



engage

A Journal for Church of God Ministries

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Executive Council Session Signals Final Push Toward Assembly
- Revival Is Here! How Long Will It Last?
- Legislation Will Allow Ministers to Re-enroll for Social Security
- Book Review: *Lee University: The Path from Church of God Bible Training School to Modern University*



Engage Journal is published in the interest of providing contemporary aids and resources to pastors and pastoral staffs.

Church of God Executive Committee

Gary Lewis, *general overseer*
Tony Stewart, *first assistant*
Wayne Dority, *second assistant*
Mark Williams, *third assistant*
Tom Madden, *secretary general*

Engage Journal

Gary Lewis, *executive editor*
Cameron Fisher, *editor*
Michael McDonald, *design/layout*

Engage invites feedback from readers on the content of the journal and suggestions for future issues.

Please email comments to cfisher@churchofgod.org or mail to Engage • P.O. Box 2430 Cleveland, TN 37320-2430.

For information on reserving ad space, please email cfisher@churchofgod.org or call (423) 478-7258.



© 2026

Contents

From the Editor **3**
Church of God Highlights **49**

Articles

Executive Council Session Signals Final Push Toward Assembly **7**
Cameron Fisher

Revival Is Here! How Long Will It Last? **13**
Jerald Daffe, Ph.D.

Toward a Theology of Success **19**
Steve Hall

“The Great Invitation” **25**
Mark Walker, Ph.D.

Legislation Will Allow Ministers to Re-enroll for Social Security **34**

Book Review:
Lee University: The Path from Church of God Bible Training School to Modern University **44**
Roy Y. Chan, Ph.D.

Resources

MONEY MATTERS **31**
Art Rhodes

LEGAL NOTES **38**
Dennis Watkins



The International Executive Council prepared for their April session with time spent at the Global Prayer Center.

DISCLAIMER: *Content of articles that originate from sources outside the Church of God, and are posted in this publication, do not necessarily reflect the views of the Church of God, but are vetted and chosen for publication in the interest of resourcing Church of God pastors and leaders.*



From the Editor | Cameron Fisher

Keep Hawai'i in Your Prayers



The Waialua Church of God experiences flood waters

I have a soft spot in my heart for the Church of God in Hawai'i. Next year it will be 60 years since my family and I moved there and my father led the state as its overseer. I have kept up with the churches and subsequent overseers ever since, Rob and Candie Taylor included.

In the last three years, the Taylors have endured two natural disasters, both of which resulted in significant damage or destruction of church property. First, it was the devastating Maui fires which left the Lahaina Church of God in ashes. Earlier this year it was flooding on Oahu, this time significantly damaging the Waialua Church. I remember worshipping in both of those churches before our family moved in 1974.

The good news is that despite the devastation, the churches will endure. Government red tape is complicating the rebuild of the Lahaina church after two years, but it is on track. In the meantime, the members have partnered with the Wailuku church on the island. Waialua, while still cleaning up, was spared being washed away due to a structure built to withstand flood waters.

As you pray for our great Church of God, send up a special petition for the Aloha State. Our dozen or so churches there and those who serve, deserve a special dispensation of grace and favor as they continue recovery. ■



80TH INTERNATIONAL

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

CHURCH OF GOD WORLD MISSIONS

Orlando, FL
July 27-31, 2026

We're excited to see our World Missions family at the International General Assembly. Stop by our booth, bring your kids to Kids Club, and be part of the Parade of Nations on Thursday night as we celebrate and gather with our global family.

Emerging Leaders GATHERING

Emerging Leaders, you are invited to join us on Wednesday night of Assembly for the Emerging Leaders Gathering. It's a space to meet and connect with other leaders from around the world, build real relationships, and enjoy a great night together.

Ages 17-30 | 07.29.26 | Room 209

INTENTIONAL • EMBRACE • EMPOWER

YOU HAVE A SEAT AT THE TABLE. YOUR VOICE MATTERS.

Church of God Intercultural Ministries Board



**Dr. Fijoy L. &
Marie Johnson**
DIRECTOR



**Ryan
Sharp**
CHAIR



**Cecil
Mathew**
CO-CHAIR



**Ron
Binda**



**Florin
Cimpean**



**Miriam
Figueroa**



**Woodrow
Jarrett**



**Serge
Jerome**



**Carlos
Moran**



**Leonard
Policarpio**



**Raymond
Pranoto**



**Ashley
Powell**



**Dexter
Russell**



**Kenneth
Smith II**



**Shibu
Thomas**



**Rod
Trusty**



**Ray
Velazquez**

CONTACT

PHONE: 423-423-1678

EMAIL: FJOHNSON@CHURCHOFGOD.ORG

WEBSITE: WWW.IMCOG.ORG

ADDRESS: DISCIPLESHIP AND EDUCATION CENTER
PO. BOX 2430 CLEVELAND TN 37320-2430

SHIPPING : 2490 KETH ST. SW CLEVELAND TN 37311

PARTNER WITH US:



**INTERCULTURAL
MINISTRY**

A Church of God Conference on Apologetics



CONTEND

An

Apologetics

Event

September 18-19, 2026
North Cleveland Church of God

**\$75 REGISTRATION
MATERIALS PROVIDED
SCAN QR CODE TO
REGISTER**

Tracks:

- **Pastors**
- **Witnessing/Laity**
- **Emerging Leaders**
- **Cultural Topics**

Sponsored by: Ministry of Evangelism Contend for the Faith Committee



Combined Efforts of Church of God Doctrine and Polity & Ministry of Evangelism Apologetics Committee



Executive Council Session Signals Final Push Toward Assembly

By Cameron Fisher



Members of the International Executive Council began their May session in the Global Prayer Center.

The Church of God International Executive Council completed a critical two-day gathering in late April where the Church of God's highest body of leaders tweaked and debated an agenda for the upcoming International General Assembly.

The Council of Eighteen and the Executive Committee, which together comprises the Executive Council, adjourned just after noon on Wednesday, April 22, completing more than 12 hours of information, deliberation, and

discussion on potential items to be presented at the 80th International General Assembly slated for July 27-31, 2026, at the Orlando Convention Center (OCC). Action taken by the Council will be reflected in the release of the Official Agenda, at least 30 days prior to the General Assembly. General Overseer Gary Lewis chairs the Executive Council and will be moderating the General Council sessions for the first time.

This historic Assembly will feature an array of exciting events and keynote



speakers. On Monday, July 27, pre-Assembly events will include the popular LEAD Conference where registered delegates can participate in a free afternoon leadership session with well-known speaker and author **John Maxwell**. He



will be joined by Gary Lewis and Dave Martin. The Chaplains Commission will conduct their biennial conference for chaplains, and that night will be a special awards and partners gala hosted by Church of God World Missions (invitation only). All day, registration will be available at the OCC.

At 8:30 am on Tuesday, July 28, General Overseer Lewis will call the General Council to order for their first business session. Morning and afternoon sessions will take place on Wednesday and Thursday, and culminate in a Friday morning session, followed by the General Assembly session on Friday afternoon.



Keynote speakers for the Assembly will include an opening Tuesday night message from **Samuel Rodriguez**, President of the National Hispanic Christian

Leadership Conference, Senior Pastor of New Season Church in Sacramento, and a leading voice for faith and the Gospel around the globe. On Wednesday night, **Christine Caine** will be the



keynote, following a message at the International Women's Ministries service earlier that day. Caine is an author, evangelist, and co-founder of the A21 organization that combats human trafficking. Also on Wednesday, the biennial tribute to deceased ministers in the Church of God will take place during the evening service.

