the fun! Individual campsites are \$25 per night. We have group sites reserved at \$40 per night which will be divided by the number of families. We have three group sites reserved, so please let Sherie know if you want a spot saved for your family.

If you have any questions call or text Sherie at (615) 512-5533.

For more information on Mammoth Cave and area attractions you can call (877) 444-6777 or visit <http://recreation.gov/> or <http://www.nps.gov/> **UN**

2024 French Feast Site—Club Miléade La Gaillarde



Your French brothers and sisters in Christ are pleased to welcome you back to Club Miléade La Gaillarde for the Feast of Tabernacles in 2024. The Feast will be held on the beautiful French Riviera near the well-known tourist destinations of Saint-Tropez and Saint-Raphaël. We have en-

joyed the Feast in this region of France for many years, and this will be our third time celebrating the Feast at this seaside location.

Located an hour south of the Nice airport, Club Miléade La Gaillarde is situated just across the street from the beautiful Mediterranean Sea with 180-degree ocean views and an underpass walkway to the well-known beach of La Gaillarde. The outdoor heated pool and children’s play area overlook the water and the hotel’s newly constructed main building has a restaurant and bar, playroom for children and a spa where visitors can schedule a massage, enjoy a sauna or relax in the indoor jacuzzi overlook-

ing the sea. The auditorium for church services is located next to the main building and the hotel accommodations, many with ocean views, are a short walk from the main complex. This site’s room and board package provides the opportunity to experience full-course buffet-style French meals while enjoying fellowship with other brethren from around the world. We plan to offer three afternoon excursions to nearby points of interest.

Registration opens on March 20, 2024. Keep an eye out for announcements with further details on feast.ucg.org and the 2024 UCG Feast of Tabernacles Locations Facebook page. **UN**

Gear Grinder Bike Ride



Registration is now open for up to 50 riders to participate in the second annual Gear Grinder bike ride on Sept. 8, 2024. This year’s bike ride will take place around the historic river town of Stillwater, Minnesota. This fully supported ride will begin and end in

Afton, Minnesota (20 miles East of St. Paul). Riders can choose one of two routes (28 or 51 miles).

For more ride details and to register, go to:

<https://www.eventcreate.com/e/geargrinder2024>.

Tony Stith

“A Biblical Worldview” New Video Series by President Shabi



A new video series titled, “A Biblical Worldview,” is being presented by Rick Shabi each week. These 10-15-minute videos are intended to be the Church’s response to what is going on in the world. These messages are directed more towards the audience of the world, as opposed to our membership, and preach a warning message, a message of repentance and the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the nations.

The first three episodes are titled:

- What Vivek Said Was Right.
- Tucker Said He Didn’t Know Why—Understanding the Decline of English-Speaking Nations.
- The West—Where Is It in the Changing World Order?

You can watch these videos on our website at ucg.org/beyond-today/



beyond-today-dailys/a-biblical-worldview and from our YouTube channel at youtube.com/user/BeyondTodayTV.

You can also view these videos on the *Beyond Today* app on Google Play for Android devices, Roku, Amazon Fire TV, Samsung smart TVs, LG smart TVs and Apple iOS devices.

Peter Eddington
Operation Manager
Media and Communications Services



Operation Manager's Update

Ministerial and Member Services

We're happy to announce that on Dec. 16, 2023, Robert Wood was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Ruth, serve the congregation in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

At the beginning of January, the congregations in Tallahassee and DeFuniak Springs, Florida, consolidated and now meet in Marianna,

Florida, pastored by Skeets Mez. Braden Veller, the former Tallahassee pastor, will continue pastoring Ocala and Fort Myers, Florida.

On Jan. 6, 2024, Patrice Sinyenga was ordained into the ministry. He and his wife, Gift, serve the congregations of Iso-ka and Kalukanya, Zambia.

At the beginning of Feb-

ruary, Greg Musgrove was appointed pastor of the South Alabama congregation, replacing Skeets Mez. Mr. Mez will continue pastoring Columbus and Central Georgia, along with Marianna, Florida.

Thank you for your continued prayers for these men and their wives and that God's presence is with them and His Church that He may "establish the work of our hands" (Psalm 90:17). **UN**



Steve Myers is the Ministerial and Member Services manager for UCG and an elder who serves in the Cincinnati, Ohio, area. He can be reached at steve_myers@ucg.org

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Meet the Caribbean Brethren

weekly services each and every Sabbath, with Kingston having an interactive Bible study every week. "Mochie" is the combination of brethren from the Montego Bay congregation with the Ocho Rios congregation joining them, compliments of our church bus. Warm weather matched only by the warm hearts of brethren awaits you!

As you travel further south, you can fellowship and spend the Sabbath with God's ecclesia on the island of St. Lucia. The island, called the "honeymoon capital of the Caribbean," is home to our small but energized congregation in the capital city of Castries.

For you cruisers, our church hall is about an eight-minute walk from the cruise ships' docking station. The fabulous views of this island will pale to the warmth and brotherhood you will feel when you spend a Sabbath with your St. Lucia family. Almost everyone has to make a second trip to this island jewel.

As we travel even further south, we visit the last islands in the Caribbean chain called Trinidad and Tobago. Twin islands, but oh-so different habitats. Each Sabbath God's people assemble to hear God's Word preached, share genuine fellowship and partake of some of the

best foods the world has ever tasted. A nation of diverse cultures, our brethren reflect a love for each other that hopefully many of you can experience by sharing a Sabbath with this part of your Caribbean family.

We also have members on the islands of Grenada, Mustique, Dominica, Haiti and even Cuba. Our farthest churches are in the country of Guyana. Guyana is the only country in South America where English is the national language. Our small churches, one in Long Creek and the other in the interior, have faithful and dedicated members who treasure the

Word of God and keep the Sabbath every week. As God moves across the country, we anticipate growth as He has prepared a people and a Church for those to attend. The brethren in Guyana show agape and magnify it to their sphere of the world.

Next time you make vacation plans, "don't worry, be happy" and consider the Caribbean family in your travels. You will not regret it.

If you have an opportunity to visit one of our Caribbean congregations, you can find Sabbath service locations and times under the <https://www.ucg.org/congregationswebsite>. **UN**

Manila Conference

Continued from page 1

to bond together as a Church, to share ideas and have open discussions on whatever comes to mind. Being blessed with a very nice facility where we are all in the same hotel and share every meal together has enhanced the week. We may be of different nations and backgrounds, but we are one Body—family united by God's Spirit and the truth into which He has called us."

The Philippines is a unique country, comprised of over 7,000 islands. There are around 600 who are in the Church in this nation, with congregations and pastors serving them in the three major areas of Luzon, Mindanao and the Visayas.

At the conclusion of the conference Rick and Deborah Shabi traveled on to Hong Kong to visit the Church and meet with senior pastor Terry Franke and members to discuss their website and plans to effectively preach the gospel in Hong Kong. Darris and Debbie McNeely traveled on to Singapore, where they were joined by

Grant and Kim Chick from Perth, Australia. Mr. Chick is the senior pastor for the Church in Singapore. On the Sabbath of Dec. 30 Mr. McNeely held a *Beyond Today* lecture which 16 subscribers attended. Visits with members were held as well as discussions on future planning to advance the mission of the Church in the region.

Also traveling post-conference were Steve and Kathe Myers, along with senior pastor David Dobson and his wife, Denise. They flew to the south island of Mindanao. There were about 85 brethren at Sabbath services in Davao. It was a joyous celebration of the Sabbath and wonderful opportunity to be together, with many traveling long distances.

The following day they were able to have extended visits with Jed Sy and her brother, Jong Pilapil, who are members presently incarcerated. It has



Brethren at Sabbath services in Davao City, Philippines

almost been 20 years that they have been imprisoned and yet have remained extremely faithful under very difficult circumstances. They have set an amazing example of God's way through the difficult decades and have been used as trusted leaders in both the men's and women's prisons. They even refer to Jong as the "mayor" since he is able to help with the inmates in ways even the guards cannot do. He knows each of the over 1,800 inmates by name!

This conference was the

first of eight international conferences to be held over the coming months. For some it will be the first time for all ministers in a region to gather in up to six years. Beyond the training and discussion of various topics, discussions on advancing the mission of the Church in each area were a focus for the meetings.

