



News At a Glance

Paul Kieffer Resigns From Council of Elders

On Wednesday, Dec. 9, Paul Kieffer voluntarily resigned from his position on the Council of Elders. Mr. Kieffer was one of the three international Council members. David Baker was the runner-up of the international candidates in the 2009 balloting. Mr. Baker has accepted the position on the Council.

We welcome Mr. Baker to the Council of Elders and look forward to working with him in the future.

Roy Holladay

Over 3,550 Sermons Added to Members' Site

Over 3,550 sermons have been indexed on the UCG members' site as of Dec. 15 as a result of uploads from UCG local congregation Web sites, reported senior Web developer Tom Disher.

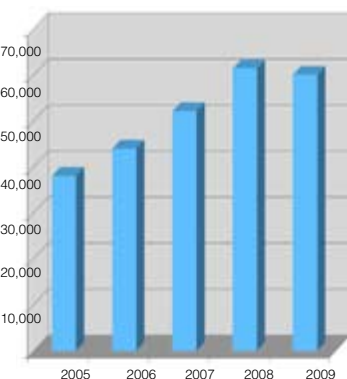
Media and Communications Services announced the initial launch of new local congregation Web sites in July 2009 as part of an essential step in developing United Church of God's Web presence and unifying the appearance of all UCG sites. As of Dec. 15, three out of four local congregation sites have gone live.

Since July 8,800 sermons have been downloaded, equating to nearly 9,000 hours of sermons listened to by visitors of the local congregation sites or the members' site. The sermons page on

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United Statistics

World News & Prophecy (Print Run November issues)



Council Adopts Broadcast Television Plan



CHAIRMAN ROY HOLLADAY passes the microphone to fellow Council member Jim Franks during a town hall meeting question-and-answer session with the 2010 ABC class

■ At its quarterly meeting held Dec. 7 to 10, the Council of Elders approved a plan to air *Beyond Today* on broadcast television in the United States beginning April 2010.

by Elizabeth Cannon

On Dec. 9 Darris McNeely, chairman of the Media Committee,

presented to the Council of Elders a media mix plan recommended by Peter Eddington, production manager for Media and Communications Services.

This plan introduces a new media strategy of preaching the gospel on weekly commercial television, with airtime purchased either on cable networks or in individual broadcast markets or both. The media mix also includes budget recommendations for a number of areas including print promotions, Internet and subscriber development.

The Media and Communications Services department is preparing to

launch commercial television programming in April 2010 with the current *Beyond Today* program and then to launch an improved program in the fall. The initial budget for the first 12 calendar months of airtime was set at a minimum of \$400,000, to be reviewed annually as budget and finances permit.

The rationale behind broadcasting a weekly program is building a loyal audience who will become high-quality subscribers to our literature. "Regular weekly TV, as opposed to occasional one-time

See "Council," page 7

Senior Pastors Hold Annual Meeting

by Jim Franks

The United Church of God is an "international association"! We see that in evidence each year at the GCE when ministers and wives travel to Cincinnati from around the world. But we also see some of that whenever the senior pastors come to town.

Our two days of meetings on Dec. 1 and 2 were very successful and provided an opportunity for in-depth discussions of each area. The senior pastors gave reports on their activities that were truly inspiring.

We also talked about plans for preaching the gospel in each area and discussed ways to get more work done with fewer resources. These men are all doing an outstanding job, and we are privileged to have them serving in areas outside the United States.

"Senior pastor" is a title that was developed about 10 years ago when it became obvious there were parts of the world that would need help with ministerial leadership.

Our Rules of Association offer three basic models for leadership in areas outside the United States: (1) an area may be organized under the leadership of a national council, (2) an area may be organized under the leadership of a national council from a neighboring country or (3) an area may be organized under the leadership of the home office.

Today, we have five areas outside the United States that operate under the third option. The United Kingdom is an additional area that has requested the help of a senior pastor but plans to maintain a national council for general oversight. Paul Suckling has been des-

ignated as the senior pastor who will travel to the United Kingdom four times per year for the purpose of ministerial and congregational development.

The remaining five areas and the designated senior pastors are: Ghana under Melvin Rhodes, Nigeria under Fred Kellers, East Africa under John Elliott, Asia and the Philippines under David Baker, and Eastern Europe and Scandinavia under Victor Kubik.

In addition to the senior pastors, four of the areas have an assigned "associate pastor." Tom Clark is the associate for Ghana; Mark Mickelson is the associate for Nigeria; Tim Waddle is the associate for East Africa; and Johnnie Lambert is the associate for Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. **UN**

Jim Franks is the operation manager for Ministerial Services.

"Forward to the Kingdom" Blog Reaches 30,000 Views

The "Forward to the Kingdom" experimental blog has received 30,000 views in its first nine months.

The more than 400 short items posted to the blog cover a variety of Bible tips, Christian living principles, inspirational answered prayer stories and news items all intended to encourage readers to seek first the Kingdom of God, said Mike Bennett, editorial content manager, who coordinates the blog.

The blog posts provide hundreds of links back to other UCG Web sites, which will help in making Church sites rank higher in the search engines. The blog has also received more than 900 comments from interested readers.

"Guest bloggers are welcome! Just send me your ideas or short items at mike_bennett@ucg.org," said Mr. Bennett. Doctrinal items are reviewed by a team of three ministers.

The blog is at <http://ucgmikebennett.wordpress.com> or just type "Forward to the Kingdom" in Google or another search engine.

Plans are for the "3 Bible Tips" blog category to migrate to the new FreeBibleStudyGuides.org Web site in early 2010.

The Church is also providing the opportunity for local congregations to have their own blogs on their local congregation Web sites. Members can talk with their local pastors about this new development. **UN**

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the members' site has received 14,600 hits in the past 16 weeks.

Each congregation can have a part in increasing UCG's Web presence by utilizing its local congregation Web site, uploading weekly sermons and writing commentaries in its blog. By doing so, we will increase the effectiveness of our efforts to preach the gospel on the Internet.

"It would be incredibly helpful if every congregation had volunteers to upload weekly sermons, sermon transcripts, even notes from sermons to their local site," said Mr. Disher.

"It's helpful for a couple of reasons. Each sermon that is uploaded becomes a content-rich page on the site if it has a transcript and an informative summary. It also helps us optimize our sites so that when people search for something like 'Sabbath,' they'll be more likely to find the local congregation site or the main UCG Web site on the first page of the search results."

"It might not seem important," said Mr. Disher, "but it's a really effective and easy way to preach the gospel."

Contact your local pastor if you would like to volunteer to help with your local congregation's Web site. Also, go to <http://members.ucg.org> to find out how you can help preach the gospel on the Internet.

Elizabeth Cannon

How to Help Preach the Gospel on Facebook

One of the ways the readers of UCG literature and visitors to our Web sites are building a relationship with us is through our Facebook fan pages. There has been exciting growth on all five of our fan pages. As of Dec. 9:

- The *Good News* fan page at www.facebook.com/GoodNewsMagazine has 3,012 fans.
- The United Church of God fan page at www.facebook.com/UnitedChurchofGod has 2,590 fans.
- The *World News and Prophecy* fan page at www.facebook.com/WorldNewsProphecy has 1,517 fans.
- The "This Is the Way" fan page at www.facebook.com/pages/This-is-the-Way has 1,023 fans.
- The *Vertical Thought* fan page at www.facebook.com/VerticalThought has 767 fans.

These pages will also have benefits in helping our material rise in

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Profile: Garvey and Gloria Chilopora

by Cathy Botha

Garvey, a 32-year-old Malawian doctor, is currently working and studying in South Africa. His roots are in the medical profession: his father is a general practitioner and his mother is a nurse.

Together Garvey's parents run a community clinic in Malawi. They started their clinic in 1989 with private funds, but over the past few years they have been assisted by LifeNets.

Garvey studied medicine at the University of Malawi, but then he decided to specialize in obstetrics and gynecology after he completed 1½ years of compulsory community service. Garvey had initially decided to specialize in internal medicine, but he became very demoralized because there is often very little that doctors and medical science can do to help critically ill people. Many people (specifically AIDS sufferers) can die within 24



Garvey, Samuel and Gloria Chilopora

hours of admission to a hospital despite the correct medical intervention.

Then Garvey discovered the field of obstetrics where doctors can intervene for a critically ill pregnant mother, and 24 hours later she might be discharged, healthy and delighted with her new baby!

Garvey is now officially recognized as an obstetric gynecologist since he recently passed his specialist exams. He was able to pass the exams a year earlier than expected and is now hoping to further specialize in reproductive medicine. This will take another two years of intense work and study, after which he plans to return as a lecturer at the University of Malawi.

In 2007, Garvey married Gloria. They met in Malawi but were obligated to continue much of their relationship over the telephone when Garvey moved to South Africa to specialize. It was quite an expensive relationship, so Garvey decided to end it—and propose, also over the telephone. A

lavish traditional Malawian engagement ceremony soon followed and less than six months later they married and moved to Cape Town, South Africa.

This was not an easy move for Gloria. She had a good human resources job and many friends and family in Malawi.

Gloria started to attend UCG on her own in Malawi. Her biggest surprise (or shock rather) when she first attended UCG was going to a church that wasn't in a church building and being confronted with an American minister on a DVD. To add more to the surprise, the DVD was dated from the previous year.

This experience was contrary to her usual experience of Christian churches in Malawi where she grew up in a religious, churchgoing family. Her decision to attend UCG was not taken lightly. Nevertheless, she persevered. She and Garvey now attend in the Cape Town congregation. Earlier this year, Gloria and Garvey became the proud parents of Samuel Chilopora.

We are very proud of them and hope they will be able to remain in Cape Town for the next two years and their future plans will be successful. **UN**

FORWARD! Religion With Sacrifice

by Jason Lovelady



Mahatma Gandhi said that there are seven things—seven deadly social sins—that will destroy a people, society or nation: wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, business without ethics, science without humanity, politics without principles and religion without sacrifice. While each of these is profound, let's consider the last one on Gandhi's list. Can there be religion without sacrifice?

Stephen Covey, in his book *Principle-Centered Leadership*, writes, "Sadly, many people want 'religion' or at least the appearance of it, without any sacrifice... [But] it takes sacrifice to serve the needs of other people—the sacrifice of our own pride and prejudice, among other things."

Without sacrifice, Stephen Covey further writes, you can't have unity: "Pride and selfishness will destroy the union between man and God, between man and woman, between man and man, between self and self."

Can there be religion without sacrifice? No, I think not. In fact, the foundation of our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ is made possible by sacrifice. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

It is through this supreme sacrifice of His Son that God demonstrates His ultimate love for us. Clearly, God first loved us, and God desires our love in return. It is through God's example and perfect expression of love and sacrifice that we learn *how* to love.

In 1 John 3:16 we read, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Again, can there be religion without sacrifice? Can we worship God without sacrifice? For that matter, can one love without sacrifice? The answer, of course, to all three questions is no. True religion, true worship and true love require sacrifice.

Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, and God expects the same from us.

Paul urges us—beseeches us—to "offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1, New International Version). Worship demands sacrifice from us, that is, the daily giving and submitting of our lives to God.

Religion, worship and love require sacrifice. They require the giving of our whole life in service to God and each other. God is waiting patiently for us to do just that—to sacrifice our time, our treasures, our short lives in service to Him and to each other. When we do, we will please God with our sacrifice. **UN**

Jason Lovelady is treasurer of UCGIA.

January 2010
Vol. 16, No. 1



UnitedNews
News of the United Church of God, an International Association

United News (ISSN 1088-8020) is published monthly except April and October by the United Church of God, an International Association, 555 Technecenter Drive, Milford, OH 45150. © 2009 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in the U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited. Periodicals Postage paid at Milford, Ohio 45150, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post publications mail agreement number 1487167.

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Mission Statement: The mission of the Church of God is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God in all the world, make disciples in all nations and care for those disciples.

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Scriptural references are from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers) unless otherwise noted.

Subscriptions: *United News* is sent automatically to members of the United Church of God and is free to all who request it. Your subscription is provided by the generous, voluntary contributions of members of the United Church of God, an International Association, and their coworkers. Donations are gratefully accepted and are tax-deductible. To request a subscription, write to *United News*, United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, or to one of the international addresses below.

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News From Around the World

Good News Lectures Begin in Nigeria

by Oludare Akinbo

The Nigerian work is poised to start a series of public Bible lectures in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. The first began on Nov. 29, 2009. On Nov. 2, we mailed 70 letters inviting subscribers of *The Good News* and our other publications to attend a Bible lecture.

Based on previous experience, I did not include the venue but asked for a text message or e-mail confirmation of intention to attend. This way we can make sure that the place we use is adequate for the numbers attending and that we have enough

handouts (and some extra for those who might come unexpectedly).

It takes over a week for letters to get to Abuja from Lagos, but we have started getting enthusiastic responses and we look forward to the Bible study series. A kind-hearted and talented friend from the Spokane, Washington, congregation designed and sent a beautiful stand to use at these public Bible studies that will add color and advertise who and what we are to people in the surrounding areas.