On Thursday will be the traditional World Missions emphasis with the popular Parade of Nations and musical groups from around the globe, including a Jamaican choir. Delivering short evangelistic messages will be five global speakers including Sebastian Schmidgall, missionary to Israel, A.J. Velasco, pastor Church of God Dasmariñas, Cavite, Philippines, Caleen Howard, pastor, Evanston Church of God in Des Plaines, Illinois, Emmanuel Moodley, pastor, Betsaida Ministries in Durban, South Africa, and Josue Collins, pastor of Renewal Church of God in Tampa, Florida.

The Friday night closing message will be delivered by Evangelist **Jentezen Franklin**, author and senior pastor



of Free Chapel in Gainesville, Georgia. The Friday service will begin an hour earlier (6:00 pm) to allow time for the concluding event of the week, an awards ceremony for Teen Talent participants.

Speaking of Teen Talent, this year welcomes the return of the Church of God youth competition back to the General Assembly. After more than a decade of being held at Lee University in between assemblies, Teen Talent will play out on multiple stages at the OCC. Participants will be competing all week in drama, music, Bible, art, and writing, culminating in the Friday night ceremony. Registered delegates of GA26 will have full access to viewing Teen Talent competitions.

In between and in addition to services and General Council business sessions, GA26 delegates will have a wide array of events from which to choose, including reunions of schools and churches, prayer sessions, special event meal functions, and receptions. As has been the tradition, a full hall of exhibits will be offered that features ministries, product retailers, church departments, organizations, and food vendors. Exhibit space in the hall sold out in early May. The exhibit hall will also include lunch

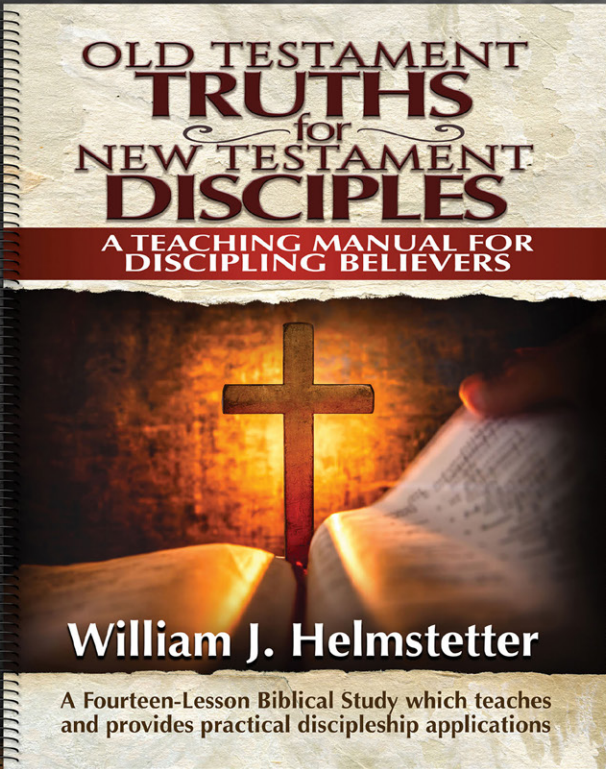
dining options, allowing delegates to stay in-house.

Recognizing its importance, General Overseer Lewis has made prayer a priority at and leading up to GA26. Prior to the opening session of the Executive Council in April, members met in the Global Prayer Center for a time of prayer and communion as the first item on their agenda. The Prayer Center is located in the former chambers of the Council, the members having elected in September 2024 to turn the space into the prayer center. At the Smoky Mountain Gathering in late April, Lewis introduced a “Global Prayer Force” to the delegates and invited them to become the initial partners in a coordinated effort to pray for the Assembly, church, world events, government leaders, and more. And finally, before the gavel drops at every business session of the General Council, a time of “priority prayer” will take place. To join the Global Prayer Force, text PRAYER to 423-370-9111. ■

To learn more about the General Assembly, please visit the Church of God website or GA26.org. Registration is required for admission to all events and business sessions.

Looking for great material for your Discipleship Group? or Class?

Just Released from Church of God Adult Discipleship
from author William J. Helmstetter



**OLD TESTAMENT
TRUTHS
for
NEW TESTAMENT
DISCIPLES**
A TEACHING MANUAL FOR
DISCIPLING BELIEVERS

William J. Helmstetter

A Fourteen-Lesson Biblical Study which teaches
and provides practical discipleship applications

A Great Discipleship Resource
for Pastors, Teachers, Disciplers,
and Classes

- Enough Material for 21 Weeks of discipling believers
- Reproducible chapter outlines for student handouts
- Pentecostal with section on the Millennium
- Why the Apocryphal Books are not in the Bible
- Convenient Spiral Format for teaching
- Every Chapter, discussion questions for small groups and classes
- Special "Supplements" for Lesson Presentation

Only \$16.95

(Special Premier Discount)

For 14-21 Weeks of Church, Class,
or Small Group Discipleship



**ADULT
DISCIPLESHIP**
KNOWING • BEING • DOING

**ORDER TODAY!
888.766.9009**

adultdiscipleshipcog.com



Church of God

Grants and Gifts

NEED TO IMPROVE YOUR GRANT WRITING SKILLS!

Check out Our recommended Grant Writing Resources



Welcome Changers!

● Aspiring Grant Writers

● Seasoned Grant Writers

● Freelance Grant Writers

● Grant Professionals

HOLLY
RUSTICK

SUBSCRIBE FOR GRAN
WRITING CONTENT!

SMOKY MOUNTAIN CHILDREN'S HOME

Fire Fund

**HELP US REPLACE THE HOUSE
THAT BURNED ON OUR CAMPUS**

Checks are to be made payable to:
SMOKY MOUNTAIN CHILDREN'S HOME FIRE FUND
or go to www.smch.org and click "DONATE."



Dr. Walt Mauldin
Executive Director

Tammie Mauldin
Co-Executive Director



449 McCarn Circle ♦ Sevierville, TN 37864-4391
865.453.4644 ♦ www.smch.org



Revival Is Here! How Long Will It Last?

By Jerald Daffe, Ph.D.



Spiritual awakening/revival is sweeping the land, the world. For many, many months we have been privileged to hear and to see the fruits of revival moving across college campuses, filling Christian concert venues, reinvigorating local churches, and spilling out in the streets (literally).

It is so wonderful to see a younger generation enraptured in worship as they lift their hands in adoration and praise. Some jump up and down with enthusiasm for extended times in worship. (Labeled as pogoing in previous decades.) It is overwhelming and so encouraging to witness this outpouring of genuine spirituality! Our prayers should be that it will continue and many souls across generations will accept Christ as Savior and Lord and become workers in the Kingdom of God.

A question arises. Could it be that how we respond to this marvelous renewal will make all the difference? I think so! A quick review of the spiritual awakenings around the world (17th to 21st centuries) reflects some common characteristics. Following are a few which are evident.

1. Revival brings emotional highs never previously experienced.
2. Revival brings spiritual and physical deliverance from the various bondages of sin.
3. Revival brings the need to grow and mature in Christ.
4. Revival mends broken relationships.
5. Revival brings change with varying results – some very positive and others equally divisive.



Prior to briefly considering several of these characteristics let's consider several definitions. Two of my favorites place the basics of revival in the Church. Leonard Ravenhill said, "True revival is God's coming to the aid of His sick church." Earle E. Cairns stated, "the works of the Holy Spirit in restoring the people of God to a more vital spiritual life, witness, and work by prayer and the Word after repentance in crisis for their spiritual decline."

The term, "awakening" also deserves a brief review.

J. Edwin Orr – "awakenings are always some repetition of the Acts of the Apostles followed by the revitalizing of nominal Christians and bringing outsiders into vital touch with the Dynamic causing all such awakenings – the Spirit of God."