God's work spans the globe. God is calling people from many far-flung regions. Please keep these and all other members around the world in your prayers. **UN**



Lachlan Martens Russell

Sept. 5, 2023

Births

Lachlan Martens Russell

Wesley and Stephanie Russell of the Columbus, Ohio, congregation are thrilled to announce the birth of their son, Lachlan Martens Russell. Lachlan was born on Sept. 5, 2023, at 10:20 p.m., weighed 6 pounds 13 ounces and was 20 inches long. Big sister, Rose, loves to hold him and play with him. Lachlan is adored by his grandparents, Steve and Linda Martens of Columbus, Ohio, and Doug and Liz Russell of Los Angeles, California.

Anniversaries

Mike and Debbi Kelley

The Columbia, South Carolina, congregation joined Mike and Debbi Kelley in celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary on the Sabbath of Jan. 13, 2024. They met on the day Debbi was baptized, June 30, 1973 in the Birmingham Worldwide Church of God congregation, where Mike had just recently moved to from Knoxville, Tennessee. They were married just outside of Birmingham the next year on Jan. 19, 1974 at the Trussville Community Center by Bob Dick.

They were blessed with a son, Christopher, and a daughter, Cynthia. Chris and his wife, Kelly have four children: Sarah, Hannah, Michael and Kayla. Their daughter, Cynthia, had two boys, Liam Calvert (his wife, Delaney) and Caleb Adams. Cynthia passed away of breast cancer in 2020.

Mike majored in journalism and earned a degree in mass communication from the University of Tennessee, as well as a master's degree in business



John Hudson Hertzog

April 17, 1942-Feb. 2, 2024

management. He has worked most of his career in sales, marketing and business development, with an emphasis in corporate communications. He also taught economics and business for 19 years and worked one year as a reporter. He is a regular contributor to the *Beyond Today* magazine. Debbi has an associate's degree from Walker College. After 35 years of working, she retired from Athens State University Research and Assessment Department.

Their hobbies include traveling, keeping up with world news and events, sailing and spending time with family. We are blessed to have them in our congregation and look forward to many more years of their loving example of marriage!

Obituaries

John Hudson Hertzog

John "Jack" Hudson Hertzog died on Feb. 2, 2024, at the Bruce McCandless Veterans Center in Florence, Colorado, at the age of 81, just over two months shy of 82. He was born on April 17, 1942.

He was a St. Louis Cardinals baseball fan, trivia guru, jokester, people person, genuine good man and devoted to the Church.

Jack's parents divorced when he was only 5 years old. His early life wasn't easy, but he joined the Air Force at an early age. He was honorably discharged after a short time due to a chronic health condition. He spent the following years visiting virtually every state in the country, picking up work where he could and finding himself. Long-time friend Sam Simms remembers that Jack bicycled into Canada and all the way across it, camping and washing windows as he went.



Margaret Ann Palmonka

Sept. 18, 1951-Jan. 16, 2024

Jack eventually settled in Texas where he found the Church and the love of his life Wanda (née Blummer). They married in Texas on March 21, 1983, and eventually moved to Roswell, New Mexico.

Jack understood God's way since 1968 and was baptized in 1970. In the last two years he was part of the Colorado Springs UCG congregation. He was able to attend the Feast in Estes Park for a few days in 2022.

Long-time friend Rick Hamilton wrote: "I met Jack in the WWCG-Dallas in 1970. After he left Dallas he never lost touch with his friends in Dallas. He and Wanda tended the card table at the Feast of Tabernacles in Steamboat Springs for several years. Jack was an avid bowler, bowling 300 on a team. His biggest love by far was the gospel and the Church of God."

At the veterans home, Jack was loved by staff and residents. While he was still able, he served as vice president of the residents advisory group. Jack enjoyed sharing the tomatoes he grew in his small garden plot. When driving him to the home, he would proudly point out the small American flags lining the driveway that he arranged to be displayed there. He was an avid coin collector and loved going to the local coin shop to bargain over prices.

He would always win at bingo, and then excitedly hold out one of his winning dollars and share how its symbols represent the 13 colonies and the 13 tribes of Israel (Joseph being divided into Ephraim and Manasseh, the U.S. being Manasseh).

Retired pastor Randy Schreiber wrote, "From the time I first met Jack and Wanda, I have known him to be completely dedicated to God's way of life. He never missed an opportunity to talk about the Bi-



David William Ritter

Feb. 1, 2024

ble and to offer his perspective on a variety of topics related to God's plan for mankind. A few days before his death he asked me to anoint him for his eyes, so he could see well enough to read the Bible that lay there beside his bed."

Jack is survived by his half-sisters Cherie and Nancy. He maintained a special bond with them as well as a stepsister Joanne and many nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.

He was preceded in death by his wife Wanda, his parents Elizabeth (née Pope) and John Hertzog, his stepmother Margaret and stepbrother John Nero.

There will be no service as he donated his body to science as did his wife. He will be interred at the Fairmount Cemetery in Denver at a later date.

He will be missed by many.

When dropped off after an outing, Jack would call and cheerily announce "Jack's back!" When the seventh trumpet blows, we'll look forward to hearing that again!

Margaret Ann Palmonka

Margaret Ann Palmonka passed away on Jan. 16, 2024. She was 72. Margaret was born on Sept. 18, 1951 in Frankfurt, Germany to U.S. military parents and was adopted by Virginia and Gerrard Delaney as an infant. She grew up in Elmont, Long Island and attended Elmont Memorial High School. After graduation, she began working for NY Telephone. During that time God was working on His plan for her and while still living at home, she overheard *The World Tomorrow* broadcast with Herbert W. Armstrong that her father, a devout Catholic, listened to regularly. Over time Margaret felt compelled to request the *The Plain Truth* magazine which she ultimately never re-



Mike and Debbi Kelley

50th anniversary

ceived. She learned years later that her father was intercepting and confiscating the magazine she had requested.

Margaret met Charles, a baptized member of the Church, in the fall of 1972. It did not take long for her to realize that he belonged to the same Church that produced *The World Tomorrow* broadcast and *The Plain Truth* magazine. She asked Charles what kind of Church it was that wouldn't follow through with a request from someone asking for their publications. Charles assured her that if she requested it she would receive it. As the two started dating she heard God's calling and understood the message.

Charles and Margaret were married on Oct. 4, 1975 and continued living on Long Island. She continued to work for the phone company in their repair department until a timely buy-out became available for her to retire and become a full-time mom since family was always a priority to her.

In 1981 tragedy struck as her second daughter, Kyane Leigh, was born premature on March 12, and later died on March 21 from complications of her prematurity. The brethren of the Long Island congregation were a great support during her loss, especially her pastor, Frank McCrady, who gave her great comfort by assuring her that she will see her daughter again in the resurrection. God's plan was still at work for Margaret during this time and led to her being baptized in 1985.

They moved to Delaware in the fall of 1995 and she found work at Toys "R" Us in the front-end department and in the money room. She worked there for approximately 10 years. However, family came first, and she left to watch her grandchildren.

In the spring of 2010, Charles and Margaret heard God’s calling and felt the need to return to keeping the Sabbath and Holy Days that they had not kept since 1995. She served in the local congregation with set up and was the attendance keeper. She also served during the Feast of Tabernacles, being in charge of the Mother’s Room. In 2019 she was given the task of stage decorations, which she did with great pride. In 2021, she thought to do something different with the stage and after sharing her thoughts with Charles and her daughter Adina, she went to work bringing Isaiah 11:6-9 to fruition. Furry creatures were

obtained, starting with the wolf and lamb, leopard and kid, and continued all the way to the small child and cobra. Anyone who attended the Feast in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and Ocean City, Maryland, saw creativity at work.

Margaret liked to stay busy and productive, so she reentered the work force in 2012 as a medical records clerk for the Queen Anne’s County Pre-Release Detention Center. Wanting to be closer to home she obtained her commercial driver’s license to drive a school bus and continued to do so until her death.