We are looking forward to increasing the number of active congregations in Nigeria by the middle of next

year. We believe there are enough longtime subscribers who are well acquainted with us that a congregation could be set up very soon. As well, a series of Bible lectures in Abeokuta has resulted in nine individuals receiving regular contact via e-letters, personal visits and periodic Bible studies.

On the Sabbath of Nov. 14, the Benin City congregation had the local news station come cover our church services from opening hymn to closing hymn in a condensed 25-minute format for airing to the public on a religious channel that airs various church or religious services. **UN**

UCG–Germany Youth Magazine *Wegweiser* Prepared to Go Online in 2010

by Claire Kasper

On Dec. 14 UCG–Germany published the fifth issue of its new youth magazine, *Wegweiser* (Pathfinder).

A small group of German-speaking teens in the Church are scattered across Germany, Switzerland

and Austria and are rarely able to meet together beyond the annual Laubhüttenfest (Feast of Tabernacles). One idea to help unite and encourage them was to introduce a new youth magazine, tailored specifically for the German-speaking European youth.

For each issue of *Wegweiser* a team of young adults in Germany search for relevant, educational and inspiring articles from various UCG resources such as *The Good News*, *Vertical Thought Commentaries*, *Teen Bible Study Guides* and *United News*. They then translate the articles into German and format them to create a 12- or 16-page printed magazine. At times the magazine features small articles written by the teens themselves, which not only helps to personalize the magazine and give them a sense of ownership, but is also a way of getting to know one another better.

One goal of *Wegweiser* is to remind the youth that the Church is

not only for their parents, but also for them. It focuses on social issues relating to teens, answers questions about why we believe what we believe and encourages the youth to delve deeper into the Bible. Memory verses are included, as well as the occasional Bible quiz.

To date, each issue of *Wegweiser* has focused on a specific theme, such as proving the Bible is the Word of God, proving the Sabbath, friendship and lessons learned from the lives of David and Joseph.

Presently *Wegweiser* is produced three times a year, and over the last two years five issues have been published. Further issues are being planned for the coming year, and it is hoped to extend the distribution to the broader public by uploading an electronic version onto the *Gute Nachrichten* (Good News) Web site this year. **UN**

Visit www.gutenachrichten.org or www.ucog.org to read the latest issue of *Wegweiser*.



UCG–Australia Welcomes Board Members

by Ruth Root

Every two years the selection of elders to UCG–Australia's Board takes place. This year the process was completed in June, resulting in Bill Bradford, Stephen Clark, Bruce Dean and Doug Gray returning to serve on the Board for another two-year term. Trevor Huthnance and Grant Chick were also welcomed to the Board, replacing David Holladay and retiring Board chairman Bill Eddington.

Trevor Huthnance has previously served on Australia's Board from Aug. 1, 2000, to June 30, 2006, during which time he also

served as chairman of the policy and planning committee. Mr. Huthnance has considerable experience in human resources and compliance and has used these skills to serve the Church extensively over the years.

This is Grant Chick's first time on the Board, and he brings experience not only as an Ambassador College graduate, elder and a longtime member of the Church, but also as owner and operator of Southern Natel Fertilizer Services in South Africa for eight years.

In addition, Grant served on the board of governors for Creston Christian College for five years, during which he was treasurer for

two years and chairman of the board of governors for 12 months before moving to Australia to serve in the ministry here.

In the course of the Board meeting, new officers to the Board were elected. Trevor Huthnance was elected Board chairman for the next 24 months, with Bill Bradford returning to the office of pastoral committee chairman for the same period.

During the meeting, current secretary to the Board Peter King indicated he would be stepping down from his office as of July 31, 2009. Mark Robertson was appointed to replace him on Aug. 1, 2009. **UN**

International News At a Glance

Southern Africa Says Farewell to Van Belkums

On the Sabbath of Aug. 8, the Durban, South Africa, congregation said their good-byes to André and Elize van Belkum. The outlying brethren from



André and Elize van Belkum

the North and South Coast, as well as those from Mooi River and Harri-smith, attended the service, which was followed by a potluck lunch. There was a very good turnout of 78 people, and everyone had an opportunity to personally say good-bye.

Mr. and Mrs. van Belkum had taken care of the United Church of God in Durban from its start almost 14 years ago and will be sadly missed in South Africa. They have since transferred to New Zealand to serve in the Pacific region.

It was quite a challenge to come up with a suitable farewell gift because of the uncertainty regarding their actual date of departure and the fact that they would be traveling light. Finally, it was decided to present them with a photograph album containing 200 photos of the members of the congregation and various activities that were held over the years.

Neville Smith

UCG–British Isles Posts Ads on Google

The Church in the United Kingdom has started posting Google ads to boost our *Good News* mailing list. They offer the booklets *United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*, *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* In three weeks there have been 2,751 clicks to the pages offering the booklets from 2,750,000 impressions (the location where the ad appears on browser windows). So far, that has led to about 50 requests for the printed booklets and *GNs*, but we have no count of who may be reading them online. We have also just begun advertising *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

Peter Hawkins

One Man Baptized, One Couple Married During Trip to France

French regional coordinator Joel Meeker made a two-week pastoral trip through Switzerland, Belgium and France in mid-November. Sabbath services were held near Geneva, Switzerland, and in Bordeaux, France. The trip also allowed visits to scattered Church members. Daniel Vernaude of Trelex, Switzerland, was baptized in a beautifully pristine but chilly lake in the Jura Mountains.

On the Sabbath afternoon of Nov. 21, Hervé Dubois of Vichy, France, and Helen Hayes of Michigan were married near Bordeaux. The new Mrs. Dubois' home congregation in Michigan was able to listen to the bilingual French and English ceremony via a telephone link.

Pioneer East Berlin Member Dies at 88

The funeral for the first East German Church of God member, Heinz Pistorius, was held in Zwickau, Germany, on Nov. 4.

In the early 1960s Heinz came into contact with the Church of God via *The World Tomorrow* broadcast over Radio Luxembourg. In 1965 he and his son were baptized by Frank Schnee in Leipzig, becoming the first members in East Germany.

Since the Church was not recognized in East Germany, Heinz and others who later became members met privately whenever a minister from West Germany was able to visit.

The Feast of Tabernacles was disrupted in 1971 when East German police (*Stasi*) ordered the meetings being held at a campground near East Berlin stopped. From that time on the group met privately without any overt interference, although *Stasi* observers in the neighborhood kept track of visitors (including elders who visited from West Germany).

Heinz was later ordained a deacon and served faithfully in the small congregation in East Germany for nearly 30 years until the two Germanys were united in 1990.

The last years of his life were marked by failing health. He was no longer able to attend Sabbath or Holy Day services. His wife, Käthe, attended to his needs faithfully until his death on Oct. 28, 2009.

Paul Kieffer



Heinz Pistorius

United Youth Corps: A Special Training

by Eduardo Elizondo

“Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). These famous words begin the promise God made to Abram to make him a great nation, to bless him and eventually bless all the nations of the earth through him, as the Messiah would come from his lineage.

Now that we have been living and serving in Jordan for over four months, those words that God said to Abram have begun to take on personal meaning. As we become more familiar with Jordanian culture and feel more comfortable in this country, we also have become

more detached from America and what we left behind.

It is quite striking to me while analyzing the lives of the patriarchs and other people of God to see that with those words of Genesis 12:1, God was beginning to set a pattern of special training for His people. Abraham is the first example in the Bible where God commands one of His servants to leave his land and his family behind.

Two generations later his grandson Jacob also left his father’s household and went to Padan Aram to live

with his uncle, Laban. In a similar fashion, God took Joseph out of his father’s household, though not by his own will, to shape him and eventually deliver his family from the famine that would strike the earth.

God then took Moses and the entire nation of Israel out of Egypt where they were in captivity. God also worked with King David, long before he was a king, by taking him away from his house to the fields where he pastored his father’s sheep.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ Himself was led by the Spirit to the wilderness where He fasted

40 days and 40 nights before being tempted by Satan. We see this pattern throughout the Bible: God takes His people out of their land, away from what is familiar to them, to teach them, to work closely and intimately with them and to change them.

In analyzing some of the common traits that God uses in this special kind of training, we see that God starts the process through solitude. It is in this state that God can call our attention to Him and to the meaning of life and our existence. When we do not have the distractions of

our everyday lives and the busyness of this world, it is a lot easier to go back to the basics and reflect upon our character development.

King David wrote his thoughts down when God was drawing him closer to Him: “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” (Psalm 8:3-4).

Drawing Closer to God in a Foreign Land

During the last four months we have learned many valuable lessons that have come from being away from our country and from our families. God has taken us away from almost everything that is familiar to us. Jordan is as foreign and unfamiliar as any country can be in this world. Everything is different—the food, the language, the culture, the religion—even the days of the workweek are different.

There is definitely a calling to go back to the basics and to reflect more on our character development and our relationship with God. As a result of being away from what is familiar, we have begun to reflect on the meaning of life and we have been able to take in His Word more deeply.

One of the great blessings this year has been the fact that the weekend in Jordan is Friday and Saturday, as opposed to Saturday

and Sunday as it is in most Western countries. We can use Thursday night and Friday during the day to prepare for the Sabbath, therefore making the day more enjoyable and more profitable with more time to pray and study God’s Word.

We have also had several Bible studies that our pastors and project coordinator have put together for us this year. We have been blessed to have so much spiritual food available, as well as the time to be able to take it all in!

As a natural consequence of all that God is doing in our lives while we are on this project, we have a responsibility to reflect what God is teaching us at a personal level. God designed this as part of the training method. His intention for Israel was to make them a model nation in the world. Jesus Christ was a light to the world, and His apostles followed in His footsteps.

We are in Jordan this year to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God by example and not by words. This is indeed a special kind of training we are receiving—a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. As we continue on this project in Jordan, we will continue striving to be lights, to be different and to exemplify all that God is teaching us as we are away from our country, our families and our fathers’ houses. **UN**

Follow the 2009-2010 United Youth Corps-Jordan team on their blog at www.uycjordan09.blogspot.com.



Eduardo and Stephanie Elizondo and Audry Bauer sit on a spot overlooking the Monastery in Petra



Jamie Franks and Kelley Schreiber in Wadi Rum

Good Works: North Carolina Congregations Host Silent Auction

by Bev McNight

On Saturday evening, Dec. 5, 2009, after combined services and a delicious meal of hotdogs and chili, the Asheboro and Greensboro, North Carolina, congregations held a silent auction as a fundraiser for the Good Works program.

While the brethren were bidding, live music was provided by Beth and Joey Jewell, Lee Dolby and Alvin Walker. They also supplied the music for a “donations appreciated” cakewalk.

God blessed our efforts with \$935 for the Good Works program! While the brethren from the Hickory congregation were not able to come, they sent some greatly appreciated contributions.

Attendees went home feeling good that they were able to have fun, fellowship and be a small part of a great work as we show our love to our brethren through the Good Works program.

How You Can Help

Would you like to help brethren around the world? The new Good Works program, in conjunction with the senior pastors

from around the world, is working to direct the efforts of people helping people.

God’s people are known for their good works! The book of 1 John states: “Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death... 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?” (1 John 3:13-14, 17).

The generosity of the Church is much appreciated around the world, and many have been helped and have been given hope in times of natural disaster or severe hardships.

One goal of Good Works is to get more local initiatives to sponsor specific needs. Local fundraising can help engage brethren—especially the youth in the Church—to connect with and reach out to those in need. **UN**

Please go to www.ucg.org/good-works to learn more about Good Works programs and to make donations to Good Works.



Bev McNight, bottom left, organized the silent auction. Attendees enjoyed live music, above left, as they walked around the hall choosing which items to bid on, bottom right.

My New Life

■ A young adult who lives in Norway recounts his story of being called into God's Church.

by John Wennström

The biggest change I made in my life occurred early in the year 2007 after I moved from Sweden to Norway to start working as a machine operator. Little did I know that while living in this new country something marvelous was going to happen that would change my life.

The Homeless Fellow

My family kept asking me if I was thinking about joining a local church group. They didn't want me to lose the Pentecostal faith I shared with them since I was on my own in a different country. One day after work, I drove around the city to find a church that didn't look boring. On a busy street, a Baptist church announced a Saturday night service for young adults.

On the following Saturday when the sun went down, I walked on the streets of Oslo heading for the church. As I was approaching a poor fellow begging for money, I began to search my pockets. But for some reason I felt that I should save whatever money I found and give it to the next homeless fellow that came in sight.

At the Baptist church there were a dozen people gathered around three tables. A lady welcomed me, but no one else said anything to me. So, I just took my place at an empty seat in front of a guy who looked more willing to talk. After a few awkward moments of silence, we said hello.

While talking, he revealed to me that he was here for the first time, just like I was. He came from Romania and had been in Oslo for just a couple of days, trying to find a job.

He began to open his well-marked Bible, and I got an uncomfortable feeling that he was going to start preaching to me. I quickly asked him where he lived. That's when he told me that he was homeless and had come to the church service to find brothers in Christ who would be willing to help him.

As he browsed the Bible and showed me scriptures describing brotherly love, I was astonished over the difference between what the Bible actually said and how I lived my life as a supposed, Bible-believing Christian. I soon realized that no one in this assembly really knew what they believed in or what the Bible said. Neither did I.