When the Holy Spirit descends in revival/awakening this marvelous spiritual renewal must be nurtured! Too frequently when the "fire" has cooled down, there is a tendency to have "enjoyed the ride" and fail to keep the spiritual vigor burning. Those initial spiritual highs may not be regularly maintained at the same level but sustained by a renewed emphasis and balance in the truths of Scripture. This provides a foundation of truth for right living when feelings are at a lower level.

There must be a continued rejoicing and reminding oneself as well as others of

the deliverances from sin and a life redirected. Private and public testimony can be a means of remembering what God has done and continues to do. This can be part of how spiritual awakening not only mends one's relationship with our Heavenly Father but also with family, neighbors, and co-workers. Older generations need to hear what younger generations are experiencing and rejoice with them. Younger generations must hear of the Spirit's intervention in past years as well as in the present life cycles.

Not to be overlooked are some changes which will naturally occur such as new music, modified worship styles, and a new generation of leadership. This is where "the rubber meets the road." How do we provide accountability and encouragement. Left unattended some wonderful renewals can return to the previous ineffectiveness as a secular environment begins to creep into our individual lifestyles and the programs of our churches and parachurches.

Then, there is always the divisive issues caused by ego, false doctrine, position, and money. Remember our adversary, Satan, comes to kill and to destroy. He uses various ways to make the advances of true spirituality fade unless carefully guarded.

Considering these challenges is there one big overriding possibility which should concern?



Yes! It is discipleship. As one of my college friends would say, “need to get into the Word.” Quite simply put – drink from the fountain of worship and eat from the Bread of the Scriptures.

Genuine revival/awakening should not be seen as an event within a shorter time period. But rather, they are to be life-changing experiences which continue to impact for years to come. The effects are to be seen outside of the church or fellowship gatherings.

How is this possible? Simple answer: an ongoing program of discipleship for all ages. Study of the Scriptures with practical application for all ages keeps spiritual vitality at a strong level.

One special historical example of discipleship following a tremendous spiritual awakening is the 1907 Cleveland, Tennessee, revival of the Church of God. The spirit of revival lasted nearly an entire year – 300 conversions, 250 baptized in the Holy Spirit, and the church membership grew from 60 to 300. These are recorded in the chapter “A Landmark Year” in Charles W. Conn’s book, *Like A Mighty Army*. Then discipleship became a major ministry. A ten-day Bible School was established to ground these new converts in the Pentecostal Faith.

There are various formats by which discipleship can be offered:

1. A reinvigorated Sunday School program for all ages;

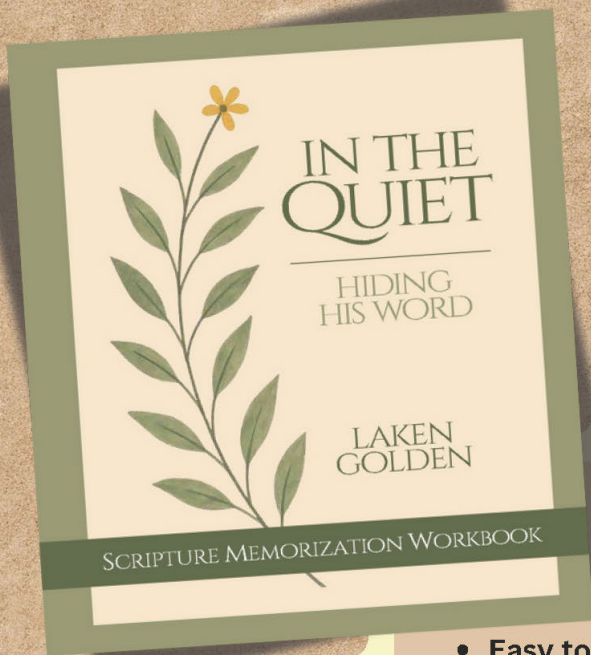
2. Specialized midweek teaching on key doctrines such as salvation, holiness, spiritual gifts, and select portions of Scripture, and evangelism, to name just a few. Consider a reading list of books which will contribute to people’s private devotions and personal growth. There is a tendency to move too quickly in the direction of practical “how to” subjects prior to laying a solid foundation. Mix these in after already having the doctrinal basis. Keep the individual studies to four to six lessons. It keeps interest and motivates to facilitate better attendance. Announce them weeks in advance to prepare individuals to anticipate being a part of the discipleship process.

Let’s keep the spirit of revival and awakening alive! ■

NOTE: There is a chapter titled “We are a Discipling Church” in General Overseer Gary Lewis’ recent book, *We Are The Church of God*.

Jerald Daffe, D.Min. is a Professor of Pastoral Ministry retired from Lee University and a member of the Doctrine and Polity Committee for the Church of God. He is the author of two books on revival, a 39-lesson study, and numerous articles.

Rediscover the Beauty and Power of Scripture!



"Your Word I have hidden in my heart,..."

Ps. 119:11a (NKJV)

ONLY
\$24.95

- Easy to Use 8-1/2 x 11" Spiral Bound
- Scripture Memorization Calendar
- 13 Topics
- Each Topic Divided into Weeks, with One Passage of Scripture per Week
- Each Week Includes a 10 Minute Daily Activity



ADULT DISCIPLESHIP
KNOWING • BEING • DOING



ORDER TODAY! 888.766.9009
adultdiscipleshipcog.com



MINISTERIOS EDUCACIONALES HISPANOS USA HISPANIC EDUCATIONAL MINISTRIES

18-19 SEPTIEMBRE SEPTEMBER 2026

REDEMPTION POINT CHURCH
3831 OOLTEWAH RINGGOLD RD, OOLTEWAH, TN 37363



GRADUACIÓN GRADUATION



CONGRESO DE EDUCACIÓN EDUCATIONAL CONGRESS



Dr. Daniel Alvarez
DIRECTOR SENIOR DE INICIATIVAS DE EDUCACIÓN GLOBAL
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF GLOBALEDCATION INITIATIVES



Dr. David Ramirez
ASISTENTE AL DIRECTOR MISIONES MUNDIALES
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR WORLD MISSIONS



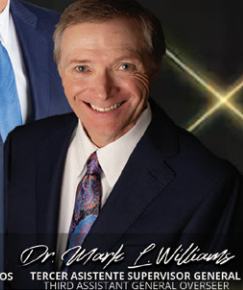
REGÍSTRATE
REGISTRATION



Dr. Gary Lewis
SUPERVISOR GENERAL
GENERAL OVERSEER



Dr. Hector De Jesus
DECANO MINISTERIOS EDUCACIONALES HISPANOS
DEAN OF HISPANIC EDUCATIONAL MINISTRIES



Dr. Mark L. Williams
TERCER ASISTENTE SUPERVISOR GENERAL
THIRD ASSISTANT GENERAL OVERSEER

GRADUACIÓN | CONFERENCIAS | VISITA A LUGARES HISTÓRICOS
GRADUATION | CONFERENCES | VISIT TO HISTORICAL PLACES

WWW.USAMEH.ORG

(423) 478-7231

USAMEH@CHURCHOFGOD.ORG



The Story Isn't Over...

The Vision Is Clear. The Work Isn't Done.

More than 3.2 billion people around the world have never heard the message of hope in Jesus Christ. That's over 40% of the global population living without access to the Gospel.

But together, we are changing that.

Through the 365 Journey, more than 1,900,000 lives have already been transformed—and the story is still being written.

Now, with just a short time remaining, we are believing to exceed **2 Million Souls** reached by July 2026.

Every gift brings the mission into focus.
Every act of obedience reveals a life worth reaching.