She is survived by her best friend, soulmate, husband

and partner through life of 48 years, Charles; children, Oriane (Daniel) Bowers of Sudlersville, Maryland; Adina (Neal) Brownawell of Camden, Delaware; Charles Palmonka and fiancé Christina Roach of Clayton, Delaware; sister, Christine (David) Gasparri of Poughkeepsie, New York; and grandchildren, Andrew Palmonka, Isabelle (Bradley) Forsyth, Romin Bowers and Kyanna Palmonka.

David William Ritter

Long-time Church member David William Ritter of the North Canton, Ohio, congregation died peacefully at home, surrounded by his fam-

ily on Feb. 1, 2024 at the age of 81. David was a loving husband of his wife Linda for over 60 years. He and Linda were blessed with four children and six grandchildren. David was called into the Church back in early 1970 and along with his wife Linda, baptized in March of 1971. Since that time, David faithfully served the brethren of the Akron area for over 52 years. David enjoyed a long and successful career in the automotive business and retired as the head of quality control for the Ford Motor Company. David had a passion for dirt bikes and airplanes. He loved sharing this passion

of racing dirt bikes with his children and also obtained his pilot’s license in the early '90s. David touched many lives and will be greatly missed.**UN**

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

Southern California Weekend Enjoyed by 116 Women



Attendance this year was 116, about 40 percent from outside the Southern California area.

“God Will See Us Through” was the theme for the 21st Women’s Enrichment Weekend held from Jan. 26-28, 2024, at the Embassy Suites in Santa Ana and sponsored by the Orange County, California, congregation. In attendance were 116 ladies with about 40 percent coming from outside the southern California area, including 22 trekking over from Arizona, and a few who came from other parts of California and other states. We had 22 who had never attended here previously.

Many arrived on Friday and settled in to relax and get together with friends. Our event officially began on Sabbath morning with church services. After three inspiring special music selections (vocal solos by Laura Wallauch and Ingrid Helge and a 11-member Women’s Ensemble), Frank Fish, pastor of the Los Angeles and Bakersfield congregations, gave the sermon “What is Your Status with God?”

The theme was explored and developed throughout the various presentations. Deborah Barr served as our

moderator for the weekend. Kristina Fogelson had a main presentation on “The Author and Finisher of Our Faith” with analogies from her hiking experiences. Kerry Lisman followed with “From Darkness to Light” as she shared lessons she learned after the death of her husband a few years ago. After a break, Sherie Stores moderated an interactive discussion focusing on our favorite go-to scriptures when we seek God’s help and comfort. The last speaker that afternoon was Caty Seiglie, who gave a humorous PowerPoint presentation: “Climb Every Mountain . . . or Not?” about the terrifying experience years ago of when she and her husband were traveling by van on what at the time was considered the deadliest road in the world (in Bolivia). Their survival of this ordeal was a clear case of God’s protection in times of danger.

In the evening, after our group enjoyed a delicious catered Mexican buffet by the Embassy, the rest of the evening was free for purchasing raffle

items and fellowshiping.

On Sunday morning, three ladies (Manuela Brill, Karen Werstiuk and Sandy Messer) shared valuable lessons learned in their lives. An interactive discussion was led by Elaine Carlisle that focused on God seeing us through in our lives.

On Sunday afternoon, after a deli sandwich group buffet, we enjoyed two presentations: Rocio Gonzalez spoke on “The Storms within Seasons” followed by Sylvia Kennedy on “Disengage Autopilot.”

We again had a fundraiser raffle this year. From the raffle proceeds and direct donations, \$3,015 was raised to fund a women’s weekend event in Guatemala. As an added bonus, many of our ladies took home some very nifty gifts from the raffle.

The ladies left the weekend uplifted and thankful to be able to be together again and ready to move forward in their Christian lives, focusing on the promises of God and God seeing us through.

Jean Updegraff



Group of young adult attendees.



Coleen Moriarty and Sherie Stores



Rocio Gonzalez, Doris Haller and Ingrid Helge



Presenters at this year’s women’s weekend

Salt Lake City Member Honored



L-R: Retired Col. Summers, Robert Roy, Rena Roy (Robert's daughter)

A Salt Lake City UCG member and our dear friend, Mr. Robert Roy, age 99, was honored with a beautiful Quilt of Valor from the Quilts of Valor Foundation, a Cold War medal from

retired Col. Summers of the U.S. Army, and a folded U.S.A. flag from the American Legion for his service during World War II as a medic with the 13th Field Hospital following front lines.

The ceremony was held on Sunday, Nov. 5, 2023, in Roy, Utah, and coordinated by the Golden Spike Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, a service organization dedicated to caring for veterans and preserving American monuments. The Quilts of Valor Foundation's mission is to cover service members and veterans touched by war with comforting and healing quilts. Mr. Roy and his daughter, Rena, deeply appreciated this gesture.

Also in attendance were his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Those of us blessed to know Mr. Roy know he is a wise man with a spirit of kindness and a wonderful sense of humor. He is cherished and loved by his family, friends and the Salt Lake City brethren.

Here is his fascinating World War II history:

Mr. Roy served in the U.S. Army as a medic in the 13th Field Hospital. The 13th specialized in treating chest and belly wounds. The Field Hospitals followed the front lines. They stayed about 30 miles behind the lines to be close enough to treat patients quickly and get them back to the front. Each field hospital took turns at the front, leapfrogging each other as the front line advanced or as they reached capacity of wounded.

- Mr. Roy was barely 20 years old when his hospital landed during the morning hours of June 8, 1944, on the beaches of Normandy. It was D-Day plus two.
- He was only a few months older in December of 1944

when his hospital was assigned to the Allied lines in the Ardennes region during the Battle of the Bulge.

- In February 1945, the Allies gathered in Groesbeek and Nijmegen in The Netherlands to begin the largest offensive initiated on Dutch soil, and the 13th Field Hospital was with them. This battle effectively put an end to the war in Europe.

As is Mr. Roy's tender nature, he told us that he didn't deserve such honor because all he did was help soldiers get better. But his daughter assured him that because of his service, many young men recovered from their injuries and eventually returned home to their families. Mr. Roy was baptized in 1972 and will turn 100 years old in May. **UN**

Northwest Family Weekend

The Northwest Family Weekend, held in Portland, Oregon, from Dec. 22-25, 2023, was a resounding success. From as far away as Texas, 280 people came to the Pacific Northwest to enjoy time with brethren away from the world.

A meet and greet event started the weekend on Friday night. Sabbath began with Bible studies for teens and families in the morning, followed by services in the afternoon with a large choir performing special music, while teen and family dances highlighted the activities for Saturday night.

Sunday included volleyball and seminars along with food and fellowship during the day. A "minute to win it" pizza party Sunday night wrapped up the weekend.

The many positive comments and expressions of gratitude by attendees this year were encouraging to all those who put in so much work to make the event a success. We are all looking forward to what's in store for next year's Northwest Family Weekend!

Ken Loucks



Winter Family Weekend



From Dec. 22-26, 2023 in Hamilton, Ohio, the annual Winter Family Weekend was held at a brand-new location. With 1,237 brethren in attendance, the Church rented the spacious Champion Mill facility for services, events and seminars. Most members stayed in the Warehouse Hotel or nearby Marriott. Just across the street from Champion Mill Conference Center, the Spooky Nook Sports facility was the convenient new location for volleyball, basketball, pickleball, children's games and many other fun activities.

Friday night brought brethren together with a dessert and coffee social. On the Sabbath morning, four short seminars covered a variety of inspiring topics. Afternoon Sabbath services featured a special music presentation with four selections, followed by a sermon by Gary Petty. That evening, several fun events for all ages were provided. These included a Jelly

Live show, a young adult hang-out at a brewery and a cards and games room for everyone.

On Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, scheduled volleyball and basketball games were held at the sports facility. On Sunday and Monday, seminars were held in the Champion Mill facility, and in the evenings, a variety of events brought brethren together. These events included a dress boutique, board and card games, family Olympics, a jam session and a family dance.

After a wonderful weekend of fellowship and spiritual rejuvenation, brethren look forward to taking what they learned this year as they continue to run in faith.

Heidi Braun

Additional Photos

To view more photos from this event, please see the gallery in the Jan.-Feb. 2024 issue of *United News*.

