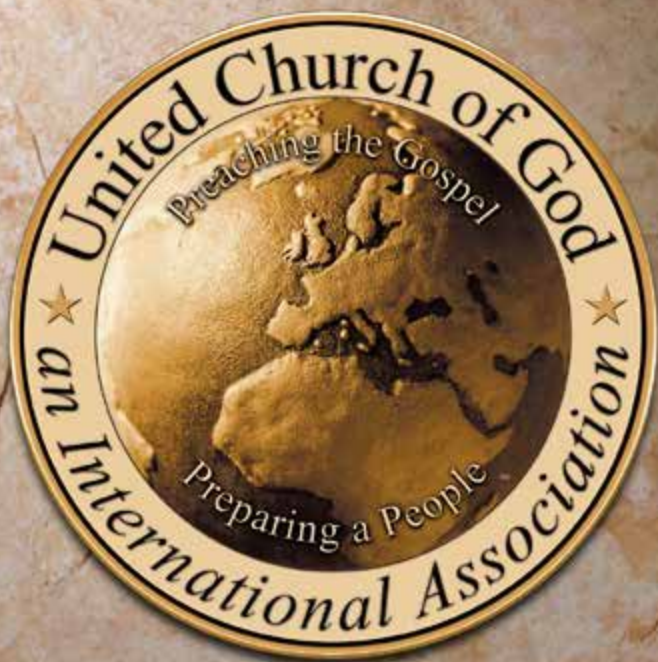


*Preaching the Gospel,
Preparing a People*



This is

*The United
Church of God
an International Association*

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This is
The United
Church of God

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Introduction

Nearly 2,000 years ago, at the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus Christ arrived on the world scene with a specific message. Mark 1:14 tells us He came "preaching *the gospel of the kingdom of God*" (emphasis added throughout).

But what did this message entail? Christ's gospel—the word *gospel* meaning "good news"—focused on the wonderful future God has in store for us, including His promise of world peace, which all of humanity will enjoy after Jesus comes to earth a second time. As the Prince of Peace and the King of Kings, Jesus will establish the Kingdom of God on earth and begin instituting lasting peace and universal justice. The Kingdom of God is, in fact, the central theme of all that Jesus preached and taught.

John the Baptist, Jesus' immediate predecessor, likewise focused his message on the certain coming of this Kingdom. Like Jesus, he emphasized the need for one to *repent*—to turn away from wrong living—before being able to enjoy an active role in the Kingdom (Matthew 3:1-2). John's message was the continuation of the Old Testament prophets' teaching that mankind's misrule would come to an end with the permanent reign of the Messiah (or, in the Greek language of the New Testament, the Christ).

After Jesus concluded His earthly ministry, the early Church continued to spread that same *good news*, the gospel of God's coming Kingdom, throughout the Roman Empire and beyond (Acts 14:22; 28:31; 1 Corinthians 4:20; Colossians 4:11).

Jesus also revealed that the Church He founded would continue to proclaim the same message even to the time of "the end." He promised that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

He also promised to remain ever with His followers who would fulfill that mission. "And remember," Jesus said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20, New Revised Standard Version).

Jesus' message, the gospel of the Kingdom of God, defines the mission of the United Church of God, an International Association. That same message, unaltered and undiluted, clarifies what we stand for in a world filled with a bewildering variety of religious beliefs, customs and opinions.

Such clarification is sorely needed today. What did Jesus actually



teach? Though a third of the world professes Christianity, almost no one seems to know what genuine Christianity really is—for so many who profess to follow Christ ignore much of what He taught, often without much thought or even realizing they are doing so. Non-Christians are thus left with a rather confused impression of the Christian religion.

To illustrate, over dinner one evening a man from India, of the Hindu faith, turned to an American writer and asked a penetrating question concerning the professed faith and the practice of the Western “Christian” nations. How, he asked, can you reconcile the teachings of Jesus with your massive weaponry and endless wars?

Like many serious thinkers, this man observed that both sides in wars between Christian nations pray to the same God while they slaughter their fellow believers in Christ. Why is this? he asked. How can this be?

These are penetrating and difficult questions, but they are not confined to the Christian world. Many Muslims have also warred against each other, as have those of other faiths, for centuries—even as they taught peaceful coexistence. Yet, while we might expect this from the non-Christian world, many are at a loss to explain the bloodstained history of the Christian West.

Anyone who seriously examines history can conclude only that it’s virtually impossible to reconcile the actual teachings of Jesus of Naza-

What Does Our Name Signify?

The name of the United Church of God, an International Association, signifies that we are united in our commitment to faithfully follow the way of life and mission for the Church revealed and established by God and His Son, Jesus Christ, in the Holy Scriptures.

Jesus prayed that His Church would be unified and preserved in the name of God (John 17:11). Also, the New Testament’s most frequent designation for the original body of believers is, as translated in most English Bibles, the “church of God” (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 1 Timothy 3:5). Some New Testament passages also attach the loca-

tion, such as “the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1).

Because many divergent groups refer to themselves as the Church of God, we include the word *United* to provide us with distinctiveness. It was also chosen to convey the unity in belief, mission and purpose for which Jesus prayed when He asked that the Church be kept in God’s name.

Also, instead of attaching a local city name, as in the New Testament, we add the phrase “an International Association” to appropriately reflect the worldwide scope of the Church and its activities.

reth with the dismal performance of nations professing to follow Him.

But some ask even harder questions: What is the ultimate purpose for human life? Why does so much evil plague the world? Why doesn’t God put a stop to violence and war? Will He ever bring about long-lasting peace, and how?

The world desperately needs answers to these and other important questions.

Do answers exist? *Yes*. The message Christ brought—the gospel of

Religion has failed to provide solutions to mankind’s dilemmas. Part of our mission is to make available hope and solutions that faithfully reflect the teachings of the Bible.

the Kingdom of God—provides the answers and solutions that few have heard or understood. And this is the message of the United Church of God—a message desperately needed in a world of wars and conflicts that continue to escalate just as Jesus foretold.

Religion as a whole has failed to provide solutions to mankind’s dilemmas. Part of our mission is to fill that gap, to make available hope and solutions that faithfully and accurately reflect the teachings of the Bible.

In the following pages we outline the mission and key activities of the United Church of God, an International Association, and the beliefs that drive them.



United Church of God
an International Association

Preaching the Gospel

The mission of the United Church of God is to follow Christ's footsteps in "preaching the gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23). Our model is the Church described in the book of Acts. This record provides us with an accurate spiritual compass in a confused and contentious world.

Scripture is clear that, just as Jesus commissioned His apostles to preach the gospel—the good news—of God's coming Kingdom, so has He commissioned His followers today to continue that mission. The conviction to preach the same message Jesus taught focuses the mission of the United Church of God and organizes its priorities.

The main collective task Jesus has required of His Church in all ages is to proclaim to all nations that He will return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to establish the literal Kingdom of God on earth and to explain how we may have a part in that Kingdom (Revelation 11:15; 17:14; 19:16).

We also take seriously Jesus' command to "go therefore and make disciples [students of Christ's teachings] of all the nations, baptizing them . . . [and] teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). The Church described in the book of Acts certainly did so, teaching that we must keep the commandments of God. It placed top priority on obeying God's Word from the heart.

From these Scriptures we see that the mission Christ has given His Church is twofold. First, it is to preach the gospel throughout the world. Second, it is to make disciples among those who hear and heed when the gospel of the Kingdom of God is preached to them.

However, we fully realize it is not possible to fulfill this dual mission strictly through our own efforts. Just as Paul recognized that in His efforts "to preach Christ's gospel . . . a door was opened to me *by the Lord*" (2 Corinthians 2:12), so we understand that God must open doors for the same message today. In regard to making new disciples, Jesus likewise explained: "No one can come to Me *unless the Father who sent Me draws him*," and "no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (John 6:44, 65).

We understand that success in fulfilling this mission must come, first and foremost, from our Creator. Christ's involvement in preaching the gospel message did not stop when His original apostles died. He promised to work with His followers in fulfilling the commission He gave them "even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

We have great confidence in Christ's promises and instructions as revealed in the Bible. The United Church of God takes seriously its role of working within and according to the blessing of God in proclaiming to today's world the same gospel Jesus preached.

Announcing the future

Commissioning the gospel's proclamation throughout the world is only the *beginning* of the plan of God the Father plan to reconcile humanity to Himself. Many have incorrectly assumed that He is desperately trying to save the whole world now, in today's age. But that simply is not so.