Bible. I had read every booklet that Mr. Armstrong had written, including the books *Mystery of the Ages* and *The Missing Dimension in Sex*. I had also seen many of his telecasts.

When I saw the video *Ambassador for World Peace: Behind the Work 1985*, I was convinced that this Church was doing the work of God. When I found the United Church of God in August 2007, I sent an e-mail to what I imagined was the Swedish UCG congregation. I asked if it was possible to meet someone in the Church in my area. It turned out that there were only two members in all of Scandinavia. It got me discouraged.

My girlfriend at the time didn't like what I was becoming. I followed the commands very strictly. I didn't want to talk about any-

The Sabbath was the hardest part to stick to. I lost many of my contacts and friends, and suddenly I noticed that most things in the world happen on Friday night.

My life decisions felt like a win-lose situation, where no matter what, I had to lose something in order to win something else. But the Bible showed me I needed to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Gradually, God showed me that His way truly was a win-win situation. As I grew spiritually through daily study, the Bible started to make sense from the first page to the last.

"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!"

against his conviction. I was worried that I had written something critical and harsh. Of course, back then I hoped the list would make him try to refute me and that by searching the Scriptures he would then find the truth.

Even though I do not have the support of my family, I have an inner peace and confidence, knowing that I will meet them in the second resurrection—unless God decides to call them in this life. There, they will have the opportunity to receive the knowledge of the truth, believe it with their hearts and live forever in a renewed and purposeful world. This is the hope I have, which I live by.

That summer of 2008 I went to a summer gathering in Sweden. I met brethren from Germany, Latvia and other Scandinavian countries; and there were also people from America. This weekend was unforgettable. Here I made my biggest decision—getting baptized.

What the homeless fellow was desperate to find was given to me. I got a new family with brothers and sisters all over the world. I cannot imagine how it is to have grown up in the Church. It must be unbelievably wonderful, having the knowledge of being a part of the biggest and most precious work in the universe.

If you look back and see how the work has been growing, how the people have been devoted and determined, it gives you courage, and inspiration. You want to study more; and the more you study, the more you understand. The more you understand, the happier you become, because then you actually live by the Word, by the tree of life. And when you reject the world and your ideas about what is good and evil, then you are not just a bystander in life, but a purposeful and useful part of the greatest happening in the universe. **UN**

John Wennström is a member living in Oslo, Norway.

As I grew spiritually through daily study, the Bible started to make sense from the first page to the last.

The Sabbath Command

During the following months my excitement and curiosity was solely focused on the Bible. I kept my Bible open and read about how Jesus Christ, as well as Paul, preached on the Sabbath and how the Sabbath was a sign between God and His people. Phrases like the "Kingdom of God" and "blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" bewildered my mind. I had to find the truth.

I googled for the Sabbath and found Herbert Armstrong, a man who believed God had restored the truth of the gospel, including the meaning of the Sabbath, through him. I was astonished by the things that he had written and said.

While I gained more and more knowledge, my life began to feel exciting and purposeful. I partly understood the Sabbath command and the Kingdom of God, and the day came when I had to decide whether I would keep the Sabbath.

No matter what would happen or what anyone would say, I was determined to keep the commandment. It meant not working overtime, no more partying on Friday nights and no more invites to friends on Saturday. For me it would mean just being home or wherever I happened to be, studying the Word, praying and reading booklets.

I learned that when we give God our time with sincere joy and enthusiasm, He gives the time back to us. We have less stress and feel that we have more time for other things.

Discouragement

More than a year had passed since my first sincere study of the

thing else other than the new truths I had found. I told her that I would never again celebrate Christmas or Easter.

Christmas was the time of the year that meant the most to her, so I understood why she broke up with me just before the year was over. I was dismayed; but during this trial I got stronger, and it persuaded me to keep going the

(Psalm 119:1-2). These words gave me encouragement, because I already had experienced the truth of it without reading it.

The New Family

While visiting my parents in Sweden, I told them that my beliefs were almost 100 percent different compared to their Protestant beliefs. My dad was shocked, and from that day on he was convinced that I lived in confusion and that I had been cursed by Satan. I wrote him a list of 20 differences to explain what I meant.

A year later he brought the list up in a discussion to tell me that everything I believed in was



(photo by Jesmina Allaoua)

direction I had already taken. I knew too much to stop.

It happened that the UCG senior pastor for Scandinavia, Victor Kubik, had planned to travel through Scandinavia to visit brethren. I had to wait four months, but in the first week of January 2008 he and his wife visited me in Oslo. I was eager to move forward and asked them about tithing and baptism. We also talked about the situation of there being just a few people scattered in Scandinavia. They encouraged me to stick close to God's Word and pray every day.



John Wennström (center) stands with Jim Franks, Victor Kubik, Johnnie Lambert and Britton Taylor after his baptism in Sweden (photo by Jesmina Allaoua)

The United Church of God, Also Known As...

■ In August the Council of Elders approved engaging a professional communication agency to help us improve the clarity of our delivery of the gospel message. This is a much-needed project to help us clearly communicate God's message for today's splintered and divided world.

by **Darris McNeely**

United's Strategic Plan makes this statement: "Communicate who we are and what we do to increase audience awareness of the benefits of God's way."

Doing this in today's world is a challenging task. There are a multitude of religious messages that cause a great deal of confusion. Add to this the increasing secularization of society, the anti-God and antireligious messages, and what we have is a world adrift both morally and spiritually.

At this juncture in United's development we have thought it best to take a step back and seek the advice of a professional communications agency that is adept at helping organizations craft compelling messages in today's world. They will not tell us what to believe or what to preach; rather they will advise us on how to communicate the vital truths of God most effectively.

This is not about trying to discover what the gospel is. We know what the true gospel is. No one on the Council or in the administration is uncertain of our doctrinal

integrity or the value of God's message of repentance and His plan of salvation in His Kingdom. What this project is about is refining how we frame God's timeless message for a modern world.

Herbert W. Armstrong was a professional advertising man with years of experience in crafting messages and marketing in his day. He brought that considerable experience with him when God called him to preach the gospel. Mr. Armstrong knew how to reach the mind of a listener with an interesting and captivating message. Even though he had personal expertise, he also drew upon the help of advertising firms to assist him at times when it was needed.

Today we have a much different audience. Mr. Armstrong spoke to a Depression era/World War II audience. Ours in the 21st century is different. Audience perceptions of organizations, religion and morals have altered the moral and ethical fabric of our society.

The technology explosion of recent years has not only given us increased opportunity to reach millions, but it has also created different ways of gathering and disseminating information. This knowledge explosion has created an audience that filters the myriad messages they see more rapidly and ignores most of them.

A Brand Recognized in the Dark

Consider for a moment how you and I approach a "brand" that we trust and respect. It can help us understand why we are going through this exercise.

In his book *Branding Faith* Phil Cooke, an author and branding expert, tells the story of how the iconic Coca-Cola bottle was designed. Understanding this world-famous shape and the product it contains illustrates the pow-

erful connection that can be made among people when successful branding occurs.

Early in the 19th century a glass designer named Earl R. Dean, who worked at the Root Glass Company, was given an assignment to design a bottle for Coke that would do two things.

"First, it could be recognized in the dark. Simply by touching the bottle, the customer would know the brand of soft drink almost instinctively.

"Second, even if the bottle was smashed to pieces, the customer could pick up any broken shard and still tell at first glance what the drink had been" (*Branding Faith*, p. 223).

Today, more than a hundred years later, the Coke bottle is known around the world. It is unmistakable, possibly the most ingenious piece of market branding in modern times.

What Does United's Brand Look Like?

This illustrates two points for United as we carefully examine the message we take to the world. The recipient should be able to identify it as a message that gives hope, understanding and purpose. It should be clearly identifiable with the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

He or she should be able to look at our Church and say, "That's the people who talk about the Kingdom of God coming to this earth with Christ's return." That understanding gives them purpose and hope. That message must be exact and unrelenting in its clarity. It must be simple, direct and uncluttered.

Speaking of the power of a well-conceived brand, Cooke writes, "Thousands of companies today use the smash test to evaluate their brands. In other words, if your logo was removed from the product, would the colors, graphic



Attendees of the Brand Essence Workshop on Nov. 18 discuss the unique attributes of the United Church of God

or other distinctive images still express the brand? Even better, how much could you smash your organization and still have it reflect your brand? Is your brand so much a part of your organization's DNA that every single aspect of your business reflects the brand?" (ibid., pp. 224-225).

Are God's eternal truths embedded in our spiritual DNA so deeply that we reflect the values of the Kingdom of God today in our lives?

How Will Branding Affect How We Preach the Gospel?

We know today that it takes more than the Sabbath and Holy Days to form our identity. For example, the love among the membership is also a key part of our brand.

There are many consistent features of the United Church of God that help form an identity. The structure of our congregational services, the way we observe the Feast of Tabernacles and the hymns we sing—these, too, help form our brand.

Our message across all forms of media also needs to be one that shows the promise of the gospel of the Kingdom of God for every individual. It must be inviting and convicting, relevant and timely, encouraging and compelling. It must give hope in a confusing world. It must remain true to the Bible, yet be more informative than today's news.

It must be both fresh and consistent for the longtime member who has "heard it all before," while at the same time be compelling for new ears hearing it for the first time. This is a challenge. Getting consultative help for this from an agency outside our walls will be helpful for the entire organization.

We are not branding sales products. We are freely giving the truth of God to a darkened world. We want to be sure that truth is recognizable at all times and under all conditions. **UN**

Darris McNeely is chairman of the Council of Elders' Media Committee.

The Essence of the Gospel

by **Brian Shaw**

If you were asked to express the gospel of the Kingdom of God in just a few words, could you? If someone asked you to describe the Church of God in a short phrase, what would you say? Could you boil down God's Church and the message He has given us to preach into a brief, yet precise, statement?

In the marketing discipline of branding, this is the kind of exercise that helps reveal what is known as a critical essence or brand essence—a short phrase that succinctly articulates the heart and soul of an organization. It expresses what makes the organization unique and admirable and embodies the values that characterize each representative.

Companies that are highly successful in integrating their communications and aligning each member of their organization are so largely because each made the effort to forge a very succinct, clearly understood and easily communicated critical essence. And we can learn much from them. Some examples of critical essence statements are:

Nike—"Authentic Athletic Performance."

Hallmark—"Caring Shared."

Disney—"Fun Family Entertainment."

Certainly, God's Church is not a business, but the work can benefit greatly from such a clear, succinct articulation of who we are and what we do. The more clearly we can express our purpose, our unique attributes and our most admirable aspirations, the better we can communicate and integrate our messaging and unify the efforts of each contributing member.

Not Branding the Church or the Gospel

Seeking to gain a clear understanding of our critical essence does not mean we are marketing or branding in the traditional sense. It is simply not possible to represent the true gospel or the true Church by reducing each to a slick, shallow icon.

God's Church has nothing to sell and will never change who it is or what it does to appeal to any market. God's people are delivering God's message. It is not ours to modify. We are to say what God tells us to say or our work is in vain (Isaiah 55:6-11).

The gospel of the Kingdom of God is not multiple messages, but one message reaching two different biblically defined segments: first, the world and second, the called within the world. God's Spirit working with the called enables them to

understand and receive His message as an invitation to know Him. Those God is not working with respond very differently, if at all (Luke 8:10).

Further, a critical essence is not a means of growing our membership, as adding members to the Body of Christ clearly belongs only to God (John 6:44; 1 Corinthians 1:9). The Church of God has always been and always will be non-proselytizing. To use another marketing term, this is one of the "differentiators" that sets us apart from all the religious clutter hindering the preaching of the true gospel.

Our "targets" for God's message are not defined by marketing measures, but by the Word of God. Though the "market" for the gospel message is the whole world, God is opening the minds of those He chooses to respond, encouraging them to seek Him out. The clarity of God's voice in the Church's messaging will resonate with them.

God's Spirit leads those God has called to seek the same things, namely the Word of God in the message and the Word of God in themselves. By these we are led into a relationship with God, so that we may truly know Him. **UN**

Brian Shaw is assistant pastor of the Chicago, Illinois, congregation and project manager of the Church's Branding Task Force.

“Council,” continued from page 1

programming, develops a presence for the Church that endures within a community,” Mr. McNeely said. “Spread this from city to city, and we begin to cover a region and nation with an effective witness of the gospel.”

During the presentation Mr. McNeely said that a production team would be formed that would focus on the Church’s video presentations and would include scriptwriters, content producers and a Web developer. “Our constant challenge, whether it is a three-minute segment or a 30-minute program, will be to make it compelling and interesting,” he said.

President Clyde Kilough, in his report to the Council on Dec. 7, said that a potential TV scriptwriter had been interviewed. Other ideas included hiring a search engine optimization (SEO) expert

to ensure that TV programs are compatible with our search optimization efforts on the Internet. Mr. Kilough said that such an idea should be part of a broader Internet plan (see “President’s Report” below).

The Internet Is the Hub

While working with the Media Committee to develop this plan, the administration cautioned that the proposed plan would lower the priority we currently have in Web development. For instance, the budget of \$70,000 for Web research and development would no longer be available with this commitment to purchasing television airtime, according to treasurer Jason Lovelady.