GN

The Good News

The Mustard Seed, the Mountain and the Mulberry Tree

A little faith can go a long way.

by Mike Cook

Have you ever seen a mountain move? Or a mulberry tree that was relocated into the sea? Speaking literally, probably not. But when we consider the meaning of Christ's instructions, we can see how a little faith can go a long way. We'll discuss moving mountains and mulberry trees, but first, let's consider the significance of a tiny seed.

A mustard seed

In Matthew 17:20, Jesus said "I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

A mustard seed is between 1 and 2 millimeters in size, but it can grow to be a 9-foot bush or a 30-foot tree. Matthew 13:31 refers to the mustard seed growing into a tree, so it's likely this highlights that something tiny has great potential.

Barnes commentary states that the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds. The mustard seed, though tiny, produces the largest of all herbs. If a tiny seed can grow to be a 30-foot tree, even the smallest faith, when genuine, can result in the greatest miracles. This can fill us with hope!

A mountain

What mountain would the disciples have thought of when Jesus spoke about moving one? It was likely the mountain referred to earlier in the chapter from the transfiguration, which could have been Mt. Hermon or Mt. Tabor. We are not sure, but it helps us understand Christ's words better when we put it into the context of the day. Mt. Hermon is the highest mountain in the area, standing at 9,200 feet, and is just across from Israel's northern border.

The mountain in this verse, however, is not a literal mountain. It is something that is considered a huge difficulty. According to Barclay's commentary, a regularly-used phrase for great teachers was "mountain remover" or "uprooter or pulverizer of mountains," and it meant "to accomplish extraordinary results." God can help us solve any problem if we take it to Him and are ready to accept His guidance.

Binyamin Melish/Pexels



There was a man who attempted to move a mountain on his own strength. Herod, a megalomaniac who named all four of his sons Herod, was known for his incredible building projects—the second temple, Masada, Ceasarea Maritime and Herodium. When Christ's disciples were listening to His instruction, they may have thought of Herodium, which was manmade with effort over time. Herod wanted his burial site to be taller than Jerusalem, so it would look down on the city. He essentially built a mountain by moving tons of rocks on top of a hill to make it taller. He accomplished this, finishing with a height 13 meters taller than Jerusalem. He wasn't liked in Jerusalem, so would go here to get away. Also, Herod wanted people to mourn when he died, instead of celebrating, so he gave orders that upon his death, dozens of favorite citizens would be killed to ensure mourning. This cruel ruler certainly did not have the right reasons for moving a mountain!

The type of mountain-moving Christ was referring to was not self-serving like Herod's. Christ moved mountains when He healed people, such as the boy with epilepsy in Matthew 17:15. Christ's disciples were unable to cure him, so after healing the boy, Christ shared His instructions about faith the size of a mustard seed (verse 20). Healing is by faith.

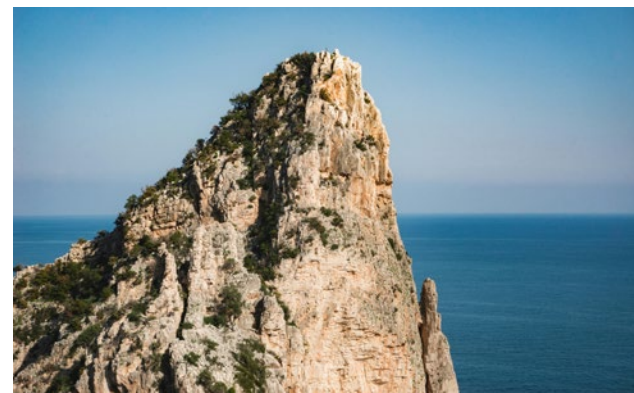
A mulberry tree

In another verse, Jesus speaks instead of a mulberry tree. "So the Lord said, 'If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, "Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea," and it would obey you'" (Luke 17:6).

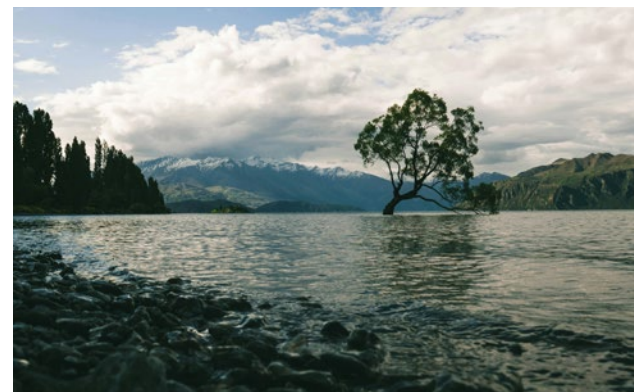
Moving a tree of this size would be no small feat. Mulberry trees can grow to 35 feet tall, and their root system spreads to be 50 feet wide, so not only would the tree be tall and cumbersome, but it would also be difficult to uproot.

The disciples would have probably been thinking of the Sea of Galilee as that is what they were most familiar with. The deepest point of the Sea of Galilee is 141 feet, so depending on where you planted the tree,

Ehud Neuhaus/Unsplash



Christian/Unsplash



it could end up fully submerged. The thought that just a little bit of faith could rip up this huge tree and put it in the sea would have amazed the disciples.

The context of Christ's example, using the mulberry tree, was a conversation about forgiveness. In Luke 17:1-4, Jesus speaks of forgiving one another seven times every day—in essence, what He is indicating is a continual willingness to forgive, no matter how often we are wronged (see also Matthew 18:21-35). Remember that the forgiveness we receive, through Christ's sacrifice, is a greater miracle than any amount of forgiveness we have to offer, so that should inspire in us a willingness to forgive!

The real power behind mustard seed faith

Jesus' instruction on the mustard seed followed His disciples' request, "increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). Sometimes we think we need to have faith like a mountain, and with that, we can move a mustard seed, but if we fall into this thinking, we have the equation wrong. God has already moved mountains—He created them! He can plant a mulberry tree anywhere He wants and all He is asking for is something comparatively small.

Christ's sacrifice is greater than we can imagine. Miracles such as healing and forgiveness require God's power. Our part is to have faith, but the heavy lifting—the impossible task—has been completed because of Christ's sacrifice. Jesus indicates that even a very slight real faith, which He compares to the mustard seed, would be sufficient to accomplish what seemed impossible. Will we try to move mountains on our own strength, like Herod, or on God's strength, by faith? **GN**

Meditation: God's Power Tool We Need to Use More Effectively

God has given us four spiritual power tools in our Christian toolbox. We're most familiar with prayer, Bible study and fasting. One tool is really powerful, but for many of us, underutilized.

by Robert Curry

Biblical meditation is so worthy of our time and attention because “the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). That's just scratching the surface of the Bible's power: “the Holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-17). So many powerful reasons why we should meditate!

The Bible is the Word of truth (John 17:17) and one of God's convicting agents. The other is the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of truth” which will “guide you into all truth...and tell you things to come” (16:13). No wonder Paul told Timothy to “stir up the gift of God which is in you...For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

If we are not meditating as much as we should God is always eager to stir us up! For effective meditation, we should first ask God to guide us by the Holy Spirit. Talk about power potential! It's just waiting to be unleashed by diligently studying and pondering God's life-changing instruction book.

Clearing up misunderstanding

Biblical meditation is not to be confused with various New Age Eastern transcendental meditation practices that originated in Hinduism and Buddhism from India and China and became popular in the 1970s. “Beyond Today” and “New Age” may appear like similar visions but seeking first the Kingdom and righteousness of God (Matthew 6:33) is beyond comparison with Satan's counterfeit practices that are merely rooted in this “present evil age” (Galatians 1:4).

Aren't you glad that biblical meditation does not require twisting oneself into pretzel positions! And

rather than trying to empty the mind in a trance-like state, biblical meditation aims to fill the mind through focused thinking about how to build a personal relationship with God the Father and become one with Him—not with the universe or Mother Nature. God has planned a thrilling future we can look forward to and think about!

Biblical meditation is desiring the mind of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5) and “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Our future soon-coming Savior wants our mind engaged, deeply appreciating that our Father has called us to Their eternal family.