Certainly, Jesus commissioned His Church to *proclaim* repentance and salvation to the nations at this time. Yet *proclaiming* Jesus' teaching *about* repentance and salvation is vastly different from actually being

We take seriously Jesus' command to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them . . . [and] teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

able to *lead* all people to salvation in this age. The task of fully reconciling and saving the world is to occur only after Christ returns to earth.

The apostle Paul tells us that announcing mankind's future reconciliation to God is part of the Church's mission: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us *the word of reconciliation*" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Notice, God has committed to His Church "the word"—the *preaching* or *announcement*—of that reconciliation.

Notice Paul's explanation of this enigmatic truth: "For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob'" (Romans 11:25-26).

This saving action of which Paul wrote has not yet occurred. It *will* occur, however, not only for Israel but for all other nationalities as well—but only after Christ returns as the King of Kings over the Kingdom of God (Ezekiel 37:12-14; Matthew 12:41-42).

The good news of God's coming Kingdom is a message the world at large has never grasped. But it is one every person desperately needs to know because it proclaims the awesome future and destiny of mankind and the means to achieve it (be sure to read "God's Great Purpose

for All Mankind,” beginning on page 10).

Reaching the world with a message

As mentioned, the Church’s primary collective commission during our age, the present era, is to *announce*—to inform the world about—the coming of God’s Kingdom, not to *establish* it. That is why, when asked what would signal His coming and the end of this age (Matthew 24:3), Jesus emphasized that the Church is to continue announcing His coming Kingdom, even to the very end of this age. That is why He said that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (verse 14). The original Greek word here translated “preached” means *to announce* or *proclaim as a herald*.

The United Church of God takes this responsibility seriously. To comply with Christ’s commission to proclaim the gospel message, we utilize many tools.

Prominent among these is *The Good News* magazine, published six times a year and mailed to hundreds of thousands of subscribers. The magazine is sent free of charge, anywhere in the world, to anyone who requests it. Drawing on writers from around the globe, it goes into almost every nation on earth.

Published in several languages, the magazine contains spiritually uplifting and educational articles written from a biblical perspective on a variety of subjects, including prophecy, human interest, marriage and the family, Christian living, history, archaeology, lives of individuals mentioned in the Bible, scriptural teachings and analysis of societal and world trends. To subscribe, visit our website at www.GNmagazine.org.

A second publication, *Vertical Thought*, is geared for teens and young adults. Published quarterly, this magazine features articles to help young people deal with challenges of our increasingly godless world by following the teaching of God’s Word. Its associated and interactive website, www.VerticalThought.org, includes a question-and-answer section in which readers can receive personal answers by e-mail from ministers and others trained and experienced in working with youth.

Proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God ► (Clockwise from top left): The Church’s weekly Beyond Today television program covers a variety of biblical topics; its Good News magazine has readers in nearly every country of the world; detailed booklets on dozens of biblical topics help readers better understand the truths of the Bible; the Church’s publications are produced in several major languages to better reach a worldwide audience; it prints and mails hundreds of thousands of booklets every year; the home office near Cincinnati, Ohio, is the center for most of its worldwide mailing efforts.



God's Great Purpose for All Mankind

USA Today published the results of a poll listing significant questions most on people's minds. At the top of the list was "What is the purpose of life?"

That question has intrigued philosophers and theologians for generations. While the answers proposed are as varied as the world's entire ideological landscape, none is convincing. No one, it seems, has found the answer to life's biggest question.

Yet the answer has been available for centuries. God's Word plainly tells us that *man's destiny is to become the children of God, divine members of His immortal spirit family*. This truth goes to the very heart of the true gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Long ago ancient Israel's King David gazed up at the infinite vastness of the night sky while he pondered the significance of man. Psalm 8:3-4 records his thoughts: "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" (English Standard Version).

David understood that *man is the pinnacle* of God's physical creation. He went on to say: "For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet" (verses 5-6).

Human beings in God's image

Genesis 1:26 describes man as created in the image of God. This helps us understand what Paul meant when he spoke of us as God's children. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, *that we may be also glorified together*" (Romans 8:16-17, King James Version).

This passage succinctly summarizes the purpose of human life—the ultimate reason for our

existence. God is creating *a family*—His family, in His image and bearing His name, to eventually appear in His glory (see also 1 John 3:2). Every human being will have the opportunity to become a member of that divine, eternal family!

Notice what God intends to do: "In bringing *many sons to glory* ['glory' means divine radiance, power and perfection as members of God's family], it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation [Jesus



Scripture reveals that God is creating a family—His family, which every human being will have the opportunity to enter according to His plan.

Christ] perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy [Christ] and those who are made holy [human beings in whom God is working] are *of the same family*. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Hebrews 2:10-11, New International Version).

The unimaginably good news is that every human being will have the opportunity to enter the family of God, receive divine glory and live forever as the same kind of beings the Father and Christ now are. This, too, is part of the staggering reality of Christ's gospel and the message proclaimed by the United Church of God. (Our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* describes this future in greater detail.)

God's plan includes all who have ever lived

But how will all of humanity—every man, woman, boy and girl who has ever lived—have

this incredible and amazing opportunity?

The Scriptures clearly reveal that God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9), and He has a master plan to give everyone this opportunity. Yet a great many believe that unless one confesses faith in Jesus as personal Savior in this present lifetime he or she will have no further opportunity for salvation.

While belief in and acceptance of Christ is indeed essential for salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), there remains the disturbing question: What happens to those who have been deceived (Revelation 12:9) and, simply through ignorance, have no understanding of God, His plan or His way of life? And what about those who, in recent years or in centuries past, lived and died without ever so much as hearing the name of Jesus Christ? Are they eternally lost? What is their fate?

The Bible gives the answers to these questions—answers that reconcile all the scriptures about life and death, judgment and mercy, forgiveness and salvation. It reveals that the "first resurrection" of Christ's followers at His return is not the end of the story. Indeed, the Bible teaches that "*the rest of the dead . . . small and great*" also are to be resurrected from the grave. They are to stand before God and, for the first time in their lives, have the full truth of the Scriptures opened to their understanding (Revelation 20:4-6, 11-12).

For the vast majority of mankind, this will be the first time their eyes will be truly opened to God's wonderful truth. Most will then willingly reject their sinful ways, committed mostly in ignorance when they knew little or nothing of God and His ways. If they sincerely acknowledge their errors and repent, then they also may be glorified and receive eternal life. This is not a "second-chance" theology, as some might assume, but truly their *first* real opportunity to *fully comprehend* God's truth and then act on it with *genuine understanding*.

An opportunity for all humanity

In Matthew 11:21-24 Jesus explained that many godless people who lived and died in

ages long before His time would have repented if only they had experienced Christ's preaching and miracles the way people of His day had. Moreover, He said that it would be "more tolerable" in the coming last judgment for the men, women and children who lived and died in ignorance than for those of His day who openly rejected Him.

But how could this be if those long-dead people were already condemned without hope of redemption? The fact is *they never had an opportunity, with a full comprehension of repentance*, to be saved. But one day, God promises, He *will* give them that opportunity.

Truly "God does not show favoritism" (Acts 10:34, NIV). He has made provision for *all* people ultimately to have an opportunity to enter a relationship with Him that can lead to glorified, eternal life. This is why Jesus said: "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29, New American Standard Bible).

Judgment in the preceding passage refers to *an opportunity to understand and then undergo evaluation* as opposed to the act of sentencing. This time of judging or *deciding* the future of those who have not yet had an opportunity to understand God's plan and purpose, whether they be small or great, is mentioned in Revelation 20:11-12, cited above. This biblical resurrection to judgment (a time for *sorting out* and *deciding*, not for automatic condemnation) is a time when God's *tolerant mercy* will finally be evident to all who are willing to face up to and repent of their former sinful ways. Though the Bible doesn't reveal many specifics about this resurrection—once more to a temporary physical life—Ezekiel 37 provides a vivid description of it.

In our free publications *What Happens After Death?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* we thoroughly explain this wonderful truth in greater detail. It is a major key to understanding God's plan to rectify all the evil and suffering that mankind has ever experienced.

The Church publishes many booklets, also free, to supplement these efforts and delve into biblical topics in greater detail. Readers and listeners may request them from any of our regional offices or from our website, www.GNmagazine.org/booklets.

Each year we print hundreds of thousands of English-language booklets and articles and mail them around the world. In addition, we offer some of our booklets and articles in the Spanish, German, Italian, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Estonian languages. Our booklet *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* is available in Arabic.