The administration suggested that a transition strategy of three to five years be implemented to change the focus to a more Web-centered mix, leading interested

people to our online resources. The Media Committee recognized the need to work on such a plan.

According to Mr. McNeely, the Council agrees with the administration that TV must lead people to the Internet.

“We see the Internet as the hub of a media wheel that includes magazines, booklets, television, radio and advertising,” Mr. McNeely said. “Everything will direct people to the Internet for more information, deeper study and personal contact. The hub is the main support and will only grow bigger in importance with each passing year. We see us developing an Internet presence that will contain greater quantity and quality of content, with other media efforts directing people to those sites.”

During the discussion Doug Horchak mentioned that the plan for television is a huge commitment, but he thinks it is exciting and wonderful. Peter Eddington mentioned that television is extremely persuasive and a half-hour program gives time to educate the viewers.

When someone responds to our TV program, Mr. Eddington said, he or she “is more interested than the individual responding to a card advertising a magazine without having a great deal of information.”

Prior to the April program launch, plans are to update the backdrop and lighting in the television studio at the home office. Plans to build a larger studio are also being considered. **UN**

Visit the Council of Elders’ Web site, <http://coe.ucg.org> to read the full Council reports.



The Council discusses elements of the media plan

From the Council Reports

by Gerald Seeling

These excerpts were taken from the Council reports. Visit the Council of Elders’ Web site, <http://coe.ucg.org>, for full reports.

2010 GCE Planning

Peter Eddington, chairman of the GCE Meeting Planning Task Force, presented three possible themes for the upcoming 2010 annual meeting of the General Conference of Elders:

1. Endeavoring to Keep the Unity of the Spirit.
2. Go Into All the World.
3. Wisdom: Key to a Successful Ministry.

After discussion, Victor Kubik moved and Melvin Rhodes seconded to have the theme of the 2010 annual meeting of the General Conference of Elders be “Go Into All the World,” and the Council of Elders unanimously approved the motion.

By consent without a resolution, the Council approved that Daniel Berendt, Elizabeth Cannon and Jorge de Campos be added to the GCE Meeting Planning Task Force.

Report on Texas Property

Treasurer Jason Lovelady updated the Council with regard to the property in Denton, Texas. He reported that the property listing service began in September of this year, and that the listing can be seen on various Web sites, specifically Loopnet and CoStar.

In addition, property signage is being placed on the property. The report from the realtor stated that the fourth quarter is typically a slow time of year for real estate. No interest has been shown, but questions from two potential developers have been received by the realtor.

The property is 81.45 acres and is listed at \$27,500 an acre, making the asking price \$2,239,875.

Facilities Study Proposal

Roy Holladay read from a document, “Facilities Study Proposal,” presented to the Council by the president and treasurer (see “President’s Report” below).

After the Council members took a guided tour of the home office to understand what is being proposed, Mr. Holladay asked if the Council supported the general idea behind phase one within the proposal. No Council members expressed any concerns, and the administration was given approval to begin working toward phase one of the proposal.

Meeting With Ambassador Bible Center Students

The Council also conducted a “town hall” type meeting with the ABC students on the final day of the meetings. The students were then invited to have lunch with the members of the Council for further discussions and questions. **UN**

President’s Report

On Dec. 7 President Clyde Kilough presented reports from the various areas of the home office.

Media and Communications Services

Rudy Rangel III, hired in August, is the latest to join the home office team. This has freed Clint Porter to help Clay Thornton with the overload Clay has been carrying. Now Clay and Clint, with Rudy’s help at times, will be able to do the high-level editing needed for the *Beyond Today* TV program.

Mr. Kilough reported that the needs for media employees depend on the needs of the media mix plan. A possible TV scriptwriter has been interviewed to serve as a writer, editor and blogger. Some have proposed hiring a search engine optimization (SEO) expert to ensure that TV programs are compatible with our search optimization efforts. Although reasonable, it should be part of a broader Internet plan. It would be shortsighted to spend many dollars in television without integrating the program into an Internet strategy.

Without major investment, current efforts in Web development include in-house search engine optimization (managed by Aaron Booth), new content such as frequently asked questions and blogs (Mike Bennett and Aar-

on Booth) and expanded visibility of local congregations’ site content (Tom Disher). Close to 40 new online *Bible Study Guide* lessons are completed and will be ready to launch soon. There are research and development projects in process to evaluate potential initiatives.

Another project is a small, short-term contract with an outside search engine optimization firm recommended by David Gosse. He and his team are creating new landing pages to support selected keyword search promotions. If successful and cost-effective, some of the search engine marketing (SEM) budget would be reallocated to similar projects.

The only significant budget for Web development is SEM in the form of keyword and banner ads being placed on Google, Yahoo and Bing (coordinated by Peter Eddington), with a present annual budget of about \$350,000. The cost per response from these ads continues to drop.

Ministerial Services

Mr. Kilough reported that Ministerial Services is currently focusing on training ministers, as nine pastors will turn 70 this year alone, tripling the number of U.S. pastors over the age of 70. There were two pastors in the hospital last month. With the aging of the ministry, it is only a matter of time before we face a serious shortage because of health issues.

We have sent employment applications to four men this fiscal year and budgeted for three new hires. Brian Shaw has been hired and will work with Media until the branding project is completed. Then he will begin serving full-time in the ministry working with Bob Fahey in Chicago. He will attend the pastoral training classes that begin in January. Plans are to hire two more from the three applications currently being evaluated.

Designed as a six-week program, the pastoral training program began in January of 2007. The process of inviting men to the fourth class, which will begin in January, has begun. We anticipate there will be three or four internationals and the rest will be from the U.S. ministry. To save funds, a two-session course, rather than a three-session, is being considered this year.

Space Needs

Mr. Kilough said that information was gathered from all operation managers about office space needs in their areas. The operation managers were also asked how many employees are needed in their areas.

Another consideration is which employees need to be placed in close proximity to each other. He commented that any option taken will be with an eye to expansion—and any moves in the short term need to take long-term needs into account. Mark Bredemeier,

the architect for the home office building, has been contacted, Mr. Kilough said.

Mr. Kilough mentioned that three phases are being planned:

Phase one, short-term needs—to move the media center downstairs to the back area of the warehouse and turn the current media center into extra office space. Rearrangements for the warehouse would have to be considered as well, but we are not ready to make suggestions with regard to budgetary needs. As well, it is not known how many extra employees are needed and how much room will be required for expansion into television.

Phase two, mid-term needs—remodel the upstairs area.

Phase three, long-term needs—eventually expanding the building. Some things are not critical, but we would like to make the education area more effective—possibilities might include an auditorium that would expand into what is currently the warehouse.

President Kilough commented that all phases would be based on a need, not a time frame, with phase one hopefully being done in the next fiscal year.

With regard to these proposed phases, Mr. Kilough reported that in November, a large installation of office cubicle modules was donated to the Church along with a phone system compatible with our current system. This is a tremendous blessing toward furnishings for the proposed phases. **UN**

Treasure Digest

You Have a Choice

Sometime ago a friend visiting from England and I were ordering dinner at a restaurant. After he ordered a steak, the waitress asked him, "Sirloin or tenderloin? Eight-ounce or 10-ounce? Rare, medium or well-done?" With each question my friend seemed to think he was finished. He ordered a salad and was asked, "Greek, Green or Taco?"

Each time he turned back to continue our conversation, the waitress would continue on with the questions: "Would you like your potatoes mashed, baked, fried or boiled? Or would you prefer rice? We have brown rice, white rice, wild rice and fried rice."

Now he was really bewildered, but it did not stop.

The waitress asked if he would like garlic toast, a whole-wheat bun or a slice of bread. Several soups were offered, and by now my haggard friend was slumped in his seat, looking thoroughly bewildered. He had never been assaulted with such an array of choices in his life. When it was over, he commented, "Next time I will just tell her that I will have whatever you are having."

It's funny how sometimes the more choices we have, the more difficult it can be to make a decision. When we finally decide, we can second-guess ourselves over and over again, never sure we have made the right choice.



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Often, we kick ourselves a year later for something we should have done or a choice we should have made.

God gives us a decision to make, but we have only two options to consider. God set before Israel a decision between life and death—blessings and cursings—and encouraged them to choose life for their sakes and the sakes of their children (Deuteronomy 30:19). God likewise gave His Church two choices. We can choose to live forever with God, or we can choose eternal death.

God will not make this decision for us; we are not robots that are controlled. God has created humans with minds to think, plan, gather information and choose. He would be remiss to degrade the human mind—the pinnacle of His creation—by taking away the very faculties that allow us to develop holy righteous character. God wants people who have chosen to follow Him willingly, to believe in Him, to trust Him and to love Him.

In the final analysis of life, it ought to be clear to us that our Heavenly Father expects us to learn to appreciate and love Him and His way of life in all its aspects. We are to understand the reason for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

During our lifetime there will be many moments in which we will be tested to see if we are focused on God. He is not concerned about the houses we live in, the cars we drive or the normal things of life. He is concerned about the choices that affect eternity. Will we choose life each time?

Robert Berendt
Pastor of Edmonton and Red Deer,
Alberta, Canada, congregations

Casual Christians

George Barna is a famous pollster and author of a number of books specializing in Christian topics. In his most recent book *The Seven Faith Tribes*, he discusses the seven predominant spiritual groups in America. The group that most captured my attention in his book is the group he calls the Casual Christians.

The Casual Christians comprise about 80 percent of all Christians, roughly 150 million. Although they label themselves as Christians, they do not see Christianity as a worldview; that is, they don't see Christianity as the lens through which to view personal decisions and the world at large. Rather, Casual Christians are comfortable with themselves, perceive themselves as independent thinkers and desire to remain open to a wide array of moral perspectives and lifestyles.

They put personal bonds ahead of ideological convictions and believe that God accepts them for who they are. This group also views themselves confidently, proudly seeing themselves as self-made, self-sufficient individuals. Viewing God as a benign and forgiving deity, they do not get too excited about matters of faith.

What an interesting analysis! Do you also find it interesting that this group of "Christians" makes up 80 percent of *all* Christians? If they do not make Christ's teachings prominent in their lives, can they really call themselves Christian?

Knowing the characteristics of Casual Christians helps us understand the recent development of the megachurches and the problems they face, such as inconsistent attendance, ministries divided into niche interests, high turnover of members, etc., and the generally independent path many take who call themselves Christian.

Casual Christians view church much like anything else in their lives—fitting in as long



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as there is room for it and easily discarded if it becomes uncomfortable or inconvenient.

What should we gather from such an analysis as Mr. Barna's? What is (and who is) a Christian then? A Christian is someone who is diligent in keeping himself or herself blameless (2 Peter 3:14) and purifies himself of herself (1 John 3:2-5). A Christian is someone who has God's Holy Spirit working in and directing his or her life (Romans 8:7-10) and who does the will of the Father and obeys the words of the Son (Matthew 7:21-27).

A Christian is someone who is developing God's character and emulating Christ (Matthew 5:48; 2 Corinthians 3:18). A Christian is someone who keeps God's commandments (1 John 3:24, 4:21; Revelation 14:12), including "remaining" in the Sabbath (Hebrews 4:9-12). A Christian is someone who is reflecting Christ in all aspects of His life, not just as a title or a convenient activity.

Rather than George Barna's discourse on Casual Christian's being a reflection on those not living up to God's standards, it should be a call to action and a reminder for true Christians to be ever vigilant to live according to Christ's example (John 13:15). Not only will we be truly seeking God, but He will be watching over us (Isaiah 66:2).

Dan Dowd
Pastor of Milwaukee and Oshkosh,
Wisconsin, congregations

Turning the Hearts . . . Your Child and the Internet (Part 2)

Too much of any good thing can be harmful to one's health. Drinking too much water can affect the electrolytes in one's system. Too much honey can make a person sick, as Proverbs 25:16 reveals. The Bible stresses moderation in all things (Philippians 4:5).

The same principle applies to using the computer—either for playing games or for browsing the Internet. Some effects from overuse of the Internet or computer games can include:

Psychologically:

- Sense of euphoria while at the computer.
- Inability to stop the activity.
- Craving more and more time at the computer.
- Neglecting family and friends to be at the computer.
- Feeling empty and depressed when not at the computer.
- Lying to family and friends about Internet activities.
- Problems at school or after-school job.

Physically:

- Carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Dry eyes.
- Migraine headaches.
- Backaches.
- Eating irregularities (e.g., skipping meals).
- Neglecting personal hygiene.
- Sleep disturbances and changes in sleep patterns.

Balance is so necessary when it comes to computer use. To help your children, set limits with them for computer use. Require that their homework be completed and that they have exercise time. Require that they spend time with the family as well. Arrange to have the computer in the family area so that you as a parent can monitor its use.

Computers are wonderful! They are great sources of information and benefit us greatly in so many ways; however, we must make sure that they don't become idols or impediments to living life in a balanced, healthy way.

Gary Antion



Good Medicine

DOES THIS BOAT
GET HDTV?
I DON'T
WANT TO MISS
MY SHOWS.