Instead of chanting a mantra (a silent meaningless sound or vibration) to free up “inner power” through self-discovery and enlightenment, biblical meditation realizes that Jesus warned against vain repetition (Matthew 6:7) and, though God in the flesh, said, “I can of Myself do nothing” (John 5:30). He said His Father gave Him what to say and did the miracles through Him. God's children want their Father and Older Brother to come live in them through the Holy Spirit and replace their selfish human nature with godly love—unselfish outgoing concern.

Myles Tan/Unsplash



Biblical meditation is desiring the mind of Jesus Christ and “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”

The Psalms contain the most instruction about meditation

Psalm 19:7-14, penned by David, testifies to the value of the law, testimony, statutes, commandments and judgments (verses 7-9). “Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them is great reward. Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults...[and] presumptuous sins” (verses 11-13). Wise meditation welcomes correction.

David concluded, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14). Meditation of his heart was square on the mind of the man after God's own heart! Is it on ours?

Psalm 119 has 176 verses—many about meditation—extolling God's law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, words, ordinances and judgments. Verse 1 kicks off with “walk in the law of the Lord.”

My go-to place conducive to meditation is the Greenhorn Trail about a half mile from our home—quiet, peaceful, with hardly anyone on the trail, where I can look up at the majestic hogbacks and God's creation at different seasons of the year. Jesus went to the mountains to get away from it all. Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening. David marveled at the night sky and pondered “what is man?”

Take note of verse 11, “Your word I have hidden in my heart.” This will enable you to meditate when you don't have a Bible handy. Challenging times are coming when we will be thankful for any verses we have memorized.

Night and day

Verse 97 tells when to meditate: “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” Psalm 63:6 covers the rest of the hours, “When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.”

Learning to meditate when you can't sleep is easily the best opportunity for improving the use of this Christian power tool. If you can't find anything to think about, try recalling a passage of scripture,

For effective meditation, we should first ask God to guide us by the Holy Spirit.

such as Revelation 4, which speaks about God's throne room and the incredible power at His command. Another idea is to follow Jesus' model prayer outline. So, tossing and turning? Better than counting sheep, toss the covers and turn the pages of your Bible, or recall these verses that you have read and perhaps studied that day, contemplating on those as you let God fill your mind with understanding. Meditation is the tool that allows God to “connect all the dots” so we see how scriptures relate to each other and the beauty of God's plan.

Meditation must lead us to doing

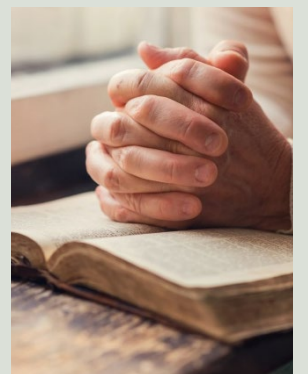
Psalm 1:1-3 and Joshua 1:8 confirm the value of meditating during the day and at night but emphasize a crucial aspect: “whatever he does shall prosper” and “that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.” Joshua would powerfully lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. We need this on our march to the Kingdom! Effective meditation will help Jesus find us “so doing” (Matthew 24:46).

Now consider how combining prayer and fasting with meditation and Bible study can increase their effectiveness. Jesus said some things come out only with prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21). On a fast day, it would be good to spend extra time in meditation, as well as prayer and Bible study.

How can we thank God for such wonderful power tools? “Whatever things are true...noble...just...pure...lovely...of good report, if there is any virtue and...anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8). **GN**

What's On Your Mind?

Learn more about meditation by reading this in-depth article.



The Most Effective Fellowship Possible

How can we use our time together at Sabbath services to edify one another?

by Tim Duncan

The Bible says to edify one another. How often do we discuss with brethren what we have been praying about, or what we have been studying? How often do we talk about the lessons we've learned through trials?

Prepare

A good practice is to prepare ahead of time for fellowship. Think about what you will share with people. Plan to talk to each other for at least five minutes, covering deeper subjects, rather than surface-level topics, such as what we ate. If you are able, arrive early for services and/or be one of the last people to leave.

Share

Talk about the messages after services. Consider what Scripture says about those who converse together on spiritual topics, "Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name" (Malachi 3:16). In addition to the messages, talk about a biblical topic you have been studying or meditating on recently.

Consider sharing some of the things you have been praying about. It can be encouraging to others when you share that you have been praying for them, and you can also ask if there is anything they would like you to pray about. Make it a point to talk to everybody in the congregation over the course of weeks and months. We don't want anyone to fall through the cracks. Even an infant can be impacted by us. Even something as small as remembering children's names can make a big impact.

In Dale Carnegie's book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, he says that if one learns only one thing from his book it should be to concentrate on the other person's point of view (pp. 74-75). Carnegie said that it is good to allow the other person to talk about themselves (p. 123) and that he tries to talk about himself less and pay attention to the speaker (p. 190), listening "intently" (p. 115).

Edify

When you do talk it's good to avoid speaking your own words on the Sabbath, but rather speak God's words (Isaiah 58:13). Our commanded assembly on the Sabbath is a great opportunity to improve our fellowship skills, as we seek breakthroughs in our relationships!

If you want the best and most effective fellowship possible and to impact people with what you say, use church services as an opportunity to edify each other! **GN**

Unsplash



Parenting with Love

Do your children feel your love? Do they feel safe emotionally?

by Joy Porter

There was a time when I would not have appreciated his gift because I was focused on the wrong things. It was a tiny key chain made of craft foam, paper and tape. In childish pencil writing, complete with a misspelling, he had scribbled "We CONECT." My eyes filled with tears when my nine-year-old son handed this gift to me. It made me deeply satisfied to know that he felt connected to me.

I have always loved my children, but could they feel my love? Did they trust me and feel safe emotionally? Or was I only focused on outward behavior and appearances? These are critical questions parents can ask of themselves. It can be easy to judge a child harshly as he learns to control his emotions, especially when we are being pushed to the limit by his behavior. But treating a child that way can never have good results in the long run, even if outward compliance is achieved. It's vital that we learn to parent in a loving way.

Secure In God

So often, we are not able to help our kids feel safe because we are living in insecurity ourselves. If we feel like a failure, sometimes we unknowingly take it out on our kids. Yelling and shaming are obvious examples of poor parenting, but sometimes it can take form in less obvious ways such as working too much or being overly controlling.

Between trying to launch a career, keeping up with bills, the stress of social media comparison, overcoming personal issues from childhood and more, it can feel impossible to actually feel secure and confident. The key is not that we get to a place where we never

feel insecure anymore; rather, it is recognizing that in our human frame, we have weaknesses (Psalm 103:14).

Instead of hiding these concerns, we need to bring them to God (1 Peter 5:7). He calls us His children and He already sent Jesus Christ to die in our stead for our sins. His love for us is almost incomprehensible. Perhaps we shy away from really considering the depth of His love because it feels safer to instead dwell on what we can do for God. However, dwelling daily on the love of God is transformational. A parent who loves God and has inner safety in the love of God is a secure parent.

In her book, *Love Centered Parenting*, author Crystal Paine discusses the concept of "living as loved." That is, when we remember that we are loved by

God, how do we conduct our lives?

"'Loved me' would stop stressing over saying things perfectly, making sure people liked me, or psychoanalyzing people's responses. I would . . . confidently love others well . . . When my kids were arguing amongst themselves and saying unkind words, I asked myself, What would 'loved me' do? Not by feeling frustrated at myself that I had apparently dropped the ball in parenting my kid or snapping at my kids with angry words like 'I expect better from you!' Or worse, yelling at them for yelling— anyone else been a hypocrite like that? 'Loved me' would stop, take a deep breath and calmly address the situation" (pages 87-88, Bethany House Publishers, 2022).

Focusing on the love of God does not mean that we stop repenting or recognizing our sins. It is instead a posture of security in God, His promises and His plan for our life. This type of security leads to parents who can parent without needing their child to behave a certain way in order to make them look good.

It's Not About You

There's nothing quite like the feeling of shame when your child misbehaves, especially in a public setting in front of people whose opinion you really care about (like church!) In the process of parenting, kids are going to do a lot of things that embarrass you. Even though it is the parent's job to discipline and teach children, in a certain sense, it's important to detach from your child's behavior. They are an individual who will do and say things that you will need to work on with them; however, those things don't necessarily reflect badly on you. Remember that your worth is in being a child of God, not in the behavior of your child. Remain calm and don't obsess about what other people may think.