The United Church of God also publishes a full-color, 12-lesson *Bible*

The Church's role is to proclaim the gospel and the need for repentance, go through doors as God opens them and take opportunities as they are presented to reach ever more people with the message of His soon-coming Kingdom.

Study Course to help students gain a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. This course is designed to explain the major themes and teachings of the Bible in easy-to-understand language. It addresses many fundamental questions about God and the way He wants us to live.

The first lesson of the course addresses the basic questions of God's existence, the Bible's role in showing why God created men, women and children, and the ultimate purpose of life. Then it guides students through many of the most intriguing and inspiring portions of the Bible, unlocking the real purpose for our existence—and how we may live fulfilling lives while accomplishing God's great purpose for us. Lesson 4 addresses the challenging question: Why does God allow suffering and evil in the world?

Thousands have been helped to change their lives for the better through this course. As with our other publications, we and our coworkers provide it freely to all who request it. And as with other publications, we are developing it in languages other than English.

Using electronic tools

Our television program, *Beyond Today*, airs weekly on satellite TV in many nations around the world and on cable channels in cities across the United States. Featuring ministers of the United Church of God, the program covers topics like those dealt with in *The Good News* magazine, though often in greater depth. (For schedule information and to watch the program online, visit us at www.BeyondToday.tv.)

Recognizing that people increasingly seek information via the Internet, the Church uses this important tool to reach an even wider audience with the gospel. In addition to making all of our publications available free by request or for downloading over the Internet, we offer a separate daily study aid—our Internet-based *Bible Reading Program*, available at www.ucg.org/brp.

It leads students through the entire Bible over the course of several years. Typically covering a chapter a day, this free, in-depth program provides the reader with a systematic reading schedule along with clear, easy-to-follow commentary, maps, charts and graphs to thoroughly explain the Scriptures. These Bible aids are intended to help all those who desire to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

The United Church of God also has a letter-answering staff available to reply to questions from anyone. These can be sent through postal mail to any of our regional offices or by e-mail to info@ucg.org.

We also offer an e-magazine (electronic magazines) and occasionally other publications only on the Internet. *Virtual Christian Magazine* offers a variety of biblically based articles 10 times a year. You can find it at www.VCMagazine.org.

The main objective of *Virtual Christian Magazine* is to provide instruction in the practical application of Christian principles. *Virtual Christian Magazine* shares stories of God personally interacting with human beings and features living examples of faith, love and hope along with practical solutions to life's challenges. The magazine is full of encouraging, inspiring and motivational stories about God helping us overcome and live a life centered on Christ and His teachings.

A call for repentance

Almost immediately after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His apostles with further instructions. “And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem’” (Luke 24:45-47).

Wherever they went, His apostles continued preaching that everyone “should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance” (Acts 26:20).

In this light, the role of the Church of God with respect to the world around it parallels that of the watchmen of ancient cities. In ancient Israel, towns positioned watchmen on the city walls or nearby hills. Their

responsibility was to warn their fellow citizens of impending danger, such as a hostile army that might be headed their way.

God at times compared His prophets to these watchmen. But an important difference is that His prophets' warning came from *Him*, not from their own observations and perceptions. For example, God told

What Is the True Gospel?

What was Jesus Christ's message? He preached "the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14-15).

The Old English word *godspel*, or "good spell," means "good news." The good news was the centerpiece of His message. He defined His mission with these words: "*I must preach the kingdom of God . . . because for this purpose I have been sent*" (Luke 4:43).

What did He command His disciples to teach? "He sent them *to preach the kingdom of God . . .*" (Luke 9:2, 6).

What is that message about, and why is it such good news?

When Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God (Luke 8:1; 9:11; 12:31; 13:18), He was continuing the messages of the Hebrew prophets whose words are recorded in the Old Testament. Centuries earlier God had inspired such faithful men as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah to look beyond the difficulties and destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah to a magnificent future when God would establish His world-ruling Kingdom on earth under the reign of the Messiah.

Notice some of their prophecies describing this wonderful age to come:

- "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6).
- "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse [the phrase referring to the promised Messiah, Jesus], who shall stand as a banner to the

people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious" (verses 9-10).

- "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14).

- "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert" (Isaiah 35:5-6).

- "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:3-4).

- "The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1).

- "'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it'" (Amos 9:13).

- "So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden'" (Ezekiel 36:35).

- "Then the LORD will go forth . . . And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west,

Ezekiel: "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word *from My mouth*, and give them warning *from Me*" (Ezekiel 3:17; compare 33:7).

Most people today are unaware that a considerable portion of Americans and people of British heredity are descendants of the ancient Israel-

making a very large valley . . . Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You . . . And the LORD shall be King over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:3-5, 9).

Jesus Christ and His apostles spoke of this

brought, includes the hopeful message that those who humbly surrender their lives to God now, in this age, will have a part in that age to come—reigning with Christ in that world to come as part of the family of God (see "God's Great Purpose for



Many Bible prophecies describe a glorious world to come, ruled by what is called "the Kingdom of God," when even the nature of animals will be changed. This is a major part of the true gospel Jesus taught.

same world-ruling government, which He called "the Kingdom of God." In Luke 21, after describing a series of trends and events unparalleled in history, He concluded: "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near . . . When you see these things happening, *know that the kingdom of God is near*" (verses 28-31).

The ancient prophets, Jesus and His apostles all spoke of a literal kingdom that will replace the world's governments. When these prophecies become a reality, a triumphant cry will ring out: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15, NIV).

The true gospel, the good news Jesus Christ

All Mankind," beginning on page 10).

Sadly, this message is seldom understood and rarely taught in churches. Many have accepted "a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6) that distorts and obscures this vital biblical truth. Replacing the true gospel, this "other gospel" (verses 8-9), as Paul labels it, evolved and spread throughout the world.

The United Church of God is dedicated to proclaiming Christ's true gospel to the world (Matthew 24:14). For help in discovering the full meaning of the gospel—the incredible good news—that Jesus Christ and the apostles preached, be sure to request or download your free copies of the booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *What Is Your Destiny?*

ite tribe of Joseph. Many Bible prophecies make it clear that these people in particular will be greatly affected by ominous events at the end time as a direct consequence of their national sins, so they need to be warned by those who understand the truth. (For a clear and thorough explanation, be sure to download or request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.)

Jesus foretold that the world would face an unprecedented time of great tribulation before His second coming (Matthew 24:21). This time of anarchy and upheaval will affect the entire world, including the modern descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Fully aware that much of the Bible is prophetic, the United Church of God publishes several booklets and regularly features articles in *The Good News* magazine focusing on world events in the light of Bible prophecy. You can receive any of these free of charge by contacting our office nearest you or from our websites mentioned earlier.

The United Church of God does not push its beliefs on anyone. Matthew 24:14 says the gospel would be preached “as a witness to all the nations.” It is up to each individual whether he will hear and accept that message.

The Church’s role in this regard is to proclaim the gospel and the need for repentance, go through doors as God opens them and take opportunities as they are presented to us to reach ever more people with the vitally important message of His soon-coming Kingdom.

Preparing a People

The two most important aspects of the mission of the United Church of God are preaching the gospel and preparing a people. Both are mandated by Jesus Christ, and the two go hand in hand.

The Church’s overall mission extends well beyond its initial responsibility of preaching the gospel and making new disciples, as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19. As verse 20 explains, the Church must also *teach* these disciples—students—“to observe *all things* that [Jesus] commanded . . . even to the end of the age.” Indeed, the Church of God is to be a continuing source of spiritual nurturing for those God calls into His family.

One of the key charges Jesus gave His apostles was “Feed My sheep” (John 21:17). He has given His Church additional shepherds—a human ministry—to guide, feed and encourage the growth of those God calls into the Body of Christ. As we see from Paul’s instructions to Titus and Timothy, God appoints ministers based on criteria vital to the well-being of the other members of the Church.

Jesus Himself, explained the apostle Paul, “gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, *attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*” (Ephesians 4:11-13, NIV).

The Church Jesus built is commissioned not only to feed His sheep, as He commanded, but to prepare these followers for greater works of service to God, their families, their communities and their fellow man. Jesus placed great emphasis on serving others (Matthew 20:26-28).

For these reasons the United Church of God, though small in numbers, strives to establish congregations around the world in which God’s people can assemble and receive guidance in godly living and service. These congregations are served by ordained pastors trained to accurately teach and explain the Scriptures and to counsel those who request personal guidance. These pastors are often assisted by other dedicated men and women in helping congregations reach their full potential in serving others—as opportunity, need and resources permit.