Stop, Drop and Follow!

In elementary school we learn the critical fire safety phrase “stop, drop and roll.” This valuable instruction has saved many physical lives. There is a similar plan for our spiritual lives: stop, drop and follow Christ, just as He has asked.

When we read John 1:35-51, we see Christ inviting His disciples to stop, drop what they were doing and follow Him. Andrew had been following John the Baptist; it was now time for him to be a follower of Jesus Christ. He quickly found his brother Simon (verse 41). The excitement grew when Christ invited Philip to follow Him in verse 43. Philip then passed along the news to Nathanael. As we read in the account in Matthew 4:18-22, it becomes clear that the disciples chose to stop, drop and follow. The choice these men made set an example for us today.

The commitment to follow is not a new one. In the Old Testament there are several recordings of God’s people following Him. Consider the exampe of the husband-and-wife team Abram and Sarai. In Genesis 12:1-4 they stopped, dropped and followed God into a new land and a new life, taking a journey they had never taken before. Of course, the Israelites under the leadership of Moses followed God for decades.

In Numbers 14:24, we find an Old Testament celebrity named Caleb. In the middle of verse 24 God states that Caleb “has followed Me fully.”

These are all examples of strong men and women who lived and followed a journey much like our own. They, like us, did not know what tomorrow would bring, but they chose to follow God with faith. We have been invited to do the same!

We have read about those who chose to say, “Yes, I will follow.” We also have recorded for us examples of those who did not make the same choice. In Luke 9:57-62, we find

those who, unfortunately, could not commit to such a following and made excuses.

This is where the story becomes personal. This is where you stop, drop and follow—no one else can do this for you! Step number one has occurred—God has stopped you. He has your attention. Are you going to give Him all your focus or something less?

Number two: What do you need to drop? Is it like the fishing net that Peter, Andrew, James and John dropped? In other words, is physical livelihood getting in the way of following Him completely? It’s important to realize that we all still have the same excuses to overcome as those in the Bible.

Number three: Take the step of faith to drop whatever it is and follow. Drop the insecurities that can hold us hostage from following Christ to the fullest.

Christ’s first words and some of His last are the same: “Follow Me.” Each step of our physical life leads us to a deeper dependency on Christ’s life and death for us, for our journey is a daily adventure of commitment to follow His path. Our ultimate goal is to be a part of His inclusive plan for all mankind, to serve, to love and to follow our Father as our Elder Brother has done. Don’t wait for an emergency “9-1-1” fire plan. Stop, drop and follow today!

Tina Rupp
Youngstown, Ohio, congregation

The Spider and Its Web

One evening I was sitting on the porch meditating on creation. While observing the life around me, a family of deer walked by. I marveled at their beauty and how focused they were, even though I was right there watching them. Then suddenly, right in front of me, a very large garden spider swung down from underneath the gutter of the porch.

My natural instinct was to destroy this very large spider, but this spider grabbed my attention. It began to string a web from a

bush located off the porch back up to the gutter from which it began its journey, starting the foundation of its web.

I was captivated as I watched this spider for more than an hour building its web. The spider took great care in the details of its web, designing its position, location, shape and size for the purpose of capturing its prey. The location of this web had me in awe. This spider had its web suspended off the porch in space, which to me was totally amazing.

After the web was created, I sat and reflected on the spider creating its web. Spiders were a nuisance to me before that day, but while standing there, observing the web, a scripture came to mind immediately.

David wrote in Psalm 14:1: “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

This process clearly showed me that this web had a designer, and that designer was the spider. Was the Master Designer showing me through the example of this spider, how magnificent He is and how detailed He was in His creation?

In essence, all living beings show the complexity and intricate detail of the Master Designer’s handiwork.

The Master Designer

In Genesis 1:1-31 we are told that the Master Designer is God, creating the heavens and the earth. From this point forward, the Master Designer took six days to make the earth suitable to sustain all forms of life, including man.

Through these verses the Master Designer has allowed us to see His greatness in detail through the creation of the earth, the plant life, the water, the animals and man.



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Through biology, we can see living organisms at their cellular level. We can see how the organs of the body work. We can also see the Master Designer’s thoughtfulness to the detailed design of the human body.

There is no doubt that many people lack the knowledge that God exists, but God tells us how to find Him. Jeremiah writes, “And you will seek Me and find Me when you shall search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

The spider showed me that everything has a designer. The spider web had a designer, and its designer was the spider. If the spider was able to design and create such an intricate and beautiful web, how much greater is the Master Designer who created the spider and gave it the ability to design and create its web?

Peter Holmes
Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation

Share Your Treasures!

Do you have any short items of biblical wisdom, humor or practical information that you would like to share? Please send them to your local pastor and ask him to forward them to UnitedNews at the home office. Guidelines are available on request (UN@ucg.org).

Children's Corner

Who Made the Seasons?

Look up the Bible verses to find the missing words.
Then unscramble the circled letters to find the answer!

1. "He appointed the moon for _ _ _ _ _ _; the sun knows its going down" (Psalm 104:19).

2. "Then God said, 'Let there be _ _ _ _ in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for _ _ _ _ _ and seasons, and for days and years" (Genesis 1:14).

3. "And He _ _ _ _ _ _ the times and the seasons" (Daniel 2:21).

4. "Then I will _ _ _ you rain in its _ _ _ _ _ , the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit" (Leviticus 26:4).

5. "The LORD by wisdom _ _ _ _ _ _ _ the earth; by understanding He _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ the heavens; by His knowledge the _ _ _ _ _ were broken up, and clouds drop down the dew" (Proverbs 3:19-20).

G _ _ _ _ R _ _ _ _ E _ _ _ _ OF _ _ _ _ W _ _ T _ _ R!

Puzzle by Whitney Smith,
Louisville, Kentucky, congregation

Children's Corner



From the Word

Are Our Children Called? (Part 2)

■ Part 2 of this doctrinal study paper, originally published in November 1998, continues the in-depth look into whether God calls children of members of God's Church and how the answer to that question affects the expectations and approach parents take when teaching their children the ways of God.

Today the Church is a spiritual nation, a family paralleling the original Israel God called in the Old Testament. Are God's expectations for the parents and children in the Church any less than what they were for ancient Israel?

The apostle Peter confirmed this fundamental principle when he declared at the end of his powerful sermon on the Day of Pentecost:

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38-39).

The Impact of Acts 2:38-39

In this tremendously important statement, God confirmed His intent to work spiritually with three groups of people:

- *You*—specifically, those repentant Jews Peter was addressing, of whom about 3,000 were baptized that day.
- *And to your children*—their descendants who, even though they did not have the spiritual maturity for the weighty commitment of baptism that day, had the same promise given to them.
- *And to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call*—of primary importance at the time, this meant God would call the gentiles, who were previously "afar off" (Ephesians 2:13, 17).

God's promise to the second category, "your children"—the offspring of the converted—is a special blessing. Under the Old Covenant, the children were included from its inception (Genesis 17:7). They were also present when the Old Covenant was renewed (Deu-

teronomy 29:10-13; Joshua 8:35). They were part of religious assemblies (Joel 2:16) and received God's promises along with the adults (Isaiah 54:13; Jeremiah 31:34).

Since the New Testament Church began primarily with Jews who understood their blessings through the Old Covenant, a logical question with the issuance of new promises under a New Covenant would have been, What about our children?

Matthew Henry makes some interesting comments to this perspective: "Your children shall still have, as they have had, an interest in the covenant, and a title to the external seal of it. Come over to Christ, to receive those inestimable benefits; for the promise of the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, is to you and to your children," v. 39. It was very express. (Isa. 44:3): I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed. And (Isa. 59:21), My Spirit and my word shall not depart from thy seed, and thy seed's seed.

"When God took Abraham into covenant, he said, I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed (Gen. 17:7); and, accordingly, every Israelite had his son circumcised at eight days old. Now it is proper for an Israelite, when he is by baptism to come into a new dispensation of this covenant, to ask, 'What must be done with my children? Must they be thrown out, or taken in with me?' 'Taken in' (says Peter) 'by all means; for the promise, that great promise of God's being to you a God, is as much to you and to your children now as ever it was' (Matthew Henry's Commentary, Acts 2:37-41).

The children Peter referred to in Acts 2:39 are in a unique category. As Paul later wrote, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy" (1 Corinthians 7:14).

The word sanctification is "used of (a) separation to God" (Matthew Henry's Commentary, "Sanctification, Sanctify"). Something or someone "sanctified" is set apart in a separate category for a particular use. "Holy" comes from the Greek word *hagios*, which "fundamentally signifies 'separated' (among the Greeks, dedicated to the gods), and hence, in Scripture in its moral and spiritual significance, separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God, sacred" (ibid., "Holiness, Holy, Holily").

In families where either parent is a believer, by virtue of being called and chosen, God views both his or her unbelieving mate and chil-

dren in a very special way. This verse does not necessarily say that unbelieving mates are called by God (especially in light of the term "unbelieving"), but they are in an unusually blessed position. They live with a converted person and are thus exposed, in a very close and personal manner, to God's way of life.

While the believer's conduct may be a powerful example for the unbelieving mate (1 Peter 3:1-2), he or she can usually go farther than just setting an example with the children, actively teaching them God's way and directly developing their understanding and relationship with Him. Without the influence of a converted parent, children in that household would be no different than others who in ignorance disobey God and lead spiritually "unclean" lives.

But because of the parent's conversion and relationship with God, such children are not as oth-

A child's calling is gradual and becomes more personal as he or she grows and matures. This is often manifested in the many steps of decision making that increase as the child matures to a young adult. An adult's calling is likely to be more abrupt or dramatic (like the apostle Paul's in Acts 9). He or she will also bring a more worldly oriented perspective when entering into the Church.

Experience shows that, as with all people called, some young people

Because of the parent's conversion and relationship with God, such children are not like others. They are in a special category. Though not baptized, they are part of the Church. Though they are not converted, they do have special access to the knowledge of the way of God.

ers. They are in a special category. Though not baptized, they are part of the "holy nation," the Church. Though they are not converted, they do have special access to the knowledge of the way of God.

If and when they become personally convicted of God's way of life and accept and respond to their calling, they, too, can receive the Holy Spirit as promised. Personal repentance must be deeply experienced; the lifelong commitment must be well understood; and the responsibilities of an "ambassador for Christ" must be accepted with spiritual gravity and maturity.

Competent counseling from a variety of spiritually wise people—ministers, parents and experienced members, for example—can greatly aid a young adult's development toward baptism.

Factors Affecting the Outcome

A called person is invited to understand God's way, accept His authority in his or her life, surrender to Him, be baptized, partake of the Holy Spirit, prepare for His coming Kingdom and inherit immortality at the first resurrection. However, the way that children who grow up in the Church are called will differ from what most adults experience.

who grow up in the Church relate to and respond favorably to God's way of life, while others do not. When should one consider that a child has an invitation to pursue God's truth and Holy Spirit? Does it only apply to the biological child of a converted member? What about a stepchild, foster child, grandchild or niece? What about the older teenager of a newly converted parent? What about the grown children of a recently converted parent? What about a young teenager whose parents have turned from the truth?

The Bible does not specifically address each of these situations, but does give a guiding principle to apply. Once more, it is found in revisiting the fundamental lesson of the tree of life.

Though invited to partake of the tree representing God's Spirit and the road to eternal life, Adam and Eve chose instead to take from the forbidden tree. Nevertheless, they had *exposure* to the tree of life; it was in full view to them, and they had access to it.

Similarly, when God calls people, they are invited to partake of His Spirit, the spiritual tree of life. Their degree of exposure to this tree of life is critical, especially for a young person developing skills in decision making.

Numerous factors determine the type and degree of positive exposure to God's way and work together to affect the eventual response of a young person to that invitation. These influences include but are not limited to:

- Age—for example, an older child about to leave home perhaps will not have much exposure to the truth if a parent is called at that time in his or her life.
- Influence of friends and peers.
- Influence of popular culture (e.g., television, movies, music).
- Personality, aptitudes, interests.
- Temperament.
- Example of parent(s).
- Example of other family members.
- Influence of the congregation—member and leadership examples, Sabbath services, church activities.

Amount and Quality of Instruction From Parent(s)

The greatest deterring factor, of course, is Satan the devil and his societal structure. As he did with Adam and Eve, he works mightily to persuade each person to reject God's bidding. Satan craftily aims his efforts at manipulating the neg-



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ative sides of all these influencing factors. The parental or guardian role is extremely important for children, because those filling this role have the opportunity and responsibility to design a home environment that gives children maximum understanding of the way of God and protection from the influence of Satan's world.

For example, consider a child who grows up in a home where both parents are members of God's Church, but are unable to attend church services or fellowship with brethren. Furthermore, the parents are seldom seen studying the Bible or praying and give little religious instruction in the home. How much is set before this child's eyes that will help him or her choose to respond to God's calling?

On the other hand, consider parents who become converted when their child is very young.

They proceed to teach this child God's truths with a positive, encouraging approach, regularly praying together, conducting regular in-home Bible studies, and frequently discussing His plan and the wonderful blessings available both now and later in His Kingdom. They also attend weekly Sabbath services in a supportive, nurturing congregation. This child has a much greater opportunity to personally relate to and clearly understand the benefits and blessings God offers.