Dr. M. Thomas Propes
GENERAL DIRECTOR

Dr. David E. Ramirez
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

**2 MILLION
SOULS** *365*
JOURNEY

Project #102-9705

Text CHALLENGE to 801801



Toward a Theology of Success

By Steve Hall

“Performance-based ministry is crushing the soul of ministers.” – Dallas Willard



How does a minister know they're successful? How does a minister determine if the ministry as a whole or a particular program is successful? My guess is that you're thinking what I'm thinking: attendance and money. Sadly, the success metrics of modern ministry are similar to those of any other business; if the ministry or business attracts significant attendance and revenue, there are no other metrics to worry about. The ends justify the means. That is, in the kingdom of the world.

All native Western people are born into and driven by a capitalist system whose engine is consumerism, and which

is fueled by discontentment. But when it comes to measuring success, is this the system of the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of the world?

I'm an American and believe that capitalism is the best post-Fall economic system on the planet. I don't want to move or adopt any other way of life. However, as a Christian, I recognize the need to temper my American capitalism with Christian covenantalism. Were Adam and Eve capitalists? Was the post-Pentecost church in the book of Acts capitalistic? There seemed to be a different standard for success before the Fall and after Pentecost, compared to the



bigger, faster, richer metrics of the worldly kingdom. I'm not attempting here to flesh out a complete theology of success. I am, however, trying to raise enough interest to inspire our tribe to seriously consider morphing our current metrics away from kingdom-of-the-world ABCs of ministry and toward kingdom-of-God metrics like health.

Consider the insight from 1 Samuel 16:7 about a Kingdom of God measure for God's idea of success in choosing a king: "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'"

I love this quote from Pastor and Missionary Pete Portal: "The professional business paradigm *of the world* celebrates things that are high profit, scalable and generate more of something... There's an upward mobility many of us are expected to exhibit or aspire to that fails to bear in mind that of the thirty-three years of Jesus' life, thirty were spent investing in relationships, hidden in obscurity."¹

Is Jesus only successful because he's the founder and leader of the world's largest religion? Jesus had such a humble origin on Earth. He was a blue-collar worker, and of common style for his day. Nothing

remarkable from a kingdom-of-the-World perspective. He even drove his movement into the ground, landing himself in court and on a cross of crucifixion, having his "customers" scattered. I love this line by Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "In a world where success is the measure and justification of all things, the figure of Him who was sentenced and crucified remains a stranger and is at best the object of pity. The world will allow itself to be subdued only by success."² What about you? Will your sense of ministerial worth only be subdued with a kingdom of the World ABC (attendance, buildings, and cash) metric of success? God help us, performance-based ministry is crushing the soul of ministers. But what else is there to measure?

Bible scholar Eugene Peterson, in his pastoral memoir, describes his gradual but steady shift from performance-based ministry to faithfulness-based ministry: "I was acquiring a sacred imagination strong enough to reject and resist the relentlessly secularized and ghettoized one-dimensional caricature that assigned American pastors to jobs in a workplace that markets religion. When I looked around me and observed churches in competition with one another for their share in the religious market, hiring pastors to provide religious goods and services for a culture of God consumers, I wanted nothing to do with it. I couldn't see that either

1 Portal, Pete. *How to be (Un)Successful: An unlikely guide to human flourishing*. (p. 52). Kindle Edition.
2 Portal, Pete. *How to be (Un)Successful: An unlikely guide to human flourishing*. (p. 17). Kindle Edition.



God or place—holy God, sacred place—was a significant consideration in forming a pastoral identity in America.”³

Like Peterson, I spent 20 years of my 38-year local church ministry chasing the approval of *Outreach* magazine covers, which is only given if I’m faster and bigger than the next. I grimaced too often while opening my region’s denominational monthly church statistic report. My soul was often crushed because I believed that as Lead Pastor, I was a CEO of a ministry business measured by worldly metrics. This approach to success in ministry eventually suffocated the reason I was called into ministry in the first place. Ultimately, after much wrestling with the Holy Spirit, I transformed from a CEO (Chief Executive Officer) to a CCA (Chief Cultural Architect).

This transformation of my ministry identity freed me from focusing on results. My theology of success set me up for peace in ministry. Here is that biblical and truly freeing theology of success I believe in.

The 4-C’s of Biblical Ministry Success



From calling to conveying into the church, the Holy Spirit is the only biblical

agent that can do any of that. So, what do you do? You strive for excellence, not success. Do you count attendance or money? Of course, but you put it in its place. Let the ABCs of modern ministry inform you, but not identify you. Your identity is with God, who looks on the heart, not on the external kingdom of the world’s metrics of success.

Consider Pastor Mike Burnette’s confession, ironically, in *Outreach* magazine itself. In 2018, Pastor Burnette and Life Point Church in Clarksville, Tennessee, were named the Number One Fastest Growing Church in America by *Outreach*. The following year, they were named number seventy-seven. Mike goes on record in *Outreach* in 2021 about the rise and fall of Life Point: When we started getting notoriety for growth, I guess I started believing some of the press about myself. And then I felt that sense of pressure to stay at the top of the list. I mean, where do you go from No. 1? But the year after we were No. 1, we dropped to No. 77. To be 77 on the church growth list is still great. But it felt like a loss. I remember sitting privately in my office and asking, “What happened?” That was a constant question I asked myself, which is not healthy. I realized I had the wrong goalposts. Truth, I haven’t been called to grow a big church; I’ve been called to lead a church to be healthy. Can you



feel it as you read Mike's struggle with the kingdom of the world metrics? Do you feel the pressure of ministry success based on worldly metrics in your context? Have you ever been to a conference and wondered privately to God why you haven't been blessed with the success of the minister speaking from the stage? Have you ever looked at your denominational ranking of churches and felt a sense of happiness or sadness based on where your church ranked? What minister hasn't felt the heights of joy with Easter attendance only to feel the depths of despair with the abysmal attendance the week after Easter? Mike felt this when his church plummeted from number one to seventy-seven. Performance-based ministry metrics will crush your soul and the soul of your spouse.⁴

What if we as evangelical ministers shifted our focus from growth metrics to health metrics? Picture presenting church health awards at our regional meetings and the General Assembly, where pastors of 30, 300, and 3,000 stand shoulder to shoulder, all receiving the same honor based on health metrics.

What if we embraced a church success theology like Stephen Macchia's in his other-worldly book *Becoming a Healthy Church?* And used CHAT

(Church Health Assessment Tool) to regularly evaluate the health of the ministry we lead? CHAT offers a scalable, affordable way for any church to measure health using Macchia's 10 traits of biblical church health.

This radical shift would take a few General Assembly periods but would soon become the standard. A standard that aligns much more with the metrics of the kingdom of God rather than the kingdom of the world. Imagine the relief from worldly, performance-based ministry. What freedom.

So, the question "How does a minister know they're successful?" would be answered by faithfulness to an audience of One rather than an audience of many. Stop guessing about health, start assessing health. Onward! ■

Dr. Steve Hall is Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministry at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee. Shall@leeuniversity.edu

4

Hall, Steve. *The Uniqueness and Danger of Ministry: A Soul Health Manual for Ministers and Their Families* (pp. 41-42). Kindle Edition.

ONE CALLING.
ONE COMMUNITY.



PK

Hangout



and doughnut drop

INTERNATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2026
THURSDAY, JULY 30TH | 6-6:50PM
OCC ROOM 209



CREDENTIALED
WOMEN
CONNECTING

JULY 29TH

3:00 - 5:00 PM

CHURCH OF GOD
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

WE gather

* REGISTER AT GAREGISTRATION.COM *



A ministry of the
Church of God

9800 International Dr, Valencia Ballroom, Orlando, FL 32819

Email info@cogwc.com for more details!



“The Great Invitation” John 6:1-12

By Mark Walker, PhD.