Most importantly, don't hamstring the relationship with your child by becoming rigid and authoritarian in order to have children who look good on the outside and have outside compliance but are inwardly angry or disheartened because they sense their behavior is just for show. Raising children is messy and you will have good days and bad days, but that doesn't mean you are a bad parent. It's just life raising a living, breathing child!

Continued on page 10

Parenting with Love
Continued from page 9

Don't Be In A Rush

If it sounds like parenting this way will take a lot of time, you're right. As much as possible, pare down your schedule so that you have time and mental en-

strates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NIV).

As parents, we need to keep showing our love to our kids, even during the hard times. There can be times when a child is not very pleasant to be around, but parents must always strive to see the good in their children. Remember, you set the tone for the relationship every day, making sure that yesterday's frustrations do not bleed into the next day. Start the day with a big hug and



Always see your child in light of the potential they have. Make them feel loved. See the good.

ergy to really communicate with your children and to respond with love and patience when issues come up. In general, families today are overscheduled. But all the activities in the world are not going to make up for the lack of a calm, self-controlled parent who is able to patiently teach God's ways in the moment (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Do you have time every day to greet your children, hug them and talk to them for a little while? It is really important to consciously make time to sit still and just be with your kids. Play games, let the dishes sit for a while, laugh and enjoy being together!

Be Supportive

Just as we can have character traits we struggle with all our lives, our children are often born with natural reactions that they do not plan. So it is important to parent from a posture of respect for them as a fel-

It is important to parent from a posture of respect for our children as fellow children of God with us.

low child of God with us. We should never mock our children (Ephesians 6:4). Instead, we should lovingly coach them. Sometimes discipline will need to be tough, but it should always be done privately, and it should be sandwiched in between loving words and hugs. The Bible says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him" (Psalm 103:13a, New International Version). Remember that your compassion should help your child to learn the compassion of God.

We must also parent from a posture of overarching unconditional love. The Bible says, "But God demon-

strate each time you see your child. Discipline the bad behavior but always see your child in light of the potential they have. Make them feel loved. See the good.

Helping Children Process Emotions

When one of my children was about six years old, she lost a helium balloon. She was holding it by the string when she accidentally let go and it drifted into the sky before I could stop it. She began to cry angrily and uncontrollably. I remember thinking my child is out of control! How can she ever expect to survive in the world if she emotionally overreacts to everything? I can't remember exactly what I said to her but it was probably along the lines of "Stop crying, you are getting out of control!"

Yes, children do need to learn self-control and how not to overreact emotionally; however, children also need to learn how to process their emotions. At her age and having never lost a balloon in this way before, my daughter had not yet learned how to calmly process this loss. This is where parents can use the skill of emotion coaching to help their child. The Bible says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Training a child to process their emotions over a lost balloon today will lead to a child who is better able to process emotions over a broken friendship as a teenager. There are many teenagers who struggle with their emotions, and it's a lot harder to coach *them* than it is to coach a small child. So put in the time while they are young—it's worth it.

In the book *Safe House* Joshua Straub, doctor of philosophy, explains: "There are two ways we can respond to our child's misbehaviors: (1) opening the door to our

child or (2) closing the door on their emotions. Closing the door is when we dismiss our child's emotions. Parents who routinely close the door may think negative emotions (like sadness and anger) are toxic for their child. They may reprimand a child for being upset, even if she doesn't act out. 'Go to your room until you can be happy,' they may say. 'I don't have time for your crabby attitude. Get over it and move on'" (*Safe House*, Waterbrook Press, 2015, pp. 114-115).

In the storm of a child's emotions, we parents can often just want it to be over now. But as much as possible, slow down and sit with the child for a bit. Do not allow any violence, but it is okay if a child needs to cry

Children need to learn self-control; however, they also need to learn how to process their emotions.

for a time. Emotions are not evil. God Himself experiences anger, sadness and frustration, and we are made in His image.

The Bible says, "Be angry, and do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26a). It is our job to teach children how to do this. The Bible does not say, "Always pretend you are never angry!" Even the Psalms, written by David, a man after God's own heart, are filled with negative emotions being expressed directly to God. Negative emotions are a part of being human and our children need tools to manage them.

So how do you handle a child's big emotions? You could move your child to a private location and say "Do you want a hug about that?" and you could hold your child while they cry. Not all children want to be touched when they are upset. In those cases, you can say, "I see you are upset and I am listening to you." In a reasonable amount of time, you can try to guide and direct your child to accept what went wrong and help them to work through solutions to their problems. It's so important to give children time and space to process their emotions and then place options in their hands concerning what to do with the emotions they are experiencing. This teaches emotional awareness, regulation and self-control.

It's vital we learn to parent in a way that models godly love.

There is no perfect way to coach your child in processing emotions. Often our own emotions almost overwhelm us at the sight of a child having a tantrum. So don't despair if you don't do this perfectly. In fact, when our emotions get the better of us as parents, it is very helpful to apologize to our children. There is a lot to respect in a parent who is humble enough to say they are sorry for yelling or losing their temper.

There is an old saying that if you listen to your children about the little things while they are little, they will confide in you about the big things when they are older. There is no place for condoning disrespectful and disobedient behavior, but as shown in the Psalms, there is a place for expressing emotions and being heard by a loving parent. Listen to your child now. Yes, have standards, rules and obedience, but do it in an emotionally safe way that opens the door of your child's heart to you.

In summary, do your children feel your love? Do they feel safe emotionally? We cannot be focused only on outward behavior and appearances. It's vital we learn to parent in a way that models godly love. I pray all the parents among us are successfully directing our children towards God and all He has to offer our families. **GN**

Picture Perfect and a Night of Karaoke!



After a delicious dinner social on Jan. 13, 2024, the Lexington, Kentucky, congregation enjoyed a fun-filled evening that began with an activity called "Picture Perfect." Mem-

bers of all ages brought a favorite picture or photograph to share and told the group why this image was special to them. They then tied the image to a scripture which they shared. Old family homes, various family and friend pictures, and fa-



vorite campsites were among the inspirational offerings. After sunset we then transitioned into an evening of karaoke, with some in costumes and special mood-lighting adding to the atmosphere. The sing-fest



started off with a trio called "The Sublimes" and one of their choreographed songs was "Stop! In the Name of Love." We had cowboy songs, love songs, folk songs and some just plain silly songs performed by local individual

members and small groups from ages 5-75. Even the "One Eyed, One Horned Flying Purple People Eater" entertained our group.

The children especially had fun performing and the audience was happy to sing along, clap and fully enjoy the evening. Between sets of five songs, there was a brief break when videos of old advertising jingles were played and we sang along to ditties like "Pop, pop, fizz, fizz, oh what a relief it is!" and "Give me a break, give me a break! Break me up a piece of that Kit Kat Bar!"

What a fun way to spend a cold winter evening! Members are already thinking about songs to sing at the next karaoke night!

Sue Whitlark

Tampa, Florida 50th Anniversary



The Tampa, Florida, congregation celebrated its 50th anniversary on Jan. 6, 2024 with a potluck social and a

special cake to commemorate this milestone. Prior to the potluck, Cathy Martin presented a summary of Tampa's unique



five-decade history. Two other original members, Carl Gennaro, Sr. and Jackie Southall, then reminisced about their memories from the early days, providing a very enjoyable walk down memory lane.

and patriarchs so foundational to the congregation and now awaiting the resurrection. An enlarged, three-part panoramic photo of the Tampa congregation—taken in 1980—was also on display.

Several display tables were covered with photo albums from events and activities throughout the past 50 years, many containing pictures of the matriarchs

It was wonderful to hear stories from the "old-timers" who had been around since the start of the Tampa, Florida, congregation. Our potluck provided an additional opportunity for everyone to talk about the history of our local congregation and the memories we treasure.

Our anniversary event made for an enjoyable evening for the Tampa members as they reflected on a very small part of the history of God's Church. As always, it was an honor to fellowship with long-time members who have remained faithful and continue to endure to the end.