Our congregations meet in various cities around the world. Regional offices in the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia and the South Pacific serve members and support Church operations in their respective areas. They

are also responsible for distributing the Church's publications and handling other requests and inquiries within their particular regions.

A home-office facility near Cincinnati, Ohio, serves as a support hub for operations in the United States and all the associated worldwide operations of the Church. From this location the Church's president and department managers and their staffs support the Church's daily operations.

Our worship services

People often ask us: "What happens at one of your church services? If I choose to attend, what should I expect? Do I need to bring anything? Are there programs that address the needs of my family?"

Members of the United Church of God rest (refrain from normal work and recreation) and meet on the weekly Sabbath in compliance with the Fourth Commandment (see Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15) and with the clear biblical examples of Jesus and early Christians, who came together on that day to worship and give and receive instruction from God's Word (see Luke 4:16; Acts 13:42, 44; 17:2; 18:4).

Some people are surprised when they learn that our congregations meet for regular weekly church services on Saturday. The reason, of course, is that God defines the seventh-day biblical Sabbath as lasting from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset rather than being on Sunday, the first day of the week. Just as Jesus and the earliest Church of God congregations did, we observe the day and time that God has commanded.

The Bible describes the weekly Sabbath in Isaiah 58:13 as "the holy day of the LORD" and in Leviticus 23:2 as one of "the feasts of the LORD." The Hebrew word for "feast" is *moed*, which means "appointment"—a scheduled time for a meeting. Verse 3 describes the weekly Sabbath as a "holy convocation" or "sacred assembly" (NIV). It is, therefore, a *commanded* assembly (see also Hebrews 10:24-25).

Putting these verses together, we can see that God commands His people to appear before Him for a meeting, as a regular weekly appointment. (To learn more about the biblical foundation of the seventh-day



Preparing people for God's Kingdom ► (Clockwise from top left): The United Church of God conducts weekly services in many nations around the world, including Nigeria as shown here; it provides many resources to help members in studying God's Word; weekly Sabbath services and weeknight Bible studies are webcast live over the Internet for those unable to attend in person; a vital part of helping people develop is giving those in challenging circumstances, including those with disabilities, assistance to aid them in becoming as self-sufficient as possible; members are encouraged to use their talents and abilities to help others; learning to show love toward others, such as through the Church's wheelchair donation and matching program, is a vital part of Christian growth; youth camps challenge teens and preteen children to try new experiences.

Sabbath, why Christians should keep it and how to observe it, be sure to download or request your free copy of our booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*.)

We encourage everyone attending Sabbath services with us to bring a Bible. Because we believe and teach that the Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:15-17), our ministers and other speakers in the course of a service will focus on what the Bible says. Members are encouraged to turn to and read for themselves the scriptures quoted. Many will take notes for later review. Instruction given in our worship services is not based on human philosophy or speculation but on the rich teachings of the Word of God and how we should apply them in all aspects of our lives.

In this we follow the instructions of the apostle Paul, who wrote to the young minister Timothy: "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: *Preach the word!* Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:1-2). Therefore the messages presented in our services are designed to be instructive, helpful, practical and inspiring.

As we assemble before God, we come in an attitude of worship and thankfulness for what He performs in our lives. After opening with congregational hymns, we ask for God's presence and guidance.

After this opening prayer comes the speaking portion of the service, which normally includes two messages. The first, referred to as a sermonette, is short and typically deals with an item of biblical understanding or encouragement.

After another congregational hymn, we usually devote a brief segment of the service to announcements pertaining to local and international church events and activities. Sometimes musicians from the congregation may offer a short and appropriate music presentation.

Next is the main sermon, typically about an hour in length. Sermons deal with a variety of spiritual themes, such as practical Christian living, explanations of biblical doctrines or, occasionally, discussions of current events in the light of Bible prophecy. After the sermon, our services conclude with a hymn and a closing prayer.

Attention to special needs

Recognizing that people's needs vary and many learn more effectively in smaller or more-focused groups, some of our congregations also provide, for those so desiring, Bible studies or classes for adults, teens, younger children, young adults and middle-aged and older adults. Some of these may be conducted before, during or after the weekly service on

the Sabbath, and sometimes members may meet for a midweek Bible study. The Church offers these options as opportunities for extra learning, encouragement and fellowship for like-minded Christians.

Church members interact and work together in other ways as well. Congregations often organize special functions to serve various needs. They may include social events, fellowship opportunities at shared meals, sports activities, children's and teens' field trips, men's and women's leadership and speech clubs and occasional work parties to help

Jesus Christ healed the sick and comforted the afflicted, and He commands that we be compassionate to others.

members and needy people within our communities or even on the other side of the world.

Helping those in need

The focus of the United Church of God is to proclaim the good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God to all mankind. But this does not negate the need for helping people now.

Jesus Christ healed the sick and comforted the afflicted, and He commands that we be compassionate to others. Economically, we have not been given equal opportunity in this world, and some, recognizing this disparity, want to help make a difference in the lives of others.

Recognizing suffering and poverty is an important first step. But it's not until we *do* something to alleviate it that God takes notice. Jesus warned of merely saying "Be warm and filled," but not taking action (James 2:16; Matthew 25:34-46).

The United Church of God officially established a Good Works program in 2004. To be more effective, the church partnered with LifeNets, a highly efficient charity a number of church members were already involved in, where a very high percentage of all amounts donated goes to the people being helped. Both have independent as well as partner projects, depending on the needs.

Promoting a hand up, not just a handout

LifeNets develops programs offering practical assistance that promotes the well-being and self-sufficiency of disadvantaged people. These programs expand in impact by encouraging those receiving assistance to "pay it forward" by helping others.

Through LifeNets' support for agriculture and animal husbandry we have seen quantum changes in the lives of very poor people in several countries around the world.



Several years ago disease in central Zambia wiped out entire herds of cattle. People were left with no milk for their children, no draft animals for plowing their fields, unimaginable poverty and potential starvation. Entire communities were without common medicines. Children regularly died from malaria and other diseases.

In 2000 LifeNets started a program to restore cattle to needy communities. It required giving basic veterinary training and animal care to recipients to minimize the risk of future loss of animals to disease.

Drilling water wells has become a regular project of LifeNets. Clean drinking water is vital for human survival, but it's a shrinking resource in many poor countries. In many areas people, mostly women, spend a large part of each day making many trips carrying large containers to fetch water from distant sources. By drilling wells within communities, we have brought fresh, clean water for drinking, cooking and washing to communities.

In the United States a unique wheelchair matching program has existed for more than a decade. Through the LifeNets website (www.LifeNets.org) we have used the Internet to match wheelchair donors with those needing them, greatly benefiting the lives of hundreds of people.

Education to overcome poverty

Education is a key route out of poverty. LifeNets and the Good Works program have supported scholarships for young people to receive an education or specialized training in Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru, Chile, South Africa, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ukraine and the Philippines.

These scholarships have given lifelong benefits to young people who otherwise may have been relegated to the misery of unemployment and poverty. This also helps their communities—since scholarship recipients in these poor countries can then become pillars in the fabric of their society.

LifeNets has also constructed clinics and schools in Africa and Ukraine and has supported orphan and street children programs in Ukraine.

◀ **Helping people around the world** United Church of God members support a number of projects around the world, including, clockwise from top left, water wells and pumps to provide fresh water for various communities in Africa; scholarship programs to enable promising students to get an education, which helps both them and their communities; healthcare facilities such as this neonatal clinic in Malawi that provides vital services to mothers and babies; computer training such as this program in Zambia that helps young men and women develop marketable skills; building cattle herds, such as these in Brazil, to help lift people out of poverty; small business startup assistance, such as to this man in Malawi who processes and sells honey; and aid to purchase land for growing crops to encourage self-sufficiency.

The Feast of Tabernacles

The highlight of each year for members of the United Church of God is the biblical Feast of Tabernacles. Among the sacred feasts God revealed to ancient Israel, this festival lasts seven days and is immediately followed by a separate but related festival on the eighth day (Leviticus 23:34, 36, 39). This eight-day period remains an occasion for God's people to come together for spiritual instruction and renewal.