“**F**ast Frank” was a large, intimidating figure with a long beard and long hair. Prior to accepting Christ, he was a biker who lived a criminal life of gangs, drugs, and alcohol. He hadn’t been attending our church long when he invited my wife, Udella, and me to his home for dinner. We accepted his invitation with some trepidation because we didn’t really know him or what to expect.

At his home, Frank shared biker stories of knife fights, gunshot wounds, barroom brawls, and drug busts he had experienced in his old life. I became nervous, thinking he could relapse into his presalvation ways at any moment. About that time, someone started banging on Frank’s front door—it sounded

like gunshots. The person screamed, “Police! Open up! It’s a bust!” Udella and I dove underneath the dinner table. Frank didn’t move; he just invited the person in. An inebriated man walked in carrying a half-empty liquor bottle. It was one of Frank’s old drinking buddies he hadn’t seen in years.

Frank’s friend said, “Hey, Fast! It’s been a while! What’s happening!” (There might have been a few expletives in there as well.)

Frank simply responded, “Jesus is happening!”

Udella and I eventually crawled out from under the table, but the man was so drunk he didn’t even notice. Frank introduced us as his pastor, to which the man sobered up instantly. After awkwardly



staring at each other for a moment, Frank started sharing his testimony with his friend. He even invited him to church—which is not the way I saw the conversation going. It was a weird but wonderful evening.

Wonderful, because out of that weird night, Frank felt welcomed at our church and began inviting his biker friends. For a couple of years, Frank and his friends would sit in several rows of pews each Sunday, dressed in their biker black leather and covered in tattoos. Our church loved them, and many came to Christ. God did something unbelievable from that one strange dinner invitation.

We all like to be invited places, but sometimes those invitations take us into the uncomfortable and unfamiliar. We become afraid to go because we like the comfort of the familiar. But if we let fear and familiarity rule us, we can often miss out on something life-changing for us and others.

The Great Invitation

Ministerial leadership often requires a willingness to face the unknown. In fact, it's been my experience that Christ's call to lead always includes the unknown. It is a strange bedfellow to leadership—one that we, as leaders, must learn to embrace.

Fearing the unknown is a natural human response, which becomes problematic only when we allow it to immobilize and intimidate us from trusting Christ. In my forty-plus years of ministry, I've

discovered—and continue to discover—that if I won't let fear paralyze me and instead respond in faith, I'll often witness the incredible.

In John 6:1-12, we read the familiar miracle story of Christ feeding over 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish. An amazing story. But what's even more amazing is that Jesus invited his disciples to participate in the miracle. It's what I call “**The Great Invitation.**”

An interesting twist occurs in the story when Jesus asks Philip to buy food. He did so “to test him, for Jesus already had in mind what he was going to do” (v. 6). Christ knew the miracle he was going to perform and was inviting Philip to partner with him. Unknown to Philip and the others, it was a test.

In the Greek, “test” means “to perfect or refine.” Christ was attempting to perfect and refine Philip's capacity to trust him—especially when overwhelmed with uncertainty. Christ knew that his disciples needed to learn how to depend fully on him to experience all he had in mind for them. Less selfdependency and more Christ-dependency was something they had to learn, as do we.

The Lord knows the abiding trust we, as leaders, will need to defeat our fears and follow him into the kingdom work he has prepared for us. As with Philip, Christ tests us to develop that trust. “**The Great Invitation**” is really a test question: *Do I trust God enough to follow him into the unknown?*



How, then, will we respond? Let's examine how the disciples responded—first Philip, then Andrew, and then a little boy.

The Philip Response: “It can't be done.”

“It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” (v. 7). With this response, Philip was basically saying, *It can't be done. The task is too big. It's too difficult. It won't work.* Sound familiar?

Maybe we sense a calling or dream we believe is from God, but it seems far too massive and frightening to achieve. Or he's leading us down a pathway we never anticipated, and it feels too overwhelming to travel. We're having Philip's fear response of *“It can't be done.”*

If we're honest, all ministerial leaders have these moments of doubt when we can't see the way forward. God understands. He knows it's too much for us, but he wants us to trust that it's not too much for him. He doesn't want fear to prevent us from partnering with him and experiencing the greatness he has in store.

We can't get it done on our own, but can we trust that he can?

The Andrew Response: “I don't have what it takes.”

“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” (v. 9).

Andrew was saying, *This isn't enough! It doesn't measure up!*

I'm not good enough, smart enough, or experienced enough. I don't have what it takes. There's someone else who can do it better. My measly *“five loaves and two fish”* self isn't enough. I'm afraid I'll fail! This is the Andrew response—an all-too-familiar fear response.

There is always someone better, smarter, and more experienced to do what God has called each of us to do. Yet God didn't call them; he called you and me. And guess what? He knows we don't have what it takes. In and of ourselves, we aren't enough—but he is!

To trust Christ when we feel totally inadequate is to recognize that my inability does not limit his ability. It's to believe that my *“not enough”* becomes *“more than enough”* in his hands. Whether I measure up or someone else measures up isn't the issue. Trusting that Christ measures up is the issue. Do I trust that he has what it takes, and will I trust him?

As leaders, when God invites us into something great, we can either say, *“It can't be done”* or *“I don't have what it takes.”* Or we can respond like a child.

The Little Boy Response: “As I am, with what I have, I'm yours.”

The little boy came as he was to Christ, making available all he had (v. 9). With that simple demonstration of child-like faith, a miracle was birthed. The boy



didn't know if his bread and fish would be enough. He didn't know what Christ could do with such a small amount. All he seemed to know was that Christ was inviting his followers to participate in what he was doing—and he wanted to be in on it.

Even though he had no idea what would occur, the child simply made himself available to the one who could do what he couldn't. He entrusted himself to the miracle worker who could turn his not enough into more than enough. The boy wasn't going to let fear stop him, trusting that Christ's ability wasn't limited by his inability. As he was, with what he had, the little boy accepted Christ's great invitation and witnessed more than he could have ever imagined.

“As I am, with what I have, I'm yours” is the response that defeats debilitating fear and positions us to lead others into the wonder of God. Leaders don't have to be more than he's asked us to be or do more than he's empowered us to do. We simply follow him as we are, with what we have.

What's the step Christ is inviting you to take right now? Although it may be wrought with the unknown, make all you are and all you have available to him. As you do, watch the miracle begin to unfold. ■

Mark Walker, PhD.
Professor of Pastoral Studies
Lee University



“Teach the Word.. “Make Disciples”

Let Church of God Adult Discipleship's Teaching Manuals Help You Do It!

Only \$16.95...Each!



13 Complete Sessions

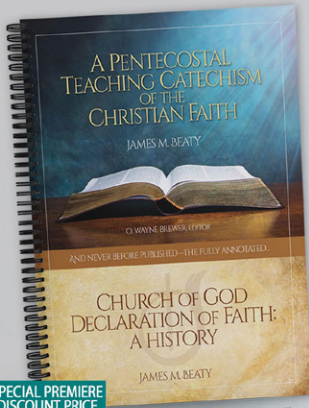


14 Complete Sessions



14 Complete Sessions

Order at: adulthooddiscipleshipcog.com 888.766.9009



A PENTECOSTAL TEACHING CATECHISM OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

FINALLY! (261 pages), A Pentecostal Teaching Catechism!
 Q&A Format—includes shorter Catechism AND A Longer format with COMPLETE Scripture References/Quotes
 Six Different, Fully Explained, Outlined Ways to Use!
 Can be used for Mentoring, Discippling, or Teaching
 Use Online, Small Groups, Classes, or Churchwide
 Includes Never Before Published Declaration of Faith: A History
 Easy to Teach—A Wealth of Reference Material
 Appendices Include D.O.F. and Doctrinal/Practical Commitments
 Extensive PowerPoint Presentation Download Available



20% Off NOW!