Without question, family and Church life profoundly influence children as they mature and make their decisions about whether or not they will follow God. For this reason, God speaks plainly about parental duty.

The Parents' Responsibility

The greatest positive factor in children's lives should be the parents. Fathers and mothers can exert a far more profound influ-

ence in their children's upbringing than any other factor. Sadly, all too many parents relinquish their God-given role to other persons or influences, which can bring about negative results.

In Proverbs 22:6 God instructs parents to "train up a child in the way he should go." This straightforward scriptural instruction leaves little room to wonder what God desires and expects. He clearly urges them to teach their children His way, expecting they will follow it. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says of this passage: "'Train up a child' means more than to teach, and includes everything that pertains to the proper development of the child, especially in its moral and spiritual nature" ("Train; Trained," Electronic Database, 1996).

Notice Psalm 78:3-7: "Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments."

Paul added, "Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

The Church also bears certain responsibilities for spiritual child development. When Christ emphasized to Peter three times that he must take care of the people (John 21:15-17), twice He said to feed, or

tend, "My sheep," while once saying, "feed My lambs."

Jesus commissioned the Church to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). What more fertile ground exists for making disciples than that of our youth who have already been called by God?

The entire Church must be involved in this work.

When the Calling Is Not Pursued

What about children who choose not to respond to God's calling? Are they headed to the lake of fire? Can they pursue God at a later time?

Those who do not respond to God's calling now have not necessarily forfeited their only opportunity to receive eternal life. Only God knows the heart or mind of each individual and when each person has had sufficient exposure to and understanding of His way of life. Since God does not treat people unfairly (Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17), those He deems to have not received an appropriate opportunity for salvation now will assuredly receive one later. Jesus Christ is the One who will perfectly decide such matters (John 5:22).

We do know this: Receiving the Holy Spirit requires repentance, which presupposes knowledge of and obedience to God's law (Acts 5:32), and leads to an intensely deep, personal relationship with God. If one has received the Holy Spirit and then rejects God, he is indeed in danger of the lake of fire. But if one has not yet sufficiently understood God's expectations so

as to make an informed decision, God can and will continue to work with him.

God's calling is not merely a one-time event, but a process! It involves an ongoing interaction between a loving Father and His children.

Although it is highly ironic, sometimes temporarily rejecting God's calling lays the groundwork for accepting it later. Eventually, those who depart from God's way will walk into trouble, will experience the spiritual emptiness of the world and will be scarred by sins that could have been avoided. But this does not mean their opportunity for salvation is lost. Some truly do not comprehend the value of God's way, and the trials of life serve to make them more aware, receptive and responsive.

Experience can be at times an unkind, but effective, teacher; and its lessons sometimes create the maturity necessary for people to sincerely repent, return to God and renew and deepen the relationship with Him that they might have had when younger. The parable of the prodigal son is certainly an example of this.

So, if a young person decides not to accept his calling, can he or she pursue it at a later time? Life has shown this very thing often happens as youth temporarily leave God's way, only to repent and embrace it at another time. In fact, most people God calls, no matter what their age, go through some form of resistance to that calling. How many baptized adults, at some point in the process of

With the understanding that being "called" means being invited by God, the answer is, "Yes!"

Whether those children eventually choose to respond to this calling depends upon many factors, including the quality and degree of exposure to God's truth via family and congregational influences. If they do not respond immediately, it does not necessarily preclude them from future opportunity—either later in this age or in the age to come. God works with all people in the most appropriate way and at the optimal time to bring them into His family.

A converted parent really has but one course of action. He or she must follow Abraham's example by teaching his or her children God's truth with the expectation that they will understand God's way of life and choose it as their own.

Parents and all members of the Church must view children as genuine, respected participants of the congregation, hoping and expecting that they will become baptized fellow members.

The biblical perspective is always to encourage people to answer God's calling, as opposed to offering loopholes legitimizing no response. Implying that it is equally valid for a child not to respond to God now is a serious mistake. Just as Abraham "commanded" his children, God urged ancient Israel to respond to Him for their own good. He said, "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants

Converted parents really have one course of action. They must follow Abraham's example by teaching their children God's truth with the expectation that they will understand God's way of life and choose it as their own.



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coming to full repentance, delayed responding to God's call, for whatever reasons?

While we should never encourage youth to leave God in order to follow the prodigal son route—indeed, it is a tragic choice because of the inevitable penalties associated with breaking God's law—we must also recognize that some people do follow this unwise path.

God's commitment is this: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God works patiently with people—after all, they are His children too—and He will give everyone ample time to respond.

Conclusion and Implications

Are the children of members of God's Church "called" now?

may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19). Because God's calling represents the best life available, children should be kept well aware of God's special invitation to them now.

Children are told to "obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1). Both parents and the Church need to do the right thing by strongly encouraging our youth to value and walk through the magnificent open door God has given them.

God revealed through the prophet Malachi that "He seeks godly offspring" (Malachi 2:15). This is our children's special heritage and identity. This is God's desire and vision for our youth as He calls them, as He extends the marvelous invitation to partake of the tree of life and eternally serve in the Kingdom of God! **UN**

Part 1 appeared in the December 2009 United News. You can read this and other doctrinal papers in full at members.ucg.org/content/study-papers.

The Best Feast Ever

■ The best Feast of Tabernacles of my life was when my son almost died.

by Kirsten Nelte

Gareth was born two years ago on the day the Feast of Tabernacles began. We began that Feast excited, exhausted, exhilarated. Since we were going to be staying home, my husband Mike and I had prayed that God would make this an especially meaningful Feast for us.

The first day of the Feast we found the time to listen to a sermon on the Internet during one of our new baby's naps. A couple of family members came over to visit. We ate good food and tried to get some sleep. The second day of the Feast of 2007 our midwife came over to check on Gareth. She took off his clothes and told us to take him to the hospital immediately. Gareth was yellow all over. She knew it was bad, but she had no idea how bad.

We took him in to get blood tests. They sent us home but immediately called us back in.

I scurried to get us quickly packed up, but I didn't come out of the nursery. Mike came in to see what was taking so long and saw me just staring at Gareth's new dresser full of baby clothes. Tiny shirts, pants, hats, socks—all green and yellow because we had not known if we were having a boy or a girl. "I can't pick out the clothes our baby might die in," was all I could say.

Gareth was jaundiced. We tell people that, and they say, "Oh, yes, so was my child." Sixty per-

cent of babies have some jaundice shortly after being born. Jaundice is caused by a high bilirubin count, which, in turn, is caused by the newborn's inability to break down red blood cells properly. A bilirubin count above 10 is usually easily treated.

see how much brain damage had already occurred.

Our minister came in right around then and anointed Gareth. At the time, I just could not believe his words of encouragement, his words about how God cares so much for all of us, especially the

life, your soul. I had only had Gareth for two days. Yet.

You may be thinking now that I was being facetious when I called this my best Feast ever. But here's the thing. I had no idea how much suffering was in the world and how much it twists and crushes and destroys the human heart until this Feast. I had never really known pain before. I had never really appreciated why it was so necessary for Christ to return. Now I know.

God's message to me was clear, and there is no way I will ever forget it. My husband and I heard few sermons during the Feast of 2007. We had very little fellowship with the brethren besides family members who came to visit us. Our fine food and drink came from a hospital cafeteria. And you could certainly consider a hospital room a temporary dwelling!

At the beginning of the third day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Gareth had a double volume blood transfusion, which means at the end of the process he only

hospital about four hours. In that time, we cried, we prayed and then we tried to rest.

I woke up about an hour later to find Mike frantically throwing our blankets around the room. "Where's Gareth? Where's Gareth?" he kept asking. "Where's my son?" I gently woke him from his nightmare, only to realize we were in a real one. We held each other, cried some more but didn't really sleep that night.

The fourth day we were able to hold Gareth for small amounts at a time. Then a lady came with a hearing test for infants and gave us the whole spiel about how, even if the results were quite bad, it was still possible for Gareth to gain some hearing later on. The human brain is incredible after all.

God is incredible after all.

He promises that some day He will take away the pain; He will wipe away every tear. That includes all the parents who have lost their little ones or who have seen their helpless babies undergo pain and suffering.



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At Gareth's age, a number above 15 would mean he was in the high-risk group for kernicterus, which causes loss of hearing and permanent brain damage. A blood transfusion is usually performed in this case. The highest our doctors and nurses had seen was 28. Gareth's count was 38.

In the emergency room they placed my tiny baby under blue lights and informed us that we would no longer be able to hold him. Tubes were inserted and monitors were set up as the doctor told us that Gareth had kernicterus, was probably deaf already and that we would just have to wait and

I had no idea how much suffering was in the world and how much it twists and crushes and destroys the human heart until this Feast. I had never really known pain before. I had never really appreciated why it was so necessary for Christ to return. Now I know.

smallest and weakest and how everything really would be all right. All I could hear was that Gareth was screaming in a very high pitch—one of the first signs of permanent brain damage. And I wasn't allowed to hold him.

It is so hard to explain to somebody who has never had a baby how attached you become the instant they enter your arms, your

had ten percent of his own blood. Mike and I had to sign a sheet saying we understood that this could mean diseases, other issues I cannot remember now or death. We read a lot of Psalms that day and a bit of Isaiah.

About 24 hours after the transfusion, some caring family members sent us home to get some sleep. We were away from the

Gareth's hearing test came back totally normal, but what that really indicated was that there was no brain damage at all. The doctors and nurses said it had to be a miracle. He had been completely healed.

That was the best Feast ever. **UN**
Kirsten Nelte is a member of the Tacoma and Bellevue, Washington, congregations.

Bound as a Sign

■ After years of wandering in the wilderness, Israel stood at the edge of Canaan. What words of guidance could Moses say to inspire the zeal they would need to continue to trust and obey God?

by Jeremy Lallier

"Hear, O Israel!"

The voice of Moses, servant of the Most High God, thundered across the plain. Forty years had passed since the Israelites had been delivered from Egypt, and now, at long last, they stood at the brink of the Promised Land. Moses was giving his farewell address.

"The LORD our God, the LORD is one!"

This was it. Moses would not be entering Canaan with his people. Because of his act of direct disobedience at the waters of Meribah, he would only glimpse the land promised to Abraham some 400 years previously. But the man of God knew that he would have this one last opportunity to speak to Israel—to instill in them the attitude and mind-set they would need if they were to survive as God's people.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."

What should have been a few-month journey had instead become a 40-year trek through the wilderness. When the first generation of Israel was told to go up and take the land of

Canaan, the people refused out of fear. They failed to trust God's sure promise of victory and, as a result, were denied entrance.

Their children, the generation Moses was now addressing, were being given the chance to succeed where their parents had not. Essential to their success was first and foremost a love for their God that placed Him above everything else in their lives. And this love would need to last.

"And these words which I command to you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

And they did. The Israelites who began the invasion of Canaan were arguably some of Israel's greatest. Under the leadership of Joshua and with the zeal of men like Phinehas (who ended a plague by killing an openly sinning Israelite) and Caleb (who was ready to fight giants at age 85), they accomplished incredible feats. Because of their trust in God and adherence to Moses' words recorded for us in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, they claimed victory after victory in their conquest of the land.

Moses' words are as essential to follow today in our own lives as they were for the Israelites invading Canaan. They stood armed and ready to enter a Promised Land; so do we. If we hope to succeed, we must be sure to take God's words and bind them as a sign on our hands, let them be as

frontlets between our eyes and set them in our hearts. But how?

Let God's Word Guide What We Do

With our hands, we take action. We build up; we tear down. We accomplish. When we bind God's Word on our hands, we let it dictate what actions we take. Rather than "every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes" (Deuteronomy 12:8), we choose to do only that which conforms to God's law.

The apostle James tells us to "be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). This is not a light commitment. Sometimes it will mean going against the crowd and making the unpopular decision. Sometimes it will mean *not* doing what we want to do. Sometimes it will invite persecution.

But we bind our hands with God's Word regardless, knowing that "godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:8).

Let God's Word Guide How We See

With our eyes, we do more than just look. We direct our attention. We choose what we will focus on. To let God's Word act as frontlets for our eyes is to allow it to direct our focus to where God wants it to be. Paul, speaking of our understanding of God's plan, writes, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

God's Word gives us a goal—something to look to and focus our attention on. While we can only see it dimly from our human viewpoint, the Kingdom of God must remain our perpetual focus. Without it, the trials we face in this life can seem overwhelming, impossibly difficult.

But by refusing to give undue attention to the things God hates, and with our eyes fixed firmly on our goal, we can share in Paul's absolute confidence that "the sufferings of this present time are *not worthy to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18, emphasis added).

Let God's Word Guide Who We Are

The biblical concept of the heart was radically different from ours today. We know it to be the organ that keeps pumping blood and occasionally think of it as the source of emotion.

In ancient Hebrew culture, to talk about the heart was to talk about "the whole man, with all his attributes, physical, intellectual and psychological, of which the Hebrew thought and spoke... The heart was conceived of as the governing centre for all of these" (*New Bible Dictionary*, second edition, p. 465). To the Hebrews, the heart was not just an organ; it was the entirety of the inner man.