Meeting in regional locations around the world, families gather to picture the "world to come" (see Hebrews 2:5-7), which will begin immediately after the return of Christ to earth. The theme of the Feast of Tabernacles is Jesus' millennial reign. Members of the Church gather annually to keep this commanded festival as a foretaste of that time spoken of by the prophet Isaiah:

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

"He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:2-4). This eternal vision becomes a tangible reality in the minds of our members during this annual event.

Indeed, the biblical prophecies of a time when nations shall beat their swords into plowshares and cease to learn of war form an

important part of Jesus' gospel—His good news—of God's coming Kingdom.

As Zechariah 14:16 tells us, upon Christ's return, "Everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem [in a devastating end-time war] shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles."

Since this festival is commanded in the Scriptures, and will be observed by all nations in Christ's Kingdom, it would seem woefully inconsistent for us to not keep it now as we look forward to that wonderful time.

The eight days of meetings are a time for worship services, special Bible studies and seminars, family activities and encouraging fellowship for young and old. Experience has proven this observance to be a major key to the Church's unity and focus on its mission. As members come together around the world at the same time to hear messages aimed at the positive hope of God's coming Kingdom, their vision is renewed and refocused on the goal of that Kingdom.

United Church of God members celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in some 40 locations around the world. More than just an annual convention or vacation, the Feast of Tabernacles helps our members focus on God's great plan and the wonderfully positive news of Christ's return to establish His rule on earth. It keenly refreshes our awareness of why the coming Kingdom of God is so needed by today's world and reminds us why sharing that message must always be the collective priority of the United Church of God.

(To learn more about the Feast of Tabernacles and God's other festivals, download or request our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.)

Celebrating a foretaste of the future ▶ (Clockwise from top left): International Feast sites sometimes include educational tours of biblical lands such as Israel; daily worship services focus on teaching about God's plan; the Feast is a wonderful opportunity to make new friends; children's choir performances are a highlight at most Feast sites; family day activities are a tradition at many locations; peaceful, relaxing surroundings give Feastgoers a taste of Jesus Christ's coming rule on earth; study of God's Word is central to keeping God's Feast of Tabernacles.





The Good Works program has also provided Bibles, church buildings and vehicles for necessary transportation for scattered congregations, as well as supporting staff to assist in training and educational programs in Zambia, Nigeria and Guatemala.

"Let us not grow weary in doing good"

The Bible clearly speaks of opening our heart and resources to the poor and encourages us to help those in need: "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:17-18).

The apostle Paul speaks about helping not only our own, but those whom we know have needs: "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:9-10).

Empowering and developing our youth

Long ago wise King Solomon admonished young people, "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). With that biblical imperative in mind, we seek to empower our young people for a life of strong character and good works. We provide programs designed to supplement their parents' efforts to mold them into good students in their schools, worthwhile community members in their neighborhoods, upstanding examples in their future jobs and good citizens who will continue responding to the call of God as they mature.

The United Church of God conducts an extensive youth-camp program at more than a dozen sites around the world. During the summer or winter school breaks, our young people can come together to develop deeper relationships with God and be challenged by new experiences. The camp programs are designed to encourage and develop lifelong character traits such as courage, diligence and perseverance. They also build a camaraderie between the campers and a staff of young-adult counselors, ministers and other camp workers—forming bonds that may last a lifetime.

Young adults who want to go above and beyond in volunteering to

◀ **Training the next generation** United Church of God camps in North and South America, Europe, Africa and Australia are a lifetime highlight for many teens and preteens. In addition to Bible and Christian living classes, those attending are given age-appropriate opportunities to learn and develop skills and abilities ranging from arts and crafts to popular sports to personally challenging activities designed to build character to last a lifetime.

help others can apply for service in the United Youth Corps. Here young men and women receive opportunities to travel and serve people in the far reaches of the globe. In the summer months, a young person could find himself or herself far from home in such places as Chile, Israel, Zambia and South Africa. Such service could include working with area residents in a language program, a computer-instruction seminar or even an archaeological excavation. Such young people not only give of themselves but are rewarded with many once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Passing on the truth of God from one generation to the next is a high priority of the Church. Therefore, to provide in-depth biblical and spiritual instruction to the next generation, the United Church of God also sponsors and staffs the Ambassador Bible Center, located in our home-office complex just outside of Cincinnati. It is designed for the college-age or older student who desires an intensive nine-month program of studying the core teachings of the Bible.

In addition to its own resident faculty, the Ambassador Bible Center's staff is supplemented by guest lecturers who bring additional expertise on certain subjects to an eager student body. Many young men and women often choose to enter this program either right before or immediately after their regular college program.

To meet the specific goal of "preparing a people" in regard to our youth, the United Church of God has developed a variety of youth programs. Their purpose is not merely to bring our young people together, but, even more important, they are meant to help them develop and strengthen a loving relationship with God. It is also our desire to educate and equip them for service to their congregations and the world at large.

Nurturing the household of God

We must keep in mind that the Church Jesus built is not an impressive building with stained-glass windows. It has no steeple or bells tolling out the chimes of an old religious melody.

The word translated *church* in the New Testament means a group of people, not a building. The Church Jesus built is made up of the people who are its members. *They* are the Church!

Why is this distinction important?

The Greek word *ekklesia*, translated into English as *church*, simply means "those called out" or a "called-out assembly." It originally referred to a city's assembly of citizens—summoned to a meeting to conduct the city's affairs. Because its meaning closely corresponds to that of the Hebrew word for "congregation," it became the standard Greek word for the "congregation" of God in the New Testament, the assembly that has come to be known in the English language as the Church.

Christ's apostles describe the Church as those who, having surrendered their lives to God in sincere obedience, have received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:32; Romans 8:9). Indeed, the Church's members are sometimes compared to the individual parts of a stone building. The apostle Peter wrote, "You also, as living stones, are *being built up a spiritual house*, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Called from all nationalities

The word translated *church* in the New Testament means a group of people, not a building. The Church Jesus built is made up of the people who are its members. *They* are the Church!

and ethnic backgrounds, all of the Church's members "are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of *the household of God*" (Ephesians 2:19).

Those in God's Church are thus members of God's family, though not yet glorified. Indeed, Church members fully understand that they are still fallible, imperfect human beings. Yet they strive to do their best in serving their heavenly Father. This they do, knowing He has already given His best for them—His only begotten Son as their Savior. And in His great mercy, He actively prepares them for their role in His coming Kingdom.

In this present age of preparation, God's people draw strength and comfort both from Him and from each other. For that reason Hebrews 10:24-25 states: "Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day [of Christ's return] approaching" (NIV).

The United Church of God diligently strives to implement the biblical mandate for "equipping the saints"—that is, preparing members of the "body of Christ" to fulfill their calling as God's servants now and as His eternal family in the coming Kingdom of God (Ephesians 4:12).

Following in the Footsteps of the Apostles

As noted earlier, it is the small but faithful Church described in the book of Acts that those of us in the United Church of God, an International Association, look to as our model and spiritual ancestor. To fully appreciate why the Church described in Acts serves as the sole model for our beliefs, mission and organization, one must understand at least some of the little-understood history of Christianity.

For that reason we include here a brief overview of what happened to the Church Jesus built and to the religion that bears His name.

Acts 2 records the beginning of that Church. From relatively few people, the Church spread from first-century Judea to the far corners of the Roman Empire and beyond. Yet it remained relatively small in numbers (see Luke 12:32), partly because it resolutely refused to be drawn into the compromising, corrupt mixture of paganism that dominated religious belief in the Roman Empire.

The Church of God began on the biblical Feast of Pentecost. On that day God poured out the power of His Spirit on the disciples who were gathered in Jerusalem in obedience to His law and Christ's personal instructions (see Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4).

This fulfilled the promise Jesus had earlier made to His disciples: "On this rock [referring to Himself—see 1 Corinthians 10:4] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [the grave] shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Here was a dual promise. Jesus would build a spiritual body of believers that would continue to exist down through the ages, even to the end of the present age and His return to earth. No human force of the physical



Living by every word of God ▶ (Clockwise from top left): Members of the United Church of God strive to follow the biblical command to live by every word of God; speakers at our services focus on explanations of biblical teachings; our home office near Cincinnati, Ohio, supports the Church's operations around the world; weekly Sabbath services are a source of weekly encouragement and instruction in God's Word; staff at our home office support the Church's media efforts, such as producing the Beyond Today TV program; our Ambassador Bible Center at the home office provides in-depth Bible instruction to eager students.

Responsible Stewardship and Accountability

The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that God's servants are to be wise stewards and managers over the resources He provides. They are to recognize that those resources—financial, physical and human alike—actually belong to *Him* rather than any individual or organization. Accordingly, the United Church of God, an International Association, has put in place systems of checks and balances to avoid abuses or financial improprieties.