SPECIAL PREMIERE DISCOUNT PRICE

EN ESPAÑOL

— POWERPOINT PRESENTATION —

FREE CALL: 888.766.9009 adultdiscipleshipco.com

LIVING AS PENTECOSTAL DISCIPLES™ DISCIPLESHIP SERIES . . . BRAND NEW!

400 SERIES



Premiere Price
20% Discount Complete Set!

Pre-Order for July 6 Release!

- VOL. 1 **A WORSHIPING PEOPLE:** A PENTECOSTAL STUDY OF VIBRANT WORSHIP FOR THE BELIEVER
- VOL. 2 **AN ENDURING PEOPLE:** A PENTECOSTAL STUDY OF VICTORIOUS ENDURANCE FOR THE BELIEVER
- VOL. 3 **A GIVING PEOPLE:** A PENTECOSTAL STUDY OF THE GIVING CHRISTIAN LIFE
- VOL. 4 **A SPIRIT-EMPOWERED PEOPLE:** A PENTECOSTAL STUDY OF THE SPIRIT-EMPOWERED LIFE
- VOL. 5 **A JOYFUL PEOPLE:** A PENTECOSTAL STUDY OF THE JOYFUL CHRISTIAN LIFE
- VOL. 6 **A FAITH PEOPLE:** A PENTECOSTAL STUDY OF LIVING BY FAITH

Premiere Price
20% Discount Complete Six Volume Set \$79.95





CHURCH of GOD FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 3331
Cleveland, Tn 37320
423.478.7179

*"Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"
Acts 20:35*



**INSPIRING
GENEROSITY**



**RESOURCING THE
LOCAL CHURCH**



**FUNDING
MINISTRY**

Experience

Serving The Local Church

Resources

Guiding Your Development

Church Financing

Advancing Your Vision

Investments

Make A Difference

Legacy Giving

Impacting The Future

**INVESTMENTS,
FINANCING,
GUIDANCE,
GIVING.**



"With God's grace and partnerships with people like you, we can expand God's Kingdom on a global level. Come partner with us!"

**T. Dwight Spivey
President/CEO**



facebook.com/generouscog



@generouscog



churchofgodfoundation.org



MONEY MATTERS

ART RHODES

Investing in a “Squirrely” Market



Regardless of whether the financial markets are up, down, or flat, the most common question I receive is “how is the stock market going to perform in the future?” Most of the time, I quickly respond with some quirk about my crystal ball being foggy or out of service for the last few years.

However, for those who are investing for retirement, the question is legitimate and one that is heartfelt. Everyone is looking for ideas on how to best invest their money for the future. If you are one of those few people who have money just to speculate in the market, you most likely are taking a short-term view of how quickly you can make as much money as possible. However, for most people, they are looking at the long-term and trying

to build a retirement account that will sustain them during their latter years of life. While they may struggle with determining how much money they will most likely need for retirement, most are just wanting to build as big of a nest egg as possible.

When I am asked the question of how much money a person will need for retirement, my answer is generally “more than you will have.” It seems as though you will meet very few people who believe they have enough, or will have enough, set aside for their retirement years. Most will always want more.

These questions bring us to where we find ourselves in early 2026. For the last three years, the financial markets in the United States have been particularly

strong, with most funds returning double digit returns during that time period. However, geopolitical events in 2026 have caused the financial markets to be “squirrely” at best. While squirrely is not a term that you will hear often on the financial news channels or see in the *Wall Street Journal*, it perfectly describes the financial markets so far this year. The markets have darted back-and-forth from extreme positive performance to huge negative downturns, primarily based upon the “news cycle” of the day.

The conflict in the Middle East, especially involving Iran, has greatly challenged the projection of the stock market. Due to the inter-relationship between oil and the Middle East, the markets have abruptly reacted to both positive and negative news. Although probably very few could have located the Strait of Hormuz on the map prior to a few months ago, most can quickly identify it today. Further, most people can rapidly respond that more than 20% of the world’s oil production travels through that small section of the ocean, thanks to the 24-hour news channels.

Even though a couple of decades ago it would have taken days, if not weeks, to assess the impact of a particular event in a global conflict, the impact is now being debated within seconds of the event occurring across multiple news outlets. Therefore, the financial markets are moving

quickly based upon news that may be only minutes old - and often inaccurate.

So, with this overabundance of information and subsequent rapid movement in the financial markets, how should a common investor who is preparing for retirement respond? It is my belief that now more than ever investors should concentrate on the long-term, rather than trying to hedge against the latest news story. If you seek to follow the news cycle, you will become a “ping-pong” investor, bouncing from one asset allocation to another. History proves that those types of investors generally lose money in the long-term.

Therefore, during a time when the focus of the financial markets seems to be changing almost hourly, the best approach is to set an allocation and stick with it, through thick and thin, for at least six to twelve months. Trying to time the market based upon the expected news cycle is a game that none of us can win.

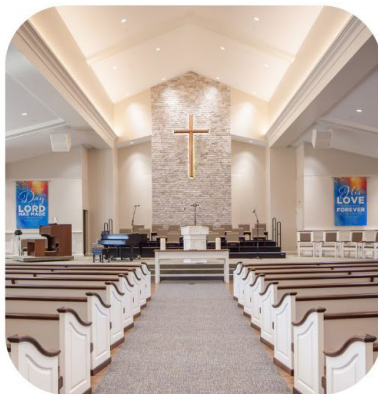
Happy investing. ■

Art Rhodes is President and CEO of the Church of God Benefits Board, Inc. The Board of Trustees and the staff of the Benefits Board are not engaged in rendering financial advice, legal advice, or other financial planning services. If such advice is desired or required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.



Church Loan Fund, Inc.

Rates as low as **5.00%**



www.churchloanfund.com

(423) 478-7131



Legislation Will Allow Ministers to Re-enroll for Social Security

The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) has applauded recent action by the U.S. House of Representatives for advancing the Clergy Act (H.R. 227).

This bipartisan legislation, sponsored by Reps. Vince Fong (R-Calif.) and Mike Thompson (D-Calif.), would give pastors a chance to re-enroll in Social Security if they mistakenly opted out irrevocably earlier in their careers.

“Having heard numerous stories of ministers who feel trapped by a decision they did not fully understand as they began their pastoral work, I know this bill will be a breath of fresh air for many faith leaders,” said ECFA President & CEO Michael Martin. “This bill is very reasonable and very welcome. I am grateful to Congressman Fong and Congressman Thompson for championing it in the House Ways and Means Committee and on the floor of the House.”

Many clergy chose early in their ministries to apply for a generally irreversible exemption from the Social Security system. The Clergy Act would allow a temporary two-year window for pastors to revoke their exemption and re-enter the Social Security system beginning in 2029.

Of note, like other workers, pastors opting back in would still need to pay into Social Security for the equivalent of 10 years (40 quarters) before being eligible to receive benefits. Also, the bill would task the IRS and the Social Security Administration with crafting a plan for notifying clergy members of their eligibility for this opportunity.

ECFA has long expressed support for the Clergy Act on Capitol Hill, and last month sent letters to Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-La.) and House Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-La.) urging action on the bill in the House. ECFA will continue to advocate for its approval in the U.S. Senate.

“I am grateful for the efforts of Senator Katie Britt (R-Ala.) and Senator Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.) on this bill as well,” added Martin. “I urge the U.S. Senate to approve this important bipartisan legislation.”

About ECFA

For decades, ECFA has been the gold standard for donors to find and evaluate accountable organizations that share their Christian values. ■

(SOURCE: Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability).