When Moses told the Israelites that these words were to be in their heart, he was not just telling them to feel strongly about them. He was telling them to integrate them into their very being—what they felt, what they thought—the *very core of who they were*.

Similar to what we do and how we see, who we are must be governed by God's Word. When we submit our entire self to God's perfect way of life, we will take part in the greatest change of all time at Christ's return, "We shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last



© 2009 Jupiterimages Corporation

God's Word gives us a goal—something to look to and focus our attention on. While we can only see it dimly from our human viewpoint, the Kingdom of God must remain our perpetual focus.

trumpet... For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

When God's Word guides what we do, how we see and who we are, it will, in turn, guide us on the path to develop the character essential to one day joining the

God family as kings and priests with Christ in our Father's Kingdom.

Let us then be certain to bind God's Word on our hands, set it as frontlets for our eyes and, above all, ask God to write it in our hearts. "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make

your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10). **UN**

Jeremy Lallier works at the home office as a staff writer.



Local Church Updates

Minnesota Congregations Throw Surprise 40th Anniversary Party

On Oct. 17, 2009, the Austin and Mankato, Minnesota, congregations combined



Marlys and Ron Peterson

for Sabbath services in Ellendale, and were delighted to honor Mr. and Mrs. Ron Peterson with a surprise reception for their 40th wedding anniversary.

They were presented with a beautiful clock picture frame inscribed with "Congratulations on celebrating 40 years together! From your Church family." A fancy carrot cake and refreshing punch were served after a potluck meal.

Ron and Marlys were married Oct. 11, 1969 in LeCenter, Minnesota. They started attending God's Church in 1970 and were baptized in 1971. Ron was ordained a deacon in 1979 and an elder in 1988.

They serve in the Mankato and Austin congregations, as well as in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, and Cedar Rapids, Iowa. They are the parents of two sons, Randy, who

lives in Spring, Texas, and Scott, who lives in Mankato. They have also been blessed with five charming grandchildren.

Steve Myers

Texas Junior Inducted Into Golden Key Honor Society

Chelsea Danielle Casey was recently inducted into the Golden Key Collegiate International Honor Society and was honored during a recent induction ceremony.



Chelsea Casey

Chelsea is a junior at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, majoring in biology. She and her family are members of the Houston, Texas, North congregation.

Chelsea currently has an overall GPA of 3.99 out of 4.0 and also participates in the Sam Houston State University honors program, having been a member for two years. After graduating with her undergraduate degree, Chelsea would like to attend medical school. She has worked part-time at a veterinarian clinic for four years, and her chief hobby is riding and taking care of her three horses.

Helen Casey

Phoenix East Hosts an Evening of Hilarity

On Nov. 18, 2009, the Phoenix, Arizona, East congregation and visitors enjoyed a full spread taco buffet and then spent the rest of the evening laughing it off during the Phoenix East fun show.

While there were a few serious acts, such as Dan Anderson's trumpet performance, some serious vocalists and the ever-so-cute duo of Scott and Braden Delamater, the night was filled with hilarity. Skits, silly songs and funny speeches were the order of the night, and there were enough of

them to make an intermission necessary. The final performance was a surprise showing by Sonny and Cher singing, "I Got You Babe." Due to circumstances beyond everyone's control, the acts had no time to rehearse on stage beforehand, and the sound crew had about two minutes per act to prepare. But the show had to go on and so it did, with only minor



Sonny and Cher sing "I Got You Babe"

hiccups to show for it. Audience members were overheard proclaiming their satisfaction for a night well spent and looking forward to another show in the future.

Lorelei Nettles

Great Clothing Giveaway Helps Hundreds in Beloit

The Beloit congregation (from the very young to the very senior), supported by the Wisconsin Dells, Milwaukee and Oshkosh congregations, held the 10th annual Great Clothing Giveaway on Nov. 22.

This event was designed to help the needy of the area get through the winter with much-needed winter clothing for men, women, children and infants. Along with the clothing, reading material, household items, toys, blankets and bedding are provided.

Every year donations come from many sources. Letters are also sent out to most of the charity organizations in Beloit. *The Beloit Daily News* prints an article that generates local interest. The local Head Start program puts the word out on the street. It's great to see empathy in action. And when that happens, God

supplies everyone's needs, the givers and receivers.

On the evening before the event, "Team Beloit" went into action. When the sun went down on the Sabbath, sleeves were

rolled up and dress clothes were traded for blue jeans and sweatshirts. Vans appeared at every door waiting to be unloaded with tons of donations. Then the volunteers got to work sift-

ing, sorting and arranging the piles of clothing and other items occupying 40 tables.

of clothing to a rescue mission in Rockford.

Was Team Beloit tired? You betcha! But everyone went home smiling, and all agreed that they could not have spent a better day.

Joe Jacoby Sr.



Team Beloit prepares for the Great Clothing Giveaway (photos by Joe Jacoby, Sr.)



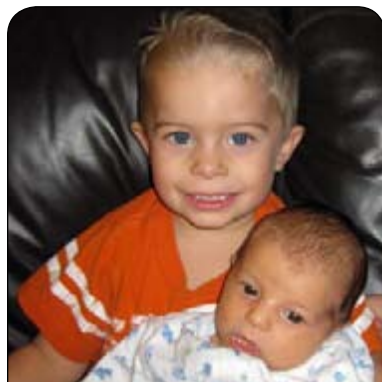
On the day of the event, people began to line up long before the doors opened at noon. By the time our doors closed at 3 p.m., a total of 502 people passed through our portals and, for the most part, did as our sign said, "Please Take All You Need, But Only What You Need." The Beloit congregation was also able to give 50 bags

Local Church Updates: If your congregation's news and events are rarely covered in *United News*, why not check with your pastor and write something for him to send in? We're looking for 100- to 300-word articles and photographs with captions. Please include a self-addressed envelope if you would like photos returned. Include the author's and photographer's names and your phone number. Please double-check the spelling of names. Please **e-mail (preferred) or give the material to your local pastor** to forward to *United News*.

Announcements

Births

Chris and Rebekah Leyden, of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation are thrilled to announce



Isaac and Matthias Leyden

the birth of their second son, Matthias Christian, who arrived on Nov. 13, 2009. He weighed 6 pounds 8 ounces and was 19½ inches long. He is the fifth grandson of James and RoseAnn Cannon of the West Palm Beach, Florida, congregation and the fourth grandchild of William and Barbara Leyden of Greeneville, Tennessee. Big brother Isaac is full of love for his little sibling.

Chad and Lora Mortier of the Topeka, Kansas, congregation are thrilled to announce the birth of their second child, Kelvin James. He was



Kelvin James Mortier

born on his due date, Oct. 5, 2008, and was 8 pounds 8 ounces and 20 inches long. He was also welcomed by his big sister Ava, who is excited to have a little brother. Kelvin is the

fifth grandchild of Donn and Alice Mortier of the Omro, Wisconsin, congregation and the second grandchild for Leonard and Kathryn Hatter of Brodhead, Wisconsin.

Steven and Stephanie Woods, along with big sister Lauren Mechelle, of the Gadsden, Alabama, congregation are pleased to announce the birth of Caylee "Mor-



Lauren and Caylee Woods

gan" Woods. After a quick labor and planned birth at the home of their midwife, Miss Morgan was born Tuesday, Nov. 10, 2009, at 3:05 p.m., weighing 8 pounds 2 ounces and measuring 20¼ inches long.

Proud grandparents are Nelson and Mary Woods of the Gadsden congregation; Deanie and Danny Phillips of Soddy Daisy, Tennessee; and Steven and Gail McDermott of Cleveland, Tennessee.

Randy and Lisa Taylor of Chipley,



Aiden Taylor

Florida, happily announce the birth of their first son, Aiden Wesley, born on Sept. 21, 2009. He weighed 6 pounds and 15 ounces and measured 20¼ inches long. Maternal grandparents are Wyman and Marilyn Berry of Bethlehem, Florida. Paternal grandparents are Larry and Cathy Taylor of Marianna, Florida.

Jason and Emily (Orsak) Hyde are excited to be new parents. Ava Eliza-



Ava Hyde

beth Hyde was born on Feb. 17, 2009, weighing 9 pounds 8 ounces and was 20 inches long. Ava is the fourth generation of her family in the Church.

Engagements

Steve and Margaret Villaescusa and Daniel and Jeanette Rich are



Felicia Villaescusa and Wesley Wood

delighted to announce the engagement of their children, Felicia

Michelle Villaescusa and Wendell Wesley Wood. Wesley and Felicia met seven years ago when Felicia moved to North Carolina with her family.

Felicia, a graduate of Wake Technical Community College, is currently working as an infant caregiver. Wesley, also a graduate of Wake Technical Community College, is currently working on finishing his Bachelor's Degree at North Carolina State University. They are planning a pre-Feast wedding in September of 2010. Felicia and Wesley are members of the Raleigh congregation.

Weddings

Helen Stinson of Nawago, Michigan, and Pierre Jean and Odette Dubois of Bressolles, France, are pleased to announce the marriage of their children, Helen Marie Hayes and Hervé



Hervé and Helen Dubois

Pierre Dubois. Their wedding took place in Bordeaux, France, on Nov. 21, 2009, after Sabbath services with the local congregation at 4:15 p.m. The congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan, joined the ceremony by phone conference.

The ceremony was performed by Joel Meeker, regional pastor of the French-speaking areas. Hervé and Helen would like to thank everyone for their prayers

and support. They plan to live in Grand Haven, Michigan.

Mr. and Mrs. Leo Ryan of Houston, Texas, along with Mr. and Mrs. William Bradford of Brisbane, Australia, are delighted to announce the marriage of their children Elizabeth Anne Ryan and Randall Craig Bradford. The wedding was held on Sunday afternoon, Oct. 11, 2009, at Montego's on the Bay in Kwana Island, Queensland, Australia.

The day began with an excep-



Randall and Elizabeth Bradford

tional performance of "How Great Thou Art" by Michele Lyons of the Brisbane congregation. The ceremony was performed by the groom's father. The groom's brother, Bill Bradford, stood as best man and was joined by groomsman Joe Rivers, brother-in-law of the groom, and junior groomsman Cameron Holladay, nephew of the groom. Sister of the bride, Lisa Ryan-Powell, served as matron of honor. With her was bridesmaid Jenny Huthnance, sister of the groom, and junior bridesmaid, Courtney Holladay, niece of the groom. The families celebrated the special day with 60 family members and friends.

Betty Funk of Oak View, California, and Bill Swaney of Grand Prairie, Texas, were married Sunday, Aug. 23, 2009, at the Grand Prairie Community Center. A

total of 100 friends and brethren, including family from Oak View, were in attendance. Doug Horchak, pastor of the Dallas congregation, officiated. Karen Collins was the maid of honor, accompanied by bridesmaids Sarah Woody and Mindy Swaney.



Betty and Bill Swaney

Tim Swaney was the best man. Betty's son Guy and Thomas Woody were groomsmen. Betty's son Karl escorted her down the aisle. Songs were sung by Oliver Hooser and Karen Collins, and they were accompanied by Justin Glasgow. The couple resides in Grand Prairie, Texas.

Obituaries

After years of struggling with health problems, David Brannen of Great Falls, Montana, passed away shortly after celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles in Bend/Redmond, Oregon, in 2009. He was baptized in 1977 and was a faithful member of God's Church.

David was born in Conrad,



David Brannen

Montana, and grew up in the rugged foothills, ranching and tending to the farm. As an adult, he drove trucks across the continental United States and north to Alaska, eventually settling in Great Falls. This good ole cowboy was never one to quit. He had a natural ability to live on the edge and share the story later. One had to wonder how one man could experience so many situations, but that was David.

Many will remember David for his love of the guitar and music. Most will remember David as one who longed to be wherever the brethren were gathering. He was constantly helping someone in need despite his limited financial resources and his failing health.

David lived too far away to make it to church services every week; therefore, the highlight of the year was attending the Feast of Tabernacles. This year, friends helped him travel to Bend/Redmond where he did attend services for the majority of the Feast until he was later taken to the hospital. Several days later he died.

He was attended during his last days by Mark Mickelson. David's wife, Anita, later traveled from Great Falls to be with him.

David was a friend to many and will be missed.

Mary Lou Bates, a founding member of the Bakersfield, California, congregation, died in October of 2009 at the age of 83.

Mary Lou centered her life on God and her family. She began listening to Herbert Armstrong on radio stations out of Mexico in the early 1950s. She was baptized by Leroy Neff and George Meeker during a baptizing tour in 1957. Her children remember driving as long as five hours for



Mary Lou Bates

Holy Day services in Sacramento, Fresno or Pasadena in the 1960s. When the Bakersfield congregation started in 1961, Mary Lou began the weekly trek of 70 miles each way to church services.

Mary Lou worked alongside her husband in a family-owned dairy until 1961 and then did office work for his construction business until her death. She was intelligent, capable, gentle, quiet, gracious, faithful, kind and service-minded. Over 100 friends, members of the community and family members gathered to honor her memory in a graveside service officiated by her former pastor, Robin Weber.