Recognizing the biblical principle that “in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14; 24:6), a 12-member Council of Elders—made up of experienced ministers—provides overall leadership for the United Church of God. Members of this council are selected on a rotating basis for three-year terms at an annual conference of ordained ministers of the Church.

The Council of Elders, chosen mostly from pastors of local churches, carries out important responsibilities. Since it functions as the board of directors for the United Church of God, its most important role is to provide guidance and establish direction for the Church throughout its worldwide operations. It is also responsible for selecting the Church's president and for monitoring his performance as well as the performance of those on the management team the president appoints to oversee the Church's ministerial, media and financial operations.

Working in a team-based environment, committees of the Council of Elders regularly interface with key staff members in related operations. Other council committees focus on planning, doctrinal issues, biblical education of

ministers and other members, and other matters. Following the biblical example of the ministerial conference recorded in Acts 15, major issues and questions are resolved by collective discussion and decision by all of the ordained elders of the Church.

In areas outside the United States, similar boards, organized according to appropriate national laws, oversee activities of the United Church of God as needs require.

Financial integrity of business affairs is a priority of the United Church of God. The Church's work is supported by the voluntary tithes and offerings of members and other donors—following the biblical teaching of honoring God with one's substance as the means of supporting the preaching of the gospel and financing the work of the Church.

We do not solicit the public for donations or take up offerings in our regular weekly worship services. In line with Christ's reminder “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8), our literature is distributed without charge or obligation to all who request it.

All donations in the United States and some other countries are legally tax-deductible, with receipts sent to donors. In the United States the Church sends donors quarterly receipts, with annual receipts issued at the end of the calendar year.

The Church maintains a system of internal auditing controls to ensure the integrity of all accounting systems and avoid any abuses of financial assets. The integrity of financial matters is of major importance. Church officers prepare annual financial statements according to generally accepted accounting methods. A

carefully chosen independent accounting firm audits the Church's financial records annually. The resulting audited statements are then published for the Church's membership.

The budget of the Church is prepared through a system that begins with each department submitting its requests for the year. The Church's president and treasurer submit a budget to the Council of Elders. A final budget recommendation, along with strategic and operating plans, is then submitted for approval to the General Conference of Elders at its annual meeting.

Regular financial reports are made to the Council of Elders at their quarterly meetings. These reports are then shared with the

Church's members via updates on its website and a regular member newsletter.

A finance committee of the Council of Elders works with the Church's treasurer to ensure effective use of funds and monitoring of all the budgets according to approved strategic and operating plans.

Preaching the gospel in today's world is a challenging experience, which keeps us on our knees in prayer, asking God not only for wisdom but for the financial means to continue moving forward. We are totally dependent on our Creator for our success. As He calls additional laborers to join in this work, we gratefully acknowledge their help. Together we move forward in seeking and doing His will.



Proper stewardship over God's resources ► (Clockwise from top left): A 12-member Council of Elders, comprising longtime experienced ministers, functions as a board of directors and is selected by the entire ministry of the Church to provide overall leadership; audited financial reports are published annually for the Church's membership; the United Church of God president and treasurer regularly review financial reports; a small but dedicated staff and volunteers help carry out some of the Church's operations at its home office near Cincinnati, Ohio.

world, or evil power from the spirit world, would ever be able to destroy His Church.

The book of Acts, written by Luke, tells the story of how the Church, from its beginning in Jerusalem, spread the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world of the Roman Empire. Luke filled the pages of this history with the work of Peter, Paul, Barnabas and others who figured prominently in the early Church.

In Luke's brief historical sketch we see the Church faithfully dedicated to proclaiming the coming Kingdom of God, with Jesus Christ as its head. Luke's account describes the overriding goal and purpose that united this early body of believers.

Paul informs us of an important characteristic of the Church that

Historians generally recognize that the Church described in the New Testament is considerably different from that which emerged as historical Christianity after the apostles passed from the scene.

Christ built. With Jesus as its foundational cornerstone, the Church's foundation also rests on the teachings of the apostles and—not to be overlooked—the prophets of the Old Testament (Ephesians 2:19-20).

A breach in beliefs and practices

Yet only a few decades after Jesus Christ ascended to heaven following His crucifixion and resurrection, the Church began to change. Heretical teachers started reinterpreting Scripture to suit their own ideas. In the centuries that followed, greater divisions arose over doctrine.

As a result, the message preached by Christ and His apostles became subtly transformed. As time passed, this altered message came to be almost exclusively about the *person* of Jesus, at the cost of neglecting the vital heart and core of His teachings.

Among a growing number of people, a distorted and in some ways fictionalized account of the *Messenger* of the Kingdom replaced the original *message* He brought. This transformation was well under way even in the days of the apostles, when Paul denounced those who were teaching “another Jesus” and “a different gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

The result was a clever masking of the gospel's most central message—the return of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on earth and the all-important *nature* of that Kingdom. This abandonment of the gospel's central message was greatly abetted by far-reaching events occurring in the Roman Empire at the close of the first and the beginning

of the second centuries of the Christian era.

During the early part of the first century the Jewish religion was accorded remarkable deference by the Roman government. And for a short time, Roman officials even regarded Christians as merely another sect of the Jews, meaning Christians received the same deference accorded to those of the Jewish faith.

But in the latter half of the first century a major change occurred. It was inevitable that Roman paganism and idolatry (which had come to include emperor worship) would come into conflict with the strict faithfulness of the Jews and Christians to the true God. It wasn't long before both Christians and Jews fell out of favor with the Romans. In A.D. 66 many of the Jews living in Judea rebelled against Roman rule, and in 70 the Roman legions captured Jerusalem and razed the temple.

For many decades after this event the very word *Jew* became a racial and religious epithet among Roman citizens. (A second Jewish revolt from 132 to 135 made matters even worse; Jerusalem was destroyed and no Jew was allowed to set foot there on pain of death.)

As these events unfolded and anti-Jewish sentiment spread throughout the empire (resulting in the deaths of Peter, Paul and many of the original Christians), many who professed to be Christians began distancing themselves from anything that even appeared to be Jewish. Since the beliefs and practices of the original Church had much in common with the Jews, this rejection of everything Jewish also led to major alterations in—and abandonment of—major aspects of the original teachings of Christ and His apostles.

What followed was a proliferation of groups and teachers calling themselves Christian, but whose traditions and teachings did not originate with Christ and His apostles. Some chose to retain many of the pagan traditions they had formerly practiced and began blending those beliefs and practices with their newly acquired belief that eternal life was accessible through Jesus Christ. Some simply fell prey to a growing deception that involved “false apostles [and] deceitful workers” who “transform[ed] themselves into apostles of Christ” but in reality were, however unwittingly, ministers of Satan the devil (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Gradually, as the apostles died out, these “false brethren” (2 Corinthians 11:26) either abandoned or altered biblical teachings and traditions that they feared would associate them with the Jewish religion. In the process they also gutted critical aspects of the message and way of life taught by Jesus and His apostles.

God's law: center of controversy

Historians generally recognize that the Church described in the New

Testament is considerably different from that which emerged as historical Christianity after the apostles passed from the scene. Edward Gibbon, the 18th-century chronicler of the Roman Empire, wrote of a “dark cloud that hangs over the first age of the church” (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776, chapter 15, section 1).

Later historian Jesse Hurlbut wrote: “We name the last generation

What Did the Early Church Believe and Practice?

The book of Acts records eyewitness accounts of the early Church from Christ’s resurrection until about A.D. 60. Chapter 2 records the beginning of the Church.

This special event began when the place where the apostles and other disciples were gathered was suddenly filled with the sound of a mighty wind and “tongues, as of fire” appeared to alight on them. They then began speaking to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem for the observance that day of the biblical Feast of Pentecost. Miraculously, the apostles’ preaching was comprehensible to all people from many lands so that all understood their words in their own language.

Often overlooked in this account is the significance of these events occurring on *the Day of Pentecost* (Acts 2:1). This was one of the festivals God commanded for His people many centuries before (Leviticus 23). In revealing these festivals, God exclaimed, “These are *My* feasts . . . the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations . . .” (verses 2, 4). Then God proclaimed them to be “a statute forever” (verses 14, 21, 31, 41).