May MISSIONS MONTH ²⁰₂₆

May Missions Month is a global invitation to step into something bigger than ourselves—to give, to go, and to make an eternal impact. Across nations and communities, lives are being transformed as we reach the Last, the Least, and the Lost with the hope of Jesus Christ.

This month, Church of God World Missions celebrates and strengthens those serving on the frontlines. Every act of generosity fuels the 365 Journey, moving the mission forward and bringing the Gospel to those who have yet to hear.

Dr. M. Thomas Propes

General Director



Dr. David E. Ramirez

Assistant Director



IRIS B. VEST
SpiritCare
CENTER



Why Choose Us

1 Bedroom Apartment

- living room, kitchen, bathroom ●
- 24/7 On-duty Staff ●
- Weekly Chapel Services ●
- Christian Fellowship ●
- On-Site Laundry Rooms ●
- Lunch Monday-Friday ●
- Internet & Cable ●
- Wellness Center ●
- Lawn Care ●

The SpiritCare Center includes:



Christian Community



Weekly Lunch and Fellowship



Spacious Apartments



Contact Us

For More Information
865-599-7460

 spiritcarecenter.net

 Christian Independent Living Facility

 509 Park Road
Sevierville, TN 37862

 Church of God

 Office Hours:
Mon-Fri, 9 AM - 4 PM

We Remember We Tell

AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



Sharing Stories — Preserving Memories



Share Your Story Today!

Dixon_Research@leeuniversity.edu

"We will tell the next generation..." Psalm 78:4

Every Story & Testimony Matters

*An initiative of the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center to preserve
the voices & memories of the Church of God*



LEGAL NOTES

DENNIS WATKINS

Responding to Threats of Self-Harm or Harm to Others



Here's a topic that is becoming more prevalent—what to do if pastors or other church representatives become aware of threats that a person will physically hurt himself/herself or others. One scenario involves a youth pastor who is told by a teenager that he/she is entertaining thoughts of harming himself/herself. Another scenario we have seen involves an adult connected with the church who threatens harm to someone else in the church. I am getting an increasing number of calls about these issues.

OVERVIEW

This subject is almost a spinoff of a situation that has been around for some time—the requirement of reporting child

abuse to the authorities. That requirement is a serious one and should not be taken lightly. In fact, all fifty states have specific rules about reporting child abuse, and you need to be careful to understand and follow them according to your state laws. Contrary to reporting child abuse, the question of responding to threats of self-harm or harm to others is not as well-developed in the law and our research has not yielded as much information. However, some basic principles come into play, and I would like to touch on them.

A FOUNDATIONAL PREMISE

In thinking about this subject, a common premise that has come to my mind in situations like this is as follows: If you become aware of credible threats

to harm oneself or others, the worst thing you can do is nothing! Just think about it—if you know about these threats and after doing nothing, someone is injured, then serious legal consequences might follow. You must have some plan of action and follow through on that plan!

BASIC STEPS

My friends at Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company have formulated a helpful multi-step strategy in dealing with this issue. The steps are as follows:

- Assess the threat—is it imminent and is it serious? If yes, call 911.
- Alert ministry leadership—report the matter to a designated response team or point person.
- Alert others—Is there a legal or moral duty to warn outside parties about the threat? If yes, notify the proper parties (target of the threat, relatives or law enforcement).
- Alert your insurance carrier—the carrier may have a protocol, or it may have resources available to you.
- Address the situation—you may need to involve local legal counsel, but there are various steps you might need to take, such as: conducting an internal investigation, removing the threat-maker from future participation in ministry activities, connecting the victim with

support resources, or informing additional parties (victim's relatives, staff members, or the congregation). The best practice would be to have a written policy and to update it regularly. There is a suggested time frame for each one of these responses, depending on the severity and other factors involved.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

I could say more about each of these basic steps, but the main purpose of this article is to point out potential problems and to emphasize that there are resources you can access to address these situations. But just remember—a more imminent or more serious threat of harm to oneself or others requires more definitive action on the part of church representatives. In the heat of the moment, this can become a daunting challenge! May the Lord help you to navigate these types of situations safely! ■

Dennis Watkins is the legal counsel for Church of God. The writer is not engaged in rendering legal or other professional services herein. If legal advice or expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought. Special thanks go out to Lauren Conant for her collaboration on this article.



PLAN NOW. RELAX LATER.

Join the Ministers' Retirement Plan
today and start planning for your future.

\$500 New Member Incentive Bonus

www.benefitsboard.com
(423) 478-7131





SEALED GO!



CHILDREN'S CURRICULUM AGES 6-11
COMING THIS JULY!

KNOW YOUR FAITH

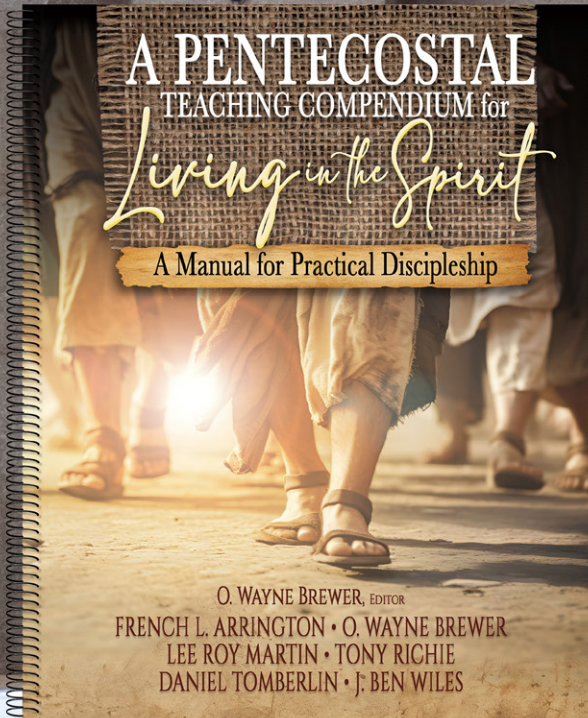
GROW YOUR FAITH

SHOW YOUR FAITH

Being a Pentecostal Disciple is all about Understanding and Living in the Spirit

It's Time to Dig Deeper, Teach & Disciple!

JUST RELEASED WITH LEADING PENTECOSTAL SCHOLARS ON THE "WHAT" AND "HOW" OF 13 BASIC AREAS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE



A PENTECOSTAL
TEACHING COMPENDIUM for
Living in the Spirit
A Manual for Practical Discipleship

O. WAYNE BREWER, EDITOR

FRENCH L. ARRINGTON • O. WAYNE BREWER
LEE ROY MARTIN • TONY RICHIE
DANIEL TOMBERLIN • J. BEN WILES

Great for Pastors, Disciplers,
Small Group Leaders,
Class Teachers...

- Easily Enough Material for 30 Weeks!
- Reproducible Student Hand Out Outlines, also Diagrams/Documents in Appendice
- Easy to Use 8-1/2 x 11" Spiral Bound
- Quick-Scan Bold Emphasis for Teaching
- Every Chapter: Group Discussion Questions/Sharing
- Outstanding, Packed Appendices!
- Spiritual Gifts Inventory for Christians
- Every Doctrine with Practical Application!

Only \$24.95
330 PACKED PAGES!
(Instruction, Tools, Application)

Great for any Library!



ADULT
DISCIPLESHIP
KNOWING • BEING • DOING 

ORDER TODAY!
888.766.9009

adultdiscipleshipcog.com

BECOME A FOSTER PARENT!