She is survived by her husband of 62 years, Merrill. She is also survived by her daughter, Helen (Allan) Hambleton, who lives in Gold Coast, Australia, and her son, Dan (Debbie) Bates. Mary Lou's oldest daughter, Linda Woodruff, died in 1972 leaving behind three children, including a 2-month-old daughter. Mary Lou and Merrill adopted the granddaughter, Janice, who now lives in Florida with her husband, Jon Fike. Mary Lou is also survived by her grandchildren, Susie, Sally-Ann and Sam Hambleton; Matthew, Sarah and Amy Bates; John and Paul Woodruff; and great-

grandchildren, Kaleb, Nicolas, Lance, Andrew and Ashley.

Joyce Carchasky died on Nov. 2, 2009, at the age of 84. Joyce began



Joyce Carchasky

attending services in November of 1969. She was a member of the St. Paul, Minnesota, congregation for 40 years. Joyce had the opportunity to travel the world as an employee of the Minnesota Historical Society and as a travel agent. Joyce loved God and His Word. She believed in God's wonderful plan, looking forward to the resurrection and seeing the face of God. Joyce is survived by daughters Nancy (Bob) Holman and Jane Bleifuss as well as four grandchildren.

Clarence Wesley Hanson, 91, of Chillicothe, Missouri, died Nov. 10, 2009, after years of combating health problems. Clarence was baptized in 1953 and was a pioneer member of the Kansas City, Missouri, congregation in 1961 and later of the St. Joseph, Missouri, congregation in 1968. He attended the United Church of God in St. Joseph until his health deteriorated. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Helen Jordan Hanson, in 1994. He then married Anna Kitchener who survives him. He is also survived by one son, Dennis, of Plainville, Kansas; one daughter, Linda Kelley, of Bolivar, Missouri; and one sister, Daisy Pearl Cockrun of Mt. Vernon, Illinois.

Clarence was a veteran of World War II having served in Australia, New Guinea, Manila and Japan. Clarence's passions were God's Word, Chinese checkers, farming and writing.

Eustace Rodrigues, 97, a devoted husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather died on June 20, 2009, at his home in Awarewaunau Village, Rupununi, Guyana.

He was born on Jan. 20, 1922, in Lemong, Moruca, in the northwest district of Guyana. He came to the Rupununi in 1959 and worked most of his life as a carpenter. He settled in Awarewaunau in 1963 and raised a family of eight with his wife, Agatha. He started receiving *The Plain Truth* magazine in 1984 and was baptized with his wife on March 18, 1991.

Mr. Rodrigues was truly a servant. He served as village captain

from 1977 to 1978, regional chairman from 1994 to 1998 and as a



Eustace Rodrigues

member of parliament from 1998 to 2001. After retiring from service to his country, he dedicated his time to the study of God's Word and serving the brethren.

Eureka Leona Smith was born June 13, 1947, in Nassau, Bahamas. After a near death experience in 1984, Eureka came across *The Plain Truth* magazine and *World Tomorrow* program. She was baptized that December. She spent her life as a homemaker and seamstress and helped run the family convenience store with husband, Mark Sr. At the time of his death in 1992, Mark was being counseled for baptism into the Church.

Eureka was a dedicated member, maintaining the church hall, mailing out literature requests, recording service information and sharing her faith with anyone who would listen, especially her grandchildren. Eureka suffered a hemorrhagic stroke on Sept. 15, 2009. She died late Friday night, Sept. 18, on the Feast of Trumpets.

She was preceded in death by granddaughter Cherith Jalynn Dupuch. She is survived by her children, Mark (Angelica) Smith, Michael (Barb) Smith, Markelle Smith and Markera (Charles) Dupuch Sr.; and many more relatives and friends.

The family of Eureka would like to thank the members of the United Church of God in the United States, Canada and Australia for their prayers and beautiful cards. It was a moving experience to receive them and feel the love and support of so many sisters and brothers in Christ.

Vera Mae (Thomas) Andy, a member of the East Texas congregation, died of cancer at the age of 82 on Oct. 15, 2009. Vera was born on Jan. 28, 1927, in Bloomberg, Pennsylvania, and was a former telephone operator and homemaker. She was a resident of Gladewater, Texas, for the past 20 years. She was preceded in death by her husband, Chester Andy, in 1999.

Vera was a quiet and gentle woman who seldom was able to attend church services due to poor health. After she was diagnosed with cancer, she lived in a nursing

home for the last three months of her life. There was no known family nearby, but several members faithfully visited her. Vera deeply appreciated the ongoing love and support of the brethren.

A memorial service was held at the United Church of God East Texas church hall on Nov. 11, with Ken Treybig officiating. Tim Waddle officiated at a graveside memorial service to be held in Danville, Pennsylvania, where her ashes were interred in her husband's grave, according to her wishes.

Ruth Vinzant, 81, of Bay Springs, Mississippi, died on the Sabbath of November 14, 2009, at Rolling Acres Retirement Center in Raleigh, Mississippi. Baptized in 1966, Ruth was a longtime member in the Church of God and, until her health prevented her, regularly attended and served in the Laurel congregation.

She was preceded in death by her husband of 52 years, James



Ruth Vinzant

Vinzant, and their son, James Vinzant. Ruth is survived by one son, William (Barbara) Vinzant; two daughters, Peggy (Ray) Hosey and Angie Johnson, who is a member of the Laurel congregation; seven grandchildren; 15 great-grandchildren; and two great-great-grandchildren.

Services were held on Nov. 17 at Mt. Nebo Baptist Church followed by the burial in Mt. Nebo Cemetery. Pastor of the Laurel congregation Andy Burnett and Tom Diaz, an elder in the Laurel congregation, officiated.

A kind and gentle person, Ruth loved God, her family and the Church; and she deeply desired Christ's return. Many people at her funeral—including her own children—stated that in all the years they knew her, they never heard her utter a bad word about anybody.

Announcements: Members are welcome to submit announcements of the births, engagements, weddings, significant anniversaries (25, 40, 50, 60, etc.) and obituaries in their families. Please include a self-addressed envelope if you would like photos returned. Most items are 50 to 100 words and should not exceed 250 words. Please **e-mail (preferred) or give them to your local pastor** to forward to *UnitedNews*.

News At a Glance

Continued from page 2

the rankings of the search engines. They are also helping with two major objectives of the Strategic Plan: "Increase Web visitor loyalty" and "Increase number of first-time Web visitors."

But with these benefits come new challenges. The world of social media is based on the free exchange of comments, and the fan pages are no different. Most of the comments have been sincere and positive, but it is easy for a disgruntled person to try to provoke debate and promote their unbiblical ideas.

How can you help? We would be thrilled if all the elders and members would visit the fan pages occasionally and post positive and meaningful comments to raise the level of the conversation.

If you are interested in helping even more than that, we welcome your help to watch over one of these pages and perhaps answer and encourage some of the sincere commenters.

Your comments and answers could benefit hundreds of people! If you have suggestions or would like to volunteer to help, contact edito-

rial content manager Mike Bennett at mike_bennett@ucg.org.

Mike Bennett

GN Print Advertising Campaign Ramps Up

Media and Communications Services began the 2009-2010 fiscal year last July with an extensive print advertising campaign. Since then, we have increased the quantity of resources for this effort. We originally offered *Good News* subscriptions to 3,500,000 U.S. households. With the new direct mail campaign, we will now reach an additional 3,800,000 households who will be given the option to mail a postage-paid subscription card or go to the Internet to place their order.

Your prayers are requested for God's blessings on this campaign.

John LaBissoniere

United Youth Corps Applications Due

The United Youth Corps offers opportunities for service, leadership training and travel for our young adults in the Church. This is the 11th year of offering United Youth Corps opportunities to the young adults and, to date, we have over 95 young adults who have



What's New on the Web?

■ UCG Web Presence Expands

On Dec. 15, Internet managing editor Aaron Booth reported the following exciting stats for UCG Web activity:

9,199 total Facebook fans.

2,009 total Twitter followers.

97 Bible FAQs posted.

266,784 Bible FAQs views.

474 videos posted on YouTube.

967,609 video views on YouTube.

99 e-mail campaigns (*This Is the Way*, UCG Weekly Update, *GN* Newsletter, *WNP* E-news) sent.

201,579 clicks to our Web sites generated by e-mail campaigns.

91,142 visits to UCG weekly commentary pages.



Featured Link

■ Members' Web Site members.ucg.org

Go to the members' Web site to

listen to sermons, learn how you can help preach the gospel on the Internet, find a Sabbath webcast, check the UCG events calendar, read a study paper and more.

If you have questions or comments, please contact: webmaster@ucg.org

participated in 28 projects in nine countries.

We are now accepting applications for the following projects in 2010:

Zambia, East Africa (late July/early August).

Ghana, West Africa (Aug. 8 to 20).

Nigeria, West Africa (Aug. 10 to 26).

Kenya, East Africa (Dec. 13 to 29).

Jordan Project, Amman, Jordan (mid-August 2010 to June 2011).

Go to www.ucgyouthcorps.org to download a project fact sheet

and application. The deadline for applications to the project in Nigeria is **Jan. 15**. The deadline for the projects in Ghana and Zambia is **Feb. 15**. The projects in Kenya and Jordan have later deadline dates.

We encourage our young adults to take the chance to find out more about how you can make a positive difference in the Church and in the world while experiencing unique international adventures.

Doug Horchak and Dave Baker

year's events will be the Double-tree Hotel in Dallas.

Visit www.ucg-dallas.org/ya for additional details and costs. If you have questions, please e-mail Phillip Sandilands at sandilands@tx.rr.com. See you in February!

Phillip Sandilands

Dallas to Host Regional Teen Formal March 20

The ninth annual Dallas Teen Formal will be held once again at the Southfork Hotel on Saturday, March 20, from 6 to 11 p.m. The theme is "A Night Under the Stars."

The cost for the dinner and dance will be \$30 per person. The Southfork Hotel has once again extended the same group rate as last year of \$69 plus tax per room per night. Please contact the hotel directly on their Web site www.southforkhotel.com or by phone at (877) 386-4383 to make a reservation.

Registration will start in January and end on March 12. Check www.ucg-dallas.org/teens for more details.

Tim Smith

2010 United Youth Camp Dates Announced

During the United Youth Camps conference in October, camp directors announced the following dates for the 2010 camp program:

Pinecrest, Missouri: June 6 to 13 (staff, June 5).

Woodmen, Alabama: June 27 to July 4 (staff, June 26).

Carter, Texas: July 4 to 11 (staff, July 3).

Hye Sierra, California: July 4 to 11 (staff, July 2).

Northwest Camp, Oregon: July 25 to Aug. 1 (staff, July 24).

Heritage, Pennsylvania: Aug. 15 to 22 (staff, Aug. 14).



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

Spring Holy Days Singles' Weekend in Asheville

Asheville, North Carolina, will be the site for a singles' activity during the 2010 spring Holy Days. Plans include an all-day tour of the beautiful Biltmore House, gardens and winery in Asheville.

The Biltmore House is a real-life castle built in the style of a French Renaissance chateau that spans over 4 acres and has 250 rooms! A tour of the Biltmore winery will give singles a behind-the-scenes look at how wine is crafted that will, of course, include free wine tasting.

Also planned for the weekend will be a drive along the scenic Blue Ridge Parkway. We will attend Sabbath and the Last Day of Unleavened Bread services with the Asheville, North Carolina, congregation.

Cost for the weekend is \$200, which includes housing and most of the meals. A nonrefundable \$100 deposit is due by Monday, Feb. 1, 2010. The remaining \$100 balance will be due upon arrival or can be mailed in prior to the event.

Please mark your calendar for Friday, April 2, through Monday, April 5, 2010, and plan to join us for this exciting event! Space for this event is limited, so sign up today!

Contact John Dean at jdeanpe@yahoo.com or Ruben Gusman at rubenkc@aol.com with questions about the weekend or visit <http://nc2010.com> for more information and to register for the event.

See you there!



Dallas Young Adults' Weekend, Feb. 12-14

The Dallas, Texas, congregation will once again host a young adults' weekend Feb. 12 to 14, 2009. The theme of this year's activities will be "Servant Leadership: The Core of Christianity Through Service, Volunteering and Preparing for the Family of God."

Included in the weekend activities will be a social mixer with all registered young adults on Friday evening, seminars and services on the Sabbath, a costume dinner and dance on Saturday evening and brunch and seminars on Sunday. The location for this

Calendar of Events

Jan. 15-17: Women's Enrichment Weekend, "Uniquely You—Uniquely Me," Garden Grove, California, garden-grove.ucg.org.

Feb. 5-7: Family Dance Weekend, Cincinnati, Ohio, East (CincyWD@fuse.net).

Feb. 6: WNP Seminar, Seattle, Washington.

Feb. 7: WNP Seminar, Tacoma, Washington.

Feb. 12-15: Midwest Presidents' Day Family Weekend, Branson, Missouri.

Feb. 21-25: Council of Elders meetings.

March 13: Southeastern Regional Prom, Atlanta, Georgia.

March 13-14: Families for God Regional Weekend, Minneapolis, Minnesota.