The Gospels show Jesus keeping the same festivals (Matthew 26:17-19; John 7:10-14, 37-38). Both the book of Acts and Paul’s letters show the apostles observing these festivals long after Christ died and was raised (Acts 2:1-4; 18:21; 20:6, 16; 27:9). This is the example they set for us.

Today, however, most churches teach that these festivals were somehow annulled by Christ’s death. Yet the unmistakable record of the Bible is that the early Church continued to

observe them long after His death—but with a greater grasp of their spiritual significance.

Speaking of one of these God-given feasts, the apostle Paul urged the Church congregation in Corinth—a mixed group of gentile and Jewish believers—to “keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Paul was obviously referring to keeping the biblical Feast of Unleavened Bread (see Leviticus 23:6; Deuteronomy 16:16). Paul similarly explained the Christian significance of the biblical Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7; Leviticus 23:5) and gave instructions on how to properly observe this ceremony in the Church (1 Corinthians 11:23-28).

Such passages prompt an obvious question: Since Jesus, the apostles and the early Church kept these days, why don’t churches teach and observe them today? After all, Paul directly tied the feasts to Jesus, His purpose and His sacrifice for mankind (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The Gospels and Acts are equally clear that Christ, the disciples and the early Church kept the weekly Sabbath on the seventh day of the week as their day of rest and worship (Mark 6:2; Luke 4:16, 31-32; 13:10; Acts 13:14-44; 18:4). It was Jesus’ custom to go to the synagogue on Sabbath days to worship (Luke 4:16).

Contrary to the teaching of those who say that Paul abandoned the Sabbath, it was his custom, too, to go to the synagogue every Sabbath (Acts 17:1-3), using this God-ordained assembly to teach others about Jesus of Naza-

areth as Savior and Messiah. of the first century, from 68 to 100 A.D., ‘The Age of Shadows,’ partly because the gloom of persecution was over the church, but more especially because of all the periods in the [church’s] history, it is the one about which we know the least . . . For fifty years after St. Paul’s life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A.D. with the writings of the earli-

areth as Savior and Messiah.

Of course, most people and churches ignore the biblical seventh-day Sabbath. But why? Shouldn’t we observe a weekly day of rest and worship as God commands (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15), and shouldn’t it be the



It was the custom of the apostle Paul to go to the synagogue every Sabbath, using the opportunity to teach others about Jesus Christ. And rather than teaching that God’s law was done away, he taught obedience to that law.

same day that Jesus and His apostles kept?

A closer examination of the Scriptures reveals many other differences between the teachings and practices of Jesus and His apostles and what is commonly taught. For example, the belief that obedience to God’s law is unnecessary is directly contrary to Jesus’ own words (Matthew 4:4; 5:17-19) and the teachings and examples of His apostles (Acts 24:14; 25:8; Romans 7:12, 22; 1 Corinthians 7:19; 2 Timothy 3:15-17).

Jesus and the apostles never taught that the righteous ascend consciously to heaven at death (John 3:13; Acts 2:29, 34), and they understood that man does not possess

an immortal soul that would spend eternity in either heaven or hell (Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Matthew 10:28). Rather, they followed earlier scriptural passages in referring to death as being like an unconscious sleep from which people will wake in a future resurrection (compare Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Daniel 12:2-3; John 11:11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:30; 15:6, 51; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).

Nowhere in the Bible do we find any hint of approval for today’s popular religious holidays, such as Christmas and Easter. Though the Greek word *pascha* is once incorrectly translated “Easter” (Acts 12:4, KJV)—and that only in one Bible translation—this is a flagrant *mis*-translation. *Pascha* always means “Passover,” never Easter!

Instead of approving such celebrations rooted in paganism, God condemns them even when they are used in attempts to worship Him (compare Deuteronomy 12:29-32; 1 Corinthians 10:19-21).

These are some of the major differences between the Christianity of Jesus and the apostles and the Christianity commonly practiced today. But don’t simply take our word for it. We encourage you to follow the example of the Bereans (Acts 17:11) and look into your Bible to see whether today’s popular beliefs and practices agree with what Jesus and His apostles practiced and taught.

(To learn more about these subjects, be sure to request our free booklets *The Church Jesus Built, God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Really Matter Which Days We Observe?*, *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest, Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* and *What Happens After Death?*)

est church-fathers, *we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul*" (*The Story of the Christian Church*, 1970, p. 33).

At the heart of this breach in Christianity was controversy over God's law—how, or whether, it should set the standard for Christian conduct. Those who wanted to avoid any association with the Jews were determined to abandon everything that might identify them with the Jewish religion, including any direct obligation to obey God's law.

They ignored or reasoned around the fact that Jesus had already given a definitive answer to this issue when He said: "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them [or fill them full, in His teaching and example]. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished*" (Matthew 5:17-18, NIV).

Accordingly, when one asked Jesus, "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" He answered, "If you want to enter into life, *keep the commandments*" (Matthew 19:16-17).

Paul expressed the same support of God's law, stating: "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. *Keeping God's commands is what counts*" (1 Corinthians 7:19, NRSV). Paul also wrote that Christ came not to abandon but "*to confirm the promises made to the fathers*" (Romans 15:8).

Therefore, we find the Church described in Acts faithfully keeping the Ten Commandments, including the seventh-day Sabbath. The Church of that era also observed the same sacred festivals as the Jews (see Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 16:1-16; Leviticus 23). As the original Church expanded to include gentiles (non-Israelites), we see that they, too, were taught to observe these biblically established festivals (Acts 13:42, 44; 18:4; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8). (Be sure to read "What Did the Early Church Believe and Practice?" beginning on page 36.)

Yet when we look at the history of the publicly prominent form of Christianity of later centuries, we find that it has abandoned those festivals, celebrating instead an entirely different set of days—Christmas, Easter and Sunday, the first day of the week. Those who faithfully continued keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, Passover and the other scripturally commanded festivals were gradually marginalized as heretics.

As new leaders with different views gained more control over congregations, they progressively expelled those who faithfully held to apostolic beliefs and practices. Late in his life, near the end of the first century, the apostle John tells of one such incident: "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, *does not*

receive us . . . And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, *putting them out of the church*" (3 John 9-10).

Persecuted not only by authorities of the Roman Empire but also by those who had falsely assumed a Christian identity, these ostracized but

God's Law and the New Covenant

Many assume that, because Jesus Christ instituted the New Covenant, God's laws are thereby made obsolete. They lean on this argument to ignore His commandments. But what does Jesus Himself say?

He answers: "*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [actually 'fill to the full,' meaning fully explain or fully express]. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away [and they clearly haven't passed away], one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.*"

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever *does and teaches them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-19).

Notice how Hebrews 10:16-17 summarizes the New Covenant: "'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: *I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them.*' Then He adds, 'Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.'" This is perfectly consistent with Christ's words. God's laws aren't annulled under the New Covenant; they are *written into our hearts and minds* so we might *obey Him better*.

A new covenant wasn't needed because the laws included in the Old Covenant were inadequate or faulty. Rather, the New Covenant was needed because, as Hebrews 8:8 tells us, "God found fault *with the people . . .*" (NIV). The fault was in the *nature of the people themselves* (verses 7-9)—the fact that human

beings are hostile to God's laws rather than spiritually minded and willing to obey (see Romans 8:5-8).

What people need to have changed is their *heart*, not the laws that define sin—sin being the violation of God's law (1 John 3:4). Such change in the heart is possible only when people receive God's Spirit. That's why the focus of the New Covenant is on providing the way and the means for sins to be forgiven so people may receive the Holy Spirit.

That is why the sacrifice of Christ is such a central focus. During His last meal with His apostles, on the night before He was crucified, "He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is [meaning *this represents*] *My blood of the new covenant*, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'" (Matthew 26:27-28).

Further, we are certainly not forgiven for disobeying God just so we can go on freely disobeying Him! Clearly God's laws remain in force. God intends to indelibly inscribe them into our emotions and thinking, our hearts and minds. The difference now is that these laws are to be written into our very thinking.

This is why the members of the United Church of God follow Christ's example of applying God's commandments *according to the fullness of their intent* as explained in Christ's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. (To better understand why obeying God's commandments is so important, be sure to download or request our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*. To understand the biblical truth about the New Covenant, read our free booklet *The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God's Law?*)

faithful brethren often had to retreat into hiding. The true Christianity and Church of Jesus and the apostles began to disappear from public view.

Shortly before the apostle John died, he received a revealing message, in a vision from Christ, to pass on to the beleaguered faithful remaining in Ephesus: “I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those *who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false*” (Revelation 2:2-3, NIV).