Cathy Martin

Honoring Deceased Elders and Wives

Lee Chovan



Lee Chovan of the North Canton, Ohio, congregation and wife of deceased elder Milan Chovan, died Jan. 2, 2024, at age 90. She and Milan were married 62 years until his death in 2016.

Lee was very active in her local congregation, serving as a deaconess for over 50 years. During this time, she organized many church dinners, formal dances and socials. Lee had a passion for singing and music and often shared her talents by performing special music as well as singing at weddings on many occasions. Those who knew her are ever blessed by her fine example.

Lee is survived by two children, Paula McCrea and Doug Chovan, and two grandchildren, Melissa and Jason. **UN**

Jekyll Island Update



A number of questions have arisen due to no Feast site in Jekyll Island in 2024. With the intent to keep everyone informed, the future of Jekyll Island as a Feast is very questionable. They are indicating raising meeting space rental costs by \$75,000 and expecting most meals to be spent at the convention center rather than at restaurants or in condos/rental homes. As for 2024 and 2025 they claim to have mistakenly rented our dates to other groups although we should have had the first rights on available space. Specific questions, comments or suggestions can be directed to USFestival@ucg.org.

Australia



Set in the isolation of the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, Wombaroo provides the ideal venue for the annual Australian United Youth Camp. A total of 62 youth aged 11-18 assembled from around Australia, Malaysia (two), New Zealand (one), and the United Kingdom (one). Staff from around Australia, 27 in total, willingly gave of their time, experience and skills to ensure another successful and safe camp.

Building Godly Friendships

The structure of the camp program is established on the principle of building godly friendships. Many of the youth attend congregations where they may be the only young person, or one of just a few. Camp enables them to build friendships in a godly environment with like-minded youth.

The day-time activity schedule functions around a “teams” concept. Teams consisted of around 14 male and female campers who participated in all activities together. Each team had one male and one female “Team Leader” who are older campers. This role helps develop leadership within a safe environment. The team leaders received initial training as well as ongoing mentoring from staff.

The campers were separated into male and female dorms for the evening. These dorms were divided up into three age ranges: 11-13; 14-15; 16-18. Nightly dorm chats were directed more to the age of the campers. Staff assigned as dorm leaders were primarily on the job from 5 p.m. to 9 a.m. They then went to their assigned activities during the day.

Free time was scheduled right after lunch, and just before dinner. Campers had time to relax, talk or play games together. “Nine Square in the Air”

(a combination of volleyball and traditional nine square) is always popular! Various staff were involved with the campers during this free time.

This program encouraged and promoted positive, godly boy/girl friendships which are so vital to the future of the Church.

Christian Living

Christian living (CL) is the foundation of the camp program.

Following breakfast, each day began with a CL class based upon the theme, which was “Answer the Call” (Acts 2:39). The topics covered were: “What is the Call?”; “Are You Being Called?”; “Why Are You Called?”; “When Do You Answer the Call?”; “Why Answer the Call?” and “The Role of Faith in the Call.”

Boy and girl dorms of the same age range combined for CL lessons targeted to their level. The last day brought all campers and staff together for a CL Wrap-Up.

Sabbath Scenarios

“Sabbath Scenarios” occurred on Sabbath morning. Staff members acted out a “contrary” scenario. The campers—divided into mixed groups of nine to 10 campers—provided a biblical response to the dilemma presented.

Scenarios included: “I am not so insecure to believe that God exists”; “There is no ‘one way’ to worship God”; “It is just a ‘computer game’! I can still discern the difference between the holy and the unholy”; “My outward appearance does not matter—God looks on my heart”; “I know God wants me to serve, but I do not have that gift.”

It was encouraging to witness the biblical knowledge of the youth and their ability to search out an answer. Staff were always on hand to provide a guiding hand.



Sabbath Service

The sermonette, presented by an older camper, addressed the benefits of compounding returns. The more we put into our calling, the greater the long-term benefit. Kobe Bryant put in extra time training to be the best. We too must put in extra time to build our relationship with God to produce exponentially greater results into eternity.

The sermon spoke to the preciousness of “The Call,” challenging the youth to answer the Call. The speaker recounted his own life experience in being called, with his mobile phone intermittently ringing throughout the message. Many of us recall how God was calling us and working with us to encourage us to answer the call. The sermon concluded with the speaker answering the phone and stating to the campers, “It’s for you!”

Monday Night Discussion “Delayed Gratification”

Beginning with “The Marshmallow Test,” campers—divided into mixed groups—identified the messages society uses to entice them to satisfy their desires now. They also considered biblical heroes of faith who delayed gratification. “The Call” requires us to “counter the culture” by controlling our desires and waiting on God to provide us with the precious promises He guarantees.

God offers the greatest reward—called “The Promise.”



Marshmallows are a simple way of teaching an eternal principle.

Activities

Speech Class occurs on day one, providing campers with basic instruction in public speaking. This is preparatory to the grand Speech Night! Based on the Spokesman’s Club format, toastmasters welcome everyone and introduce the vocal exercises, jokes (to warm up the audience) and then a vibrant 30-minute topics session. The speaking session consisted of six campers presenting speeches, each being evaluated by a fellow camper. They have three days to prepare! Speakers presented on topics ranging from Robert the Bruce to the wonders of God’s animal creation.

Skit Night produced its usual embarrassing experience for some staff who were inserted into a modern interpretation of a biblical story. While being an unrehearsed actor in the play, they must figure out the biblical story.

Other activities that kept the campers (and staff) active included games night, fireside chat, a dance, art, bush skills, speedball, softball, dodgeball, tennis, raft building, high ropes, vertical playpen, the final night dinner/dance and the challenge hike.

The Challenge Hike took a biblical theme into the Aussie bush. Staff took on characters related to the theme and each team negotiated a range of confronting challenges to solve Bible-based riddles to complete the task. And God intervened to ensure the daily forecast of heavy rain fell somewhere else!

To God’s Glory

All that is accomplished at camp is to God’s glory. It is His blessing that makes the camp program so successful and enduring. It is His Way that informs the attitudes of staff and campers. We give grateful thanks to God for His wondrous blessings in making this camp a safe and meaningful experience for all.

Stephen Clark

Ghana

The United Youth Camp program in Ghana made its return after a three-year long absence following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hosted on the campus of the University of Education, Winneba, we had a total of 30 youth campers from the congregations in Accra, Agona, Cape Coast, Elmina, Kumasi, Winneba and Takoradi, as well as 22 volunteer staff members. Camp was held from Dec. 24-30, 2023.

Campers were grouped into two teams of 15—Team Red and Team Blue. For four highly engaging days, they were taken through archery, basketball, computing, cycling, team challenge and volleyball.

Compass check in the mornings and Christian living messages in the evenings made sure to drum home the main theme, “Race to Your Crown” via daily sub-themes such as “Called to Race” and “Obtain Your Crown” to achieve a seamless balance of physical and spiritual learning.

On the fifth and final day of activities came the hour of reckoning when both teams were pitted against each other in all the activities to prove themselves. It made for an intense and entertaining day as both teams strived to reach their physical crown.

Camp was concluded by a combined Sabbath service with

the Winneba congregation after which, later that night, an awards ceremony was held to encourage the campers for putting in such admirable hard work. The movie “Overcomer” was screened at the tail end to illustrate qualities of the theme “Race to Your Crown.”

Papa Ekow Ferguson-Aikins



Kenya



The United Church of God Youth Camp in Ogembo, Kenya, was held from Dec. 10-16, 2023, and was a transformative



experience for attendees. The camp covered diverse areas of instruction, such as Christian living, time management, career talks, Bible study, music and arts and crafts.

Nestled in the scenic Ogembo countryside, campers embraced communal living in tents, fostering a sense of unity. Each evening, the camp came alive with the warm glow of a campfire, a cherished ritual that provided an intimate space for fellowship and reflection.

Ogembo's abundant agricultural offerings became a focal point as campers and volunteers delighted in roasting maize over the open flame, creating a memorable snack time experience.

The core of the camp's success lay in its commitment to nurturing both spiritual and practical growth. The comprehensive program allowed participants to delve into the teachings of the Bible while also engaging in discussions on Christian principles. The interaction between campers and volunteers was a testament to the camp's success in fostering meaningful connections.

In summary, the United Church of God Youth Camp in Ogembo left a lasting impact, blending spiritual enrichment with practical life skills, all within the picturesque backdrop of Ogembo's natural beauty.

Simon Nganga

Winter Camp

This year 130 campers, 63 staff and 12 mini-campers gathered in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, to have our biggest Winter Camp ever. We are so thankful for God's blessing and protection on camp as well as for all the staff that came to serve this year.

Each year camp is a special time that allows us to put away the distractions around us and focus on building relationships with one another and to grow our relationship with God in “The Zone.” As we go through our activities, which are a mix of indoor and outdoor activities, we practice living God's way of life surrounded by people with the same goals. It is a very special time and a blessing for everyone who gets to attend.

We have sport activities

(basketball, volleyball, field sports and broomball) in which the campers get to develop skills, teamwork, and encourage one another. We also have other activities (escape room, amazing race, dance and Bible class) in which campers get to work together, have fun, learn new skills and deepen their knowledge of the Bible. Winter Camp is a slower pace than our summer camps, which allows for more “hanging out” and fellowship time.

We used the same theme for Winter Camp as the summer camps did for 2023, “Race to Your Crown.” Because most of the campers have gone to a summer camp it gives us a unique opportunity to reinforce what they already learned and to dive

into it on an even deeper level. It is such a beneficial way to finish the year as we encouraged them to continue their race and be dedicated to God's calling.

Unfortunately, the weather didn't cooperate with us and we had significantly less snow than prior years, but our campers and staff made the best of it with great attitudes all week. We are thankful for the great campers

and staff we had as well as the prayers and financial support we had so we could run our wonderful camp program.

After camp concluded I have heard from many parents and campers sharing how much of an impact camp had on them and how it gave them the motivation and desire to deepen their relationship with God.

Aaron Creech



Teens

What does the Lord require? If God had a job posting, what would it look like? Find out in the UCG short film, "Paper."



Young Adults

How do we respond to the opportunities God has given us? In the sermon "Crafted by God," Lee Massie explains how they help us prepare for the Kingdom.



Seniors

Learning lessons from growing older in the faith is essential to our spiritual development and preparation to serve God and others throughout the Millennium.



Couples

What we experience and learn in human marriage has implications for the future and eternity that we must consider. Are you maturing into the ultimate marriage?



Singles

If limited options or geographic considerations have left you considering whether or not to date outside the Church, here are some points to consider.




Church Family

Abraham and his family are an example that God works through families. Though they often sinned, they were a repentant family that demonstrated a lot of faith.




CHILDREN'S CORNER
Famous Animals of the Bible


Write the names of the animals from the New King James Version on the blank lines. Then unscramble the letters in boxes to complete the scripture at the bottom.



__ □ __ □ __ (Numbers 22:28)


__ □ □ __ □ __ (Genesis 3:1)






__ __ □ □ __ (Daniel 6:22)


__ __ __ □ □ __ □ __ (Matthew 10:29)





__ __ __ __ (Matthew 17:27)

__ □ □ □ __ (Leviticus 16:7)



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(Ecclesiastes 12:1)

Parents

Christian parents should raise their children with a biblical worldview. Learn three ways to help your children foster a proper relationship with God in this message.



Grandparents

Grandparents can be instrumental by instilling true and moral values in children. How can you be more involved in your grandchildren's lives?



Students

Today's difficult economic times require outstanding job search skills. An interview with a career counselor sheds light on how one can successfully find a job.





The 2023 United Youth Camp (UYC) season officially concluded at the end of Winter Camp on January 2. It was another successful year due to God's blessings, dedicated staff, wonderful campers and the financial support of the Church and God's people. In 2023 we had 460 preteen campers, 651 teen campers, 478 preteen staff and 400 teen staff. We anticipate the numbers will continue to increase in the coming years.

Preparations for 2024 are well underway. The annual camp directors planning meeting, held in late October, was a hybrid of Zoom connections and in-person attendees. Additional ongoing Zoom meetings, emails and phone calls continue after the annual meeting as we prepare and plan for the upcoming camps. The teen camp directors have already written the Christian living daily outlines and will continue to spend time refining them since they serve as the backbone of our teen camp programs.



Along with all the physical and spiritual planning that takes place is the reality that camp is expensive. There is a significant financial cost to run the UYC program due to a number of factors. All of the camps are facing increased facility costs and rising food prices. We also have families within the Church who need financial assistance to send their kids to camp and, when possible, we subsidize their tuition through scholarships.

Additionally, as time goes on, some expensive equipment needs to be repaired or replaced. Also, as the number of children in the Church continue to grow, we occasionally out-grow our facilities, as is the case for one camp that moved this year. Finding a new place is not easy. We lost our pre-teen camp in Tennessee and have been unsuccessful (so far) in finding an affordable replacement. Also, we continue to look for a camp to purchase, if that is God's will. As you can see, there are many costs associated with the UYC program, so any donations are truly appreciated.



Everyone who serves in the UYC program recognizes how much God cares for all of His people and especially His youth, since they are the future of God's Church and future leaders of His congregations. The UYC program is an extension of that love and care. We strive to model God's way of life and His love for them, to help them see the vision of God's Kingdom and His plans for them. We challenge them to take ownership of their calling and relationship with God.

Everyone serving in the camp program invests time, money and energy because it is so worth it. It is valuable to help the youth grow in their relationship with God. We get to live in "the Zone" for several days, putting God's laws and principles into practice in a very practical way to show that God's way works. It is a safe haven from the challenges of the world, a time of peace and calm from the spiritual attacks that are all around us. Our camps are an invaluable program for all that are involved in them. There truly is nothing like it.

If you are interested in investing and contributing to help further the UYC program, please consider donating to the UYC Camp Fund. In doing so, you are investing in the lives of the youth in the Church. You will have received a letter in the mail from President Rick Shabi with an included envelope. You can send donations in the provided envelope or online at donate.ucg.org by selecting "Youth Programs" or "Youth Camp Facility." We thank you in advance for your support!

Len Martin (National Camp Director) and Aaron Creech (Assistant National Camp Director)



BEYOND TODAY

March 3-9	5 Steps to Real Change, Part 4: The Gift of the Holy Spirit Presented by Darris McNeely Literature offered: <i>The Power of the Holy Spirit</i>
March 10-16	The Way, Part 5: When a Church Dies Presented by Gary Petty Literature offered: <i>The Church Jesus Built</i>
March 17-23	Russia and Bible Prophecy Presented by Darris McNeely Literature offered: <i>Russia and Bible Prophecy</i>
March 24-30	God's Holy Day Plan Presented by Steve Myers Literature offered: <i>God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind</i>
March 31-April 6	The Ten Commandments: From Obedience to Virtue Presented by Gary Petty Literature offered: <i>The Ten Commandments</i>
April 7-13	Should I Celebrate Easter? Presented by Steve Myers Literature offered: <i>Easter: The Rest of the Story</i>
April 14-20	5 Steps to Real Change, Part 5: Two Questions Waiting for an Answer? Presented by Darris McNeely Literature offered: <i>Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion</i>
April 21-27	What Was Nailed to the Cross? Presented by Steve Myers Literature offered: <i>The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God's Law?</i>
April 28-May 4	Love Is Love? Or God Is Love? Presented by Gary Petty Literature offered: <i>What Does the Bible Teach About Grace?</i>



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Upcoming Women's Weekend

Sylvan Lake, Alberta, Canada
Putting God First in Our Lives—April 5-7, 2024

Join us for our Women's Enrichment Weekend in Sylvan Lake, Alberta—April 5-7, 2024, hosted by the Northern Alberta and Prince George, congregations.

We are planning a weekend of learning, laughing, sharing meals together, encouraging one another and bonding as we fellowship with other women of like minds and explore the benefits, challenges and real-life experiences of Putting God First in Our Lives!

Information and registration: <https://women.ucg.org/enrichment-weekends/sylvan-lake-alberta-2024>

For more information about upcoming women's weekends, visit women.ucg.org.

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BY THE NUMBERS

252

Campers attended UYC winter/Southern Hemisphere summer camps around the world