But one might ask, how could this have happened to the Church Christ Himself built?

Warnings from Christ and His apostles

Outside of the New Testament, few sources have survived to convey

Out of the apostolic period of the Church emerged two distinct “Christian” religions. One, small and almost invisible on the world scene, remained faithful to Christ’s message. The other appropriated Christ’s name even as it incorporated ideas and practices from other religions.

any details of what happened to the Christian religion during that time. Yet the New Testament record is clear. A major breach had occurred within Christianity. In fact, Jesus and His apostles had continually warned that this would occur (compare Matthew 7:15; 24:5, 11; Acts 20:29-31; 1 John 4:1).

Jesus gave this warning: “For *false Christs* and *false prophets* will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance” (Matthew 24:24-25, NASB).

In the early decades of the Church, the apostles vehemently opposed attempts to corrupt the truth they had personally received from Christ (1 John 2:24-26). Paul warned some of the very elders he had ordained that “from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:30-31).

Peter proclaimed: “There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies . . . And *many* will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed” (2 Peter 2:1-2). John also warned that “*many deceivers*” had already gone out into the world with their heresies masquerading as Christianity (2 John 7).

How could this happen? Jesus explained in a parable that, amid the “wheat” (His true people), God would allow “tares” to grow (Matthew 13:37-43). At first they would appear to be indistinguishable from the wheat, but, in the end, they would bear no heads of grain, no fruit to prove them genuine. On the surface they would look like real disciples, but in reality they would be far different. They would have within them no depth of commitment to the true gospel and Christ’s teachings.

Thus out of the apostolic period of the Church emerged two distinct “Christian” religions. One, small and almost invisible on the world scene, remained faithful to Christ’s message. The other appropriated Christ’s name even as it incorporated ideas and practices from other religions—a process known as *syncretism*—as was common in the Roman Empire of the day. Traditions of men replaced the commands of God and became entrenched in what would become the predominant form of Christianity known to the world.

(To learn more about this corruption of Christ’s gospel and its effect on the Church He established, send for our free booklets *The Church Jesus Built* and *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*)

The gospel of the Kingdom today

In spite of such difficulties and the rise of this counterfeit Christianity, Jesus Christ has remained true to His promise that His true Church would never die out. At His return, those Christians faithfully serving Him, steadfastly loyal to God’s commandments, will be ready for their role in the next phase of God’s plan of salvation. They will become kings and priests of God, assisting Christ in teaching the entire world the same obedience to God’s law (Revelation 5:10; 20:6; Micah 4:1-2).

Interestingly, in the apostolic era of the Church the apostle Paul described the manner of life of its members as “the Way” and “this Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). He plainly identified it as a *way of life*. We must never lose sight of the fact that Christianity isn’t merely a set of beliefs; it is *the way we live*.

The Church that Jesus built never perished. Through the centuries its members held firmly to the truth, and today it is still diligently and faithfully proclaiming Christ’s gospel of the Kingdom of God just as His original disciples did. While times and cultures have changed, the basic eternal truths of God have not changed (compare Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; Hebrews 13:8). Revelation 12:17 clearly describes the end-time Church of God as still “keep[ing] the commandments of God and hav[ing] the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Today, the United Church of God, an International Association, is

striving to practice “the faith which was *once for all* delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). To accomplish this we have committed ourselves to living, as Jesus taught, “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

We strive to live by the same divine instruction that Jesus, His apostles and the early Church followed, very aware that this sharply distinguishes us from most of what is today called Christianity, which no longer follows the Church described in the book of Acts as its model.

Like the members of that early Church, we remain fully committed to proclaiming the message of the coming Kingdom of God and Christ’s pivotal role in it. Likewise, we remain fully committed to preparing a people to serve as Christ’s helpers in that Kingdom.

We sincerely encourage you to examine in much greater detail the message Jesus taught. If you are interested, simply request our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. It’s available through our office nearest you or via our online literature library at www.GNmagazine.org/booklets.

Hope for a Troubled World

Jesus said not to worry and fret over our physical needs but to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). This, then, is the first priority of every Christian—to pursue God’s Kingdom through living as He commands. This pursuit leads to a life of great meaning and purpose, filled with personal enrichment, one with absolute faith in a future that is wonderful beyond anything we can imagine.

Ultimately, God desires that all mankind be saved and live eternally in His family and Kingdom (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9). This is what motivates us as members of the United Church of God in our collective responsibility. We see our mission as servants of God called to proclaim this message, serving God in the fulfillment of His amazing purpose for humanity. There can be no greater mission in life than to have a part in fulfilling this eternal objective.

Our greatest challenge for this age, then, is to live as God commands, to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God in all the world, to make disciples in all nations and to care for the disciples God adds to His Church today (Matthew 28:19).

We value God’s plan to save every individual who will yield to Him. We understand that two distinct groups of people will hear the message proclaimed by the Church. Jesus said of those called to be His disciples, “It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” but concerning everyone else He said, “To them it has not been given”—that is, in this present age (Matthew 13:11).

The second group is the world at large—those who, according to God’s time and purpose, He will eventually also call and grant mercy to upon their repentance (Romans 11:25-32). To this group the Church proclaims a message of hope.

Why is this knowledge important? Every individual—regardless of race, national origin or sex—will, in time, have the opportunity to be called by God and to hear and respond to the good news of the Kingdom of God and to the testimony of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. What they learn about God’s ways today may help them come to repentance with less difficulty at that time.

Therefore, the gospel of the Kingdom of God is a message directed



to all of mankind. God's plan explicitly provides for every human being from every nation to eventually have an opportunity for membership in His family—according to His timetable and will. As Peter said, "How true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34-35, NIV).

Hope beyond the time of the end

Bible prophecy warns of a coming time of international upheaval unlike any previous period in world history. Jesus describes it as a time of "great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again" (Matthew 24:21, NIV).

He tells His followers to "watch," to be personally vigilant concerning their own spiritual condition, with an eye on world events so as to understand the times and not be caught unaware and unprepared (Luke 21:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6). (For better understanding of end-time events, request our free booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*)

Christians should have a basic understanding of the times and events that may affect their lives and be able to consider them in a proper context. Paul describes Christ's servants in this present age as "ambassadors" for His coming Kingdom (2 Corinthians 5:20). That Kingdom is not here yet. But many of its citizens are alive today. The story the gospel tells is that of a little flock that, growing like a mustard seed, will eventually fill the whole earth (see Luke 12:32; Matthew 13:31-32).

Christ is now preparing, in His role as our High Priest, a people who will serve in His coming Kingdom (John 14:1-3). He foretold that for His followers' sake the terrible times ahead will be cut short and humanity will be saved from extinction (Matthew 24:22). Because of their faithfulness now, they will share in Christ's future rule over the earth (Revelation 3:21).

You, too, can choose to become a part of the work of God, a helper in proclaiming the eternal message of the Kingdom of God. The gospel of the coming Kingdom of God holds forth the only lasting solution to humanity's problems. The United Church of God remains firm in its commitment to fulfill its part in that proclamation—making known the noble and awe-inspiring purpose for human life!

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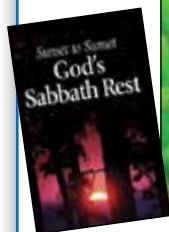
Who we are: This publication is provided free of charge by the United Church of God, an *International Association*, which has ministers and congregations throughout much of the world.

We trace our origins to the Church that Jesus founded in the early first century. We follow the same teachings, doctrines and practices established then. Our commission is to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).



Free of charge: Jesus Christ said, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). The United Church of God offers this and other publications free of charge as an educational service

in the public interest. We invite you to request your free subscription to *The Good News* magazine and to enroll in our 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*, also free of charge.



We are grateful for the generous tithes and offerings of the members of the Church and other supporters

who voluntarily contribute to support this work. We do not solicit the general public for funds. However, contributions to help us share this message of hope with others are welcomed. All funds are audited annually by an independent accounting firm.

Personal counsel available: Jesus commanded His followers to feed His sheep (John 21:15-17). To help fulfill this command, the United Church of God has congregations around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship.

The United Church of God is committed to understanding and practicing New Testament Christianity. We desire to share God's way of life with those who earnestly seek to follow our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our ministers are available to counsel, answer questions and explain the Bible. If you would like to contact a minister or visit one of our congregations, please feel free to contact our office nearest you.

For additional information: Visit our website www.GNmagazine.org to download or request any of our publications, including issues of *The Good News*, dozens of free booklets and much more.