BE A PART OF TRANSFORMING LIVES

Visit smch.org/services
or email us at
foster@smch.org



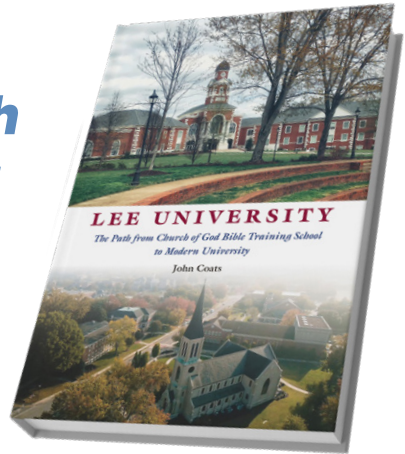
449 McCarn Circle
Sevierville, TN 37862
865-446-0603



Lee University: The Path from Church of God Bible Training School to Modern University (2025)

By John D. Coats

(Reviewed by Roy Y. Chan, Ph.D.)



John D. Coats offers a comprehensive institutional history tracing the evolution of a small Pentecostal Bible school into a thriving regional university in Cleveland, Tennessee. Tracing Lee’s journey from its 1918 origins in the Appalachian Mountains to its present status as a thriving regional university, Coats offers an honest, well-researched account of an institution shaped by persistent tension: the push for academic growth versus the pull of denominational loyalty. This new book is authored by a historian with over thirty years of experience in Christian higher education.

The book unfolds chronologically across ten chapters. Coats begins with the Church of God’s early resistance to formal education, rooted in a simple, Spirit-filled faith. Yet as the denomination expanded, leaders recognized the need for trained Christian workers. The Bible Training School (BTS) was born into

immediate crisis, facing low enrollment, financial strain from the A. J. Tomlinson church split, and the devastating Spanish Flu. From these humble beginnings, a central conflict emerges—one that never disappears: the school’s desire to grow academically versus the church’s fear that it is drifting from its Pentecostal roots.

As BTS became Lee College and later Lee University, Coats walks readers through each presidential era. The revolving door of presidencies in the 1950s, the consolidation under Ray Hughes and James Cross, and the painful but necessary struggle for accreditation and desegregation all receive careful treatment. The book’s strongest sections highlight leaders who navigated crisis with wisdom. Charles Conn’s 1970s “balancing act” between secular progressivism and Church of God conservatism redefined holiness not as mere separation but as love for God, neighbor, and righteousness.

Later, the unlikely partnership of President Lamar Vest (a traditionalist) and Vice President Paul Conn (a progressive) rescued Lee from near bankruptcy. Their friendship offers a model for how divided church bodies can work together toward a shared mission.

Paul Conn's 34-year presidency receives extended attention. Coats credits Conn with diversifying the student body and faculty while keeping Lee anchored in Church of God culture. Yet he also raises a provocative question from historian Mark Noll: are teaching-focused Christian colleges like Lee inherently limited in producing deep scholarly reflection? Coats never fully resolves this tension, leaving readers to wonder whether Lee's celebrated "balance" came at the cost of theological or Pentecostal distinctiveness.

The final chapters address recent growth and leadership transition. Coats argues that Lee's enrollment boom and financial prosperity reshaped campus identity, emphasizing student experience and entrepreneurship over traditional spiritual and academic depth. The transition from Conn to President Mark L. Walker, complicated by COVID-19, raises urgent questions for every faith-based institution: How do we maintain our identity amid declining enrollment, shifting cultural values, and doctrinal debates?

Coats does not write a celebratory chronicle. He writes an honest one. The

book occasionally suffers from chronological confusion (Chapter 3, especially) and leans more on description than deep analysis. Missing are student voices, faculty dissent, and classroom realities—perspectives that would enrich this largely administrative view. Still, the strengths outweigh the limitations.

For pastors and church leaders, this book offers a valuable case study. It asks hard questions: When does academic growth become spiritual drift? How much independence should a church-related school have? Can traditionalists and progressives truly work together? Coats does not provide easy answers, but he gives us the history we need to wrestle with them.

I highly recommend this book for anyone who cares about the future of Church of God higher education. The path from Bible training school to modern university was never straight. And as Coats reminds us, it is far from over. ■

Roy Y. Chan, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Education and Director of Graduate Studies in Education at Lee University, where he serves as program coordinator for the Doctor of Education (EdD) in Professional Practice. Email: rchan@leeuniversity.edu.



Global Missions Training is where calling is strengthened through preparation. Built to equip mission-ready leaders, this journey combines hands-on training with intentional spiritual growth through a one-week intensive, a three-month immersion, and a one-year internship.

Phase 1:

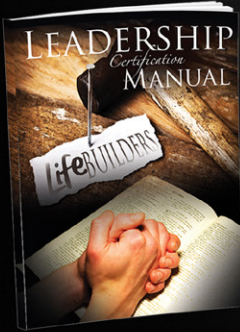
July 13th-18th, 2026
Brunswick, Georgia

Phase 2:

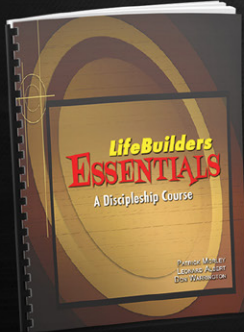
June 15th-August 15th, 2026
Poza Rica, Veracruz,
Mexico

Visit www.cogwm.org/gmt/ to learn more or sign up.

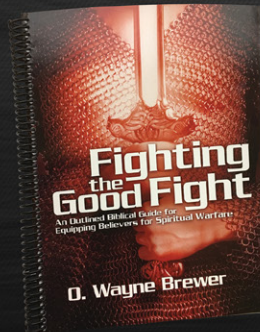
DISCIPLE.



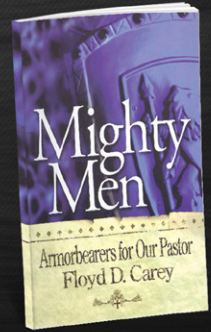
TIPS, STRATEGIES,
TEMPLATES,
TEACHING Español



BEST PENTECOSTAL
MEN'S DISCIPLESHIP!
Español

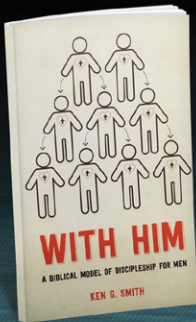


SPIRITUAL WARFARE,
DISCIPLESHIP FOR MEN,
POWERFUL! Español

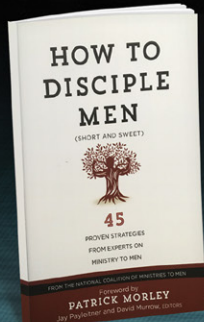


TYING MEN &
PASTOR TOGETHER

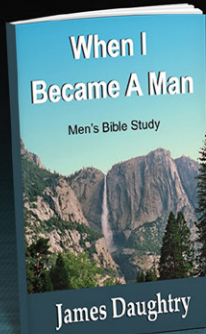
MEN.



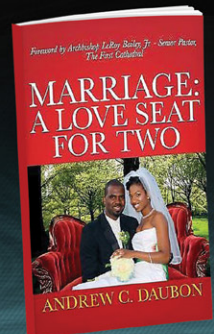
BASIC DISCIPLESHIP
PRINCIPLES



NEW!
EXCELLENT RESOURCE



MEN'S BIBLE STUDY
Español



STRAIGHTFORWARD,
MARRIAGE FOR MEN



Adult-Men-Women
DISCIPLESHIP
KNOWING • BEING • DOING

LifeBUILDERS
Men Empowered by the Spirit

adultdiscipleshipcog.com

888.766.9009

Free Call

QUANTITY DISCOUNTS

national youth leaders association

conference

1 conference : 3 locations

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

August 21-22, 2026 / Weatherford, TX

SOUTHEAST REGION

September 18-19, 2026 / Cleveland, TN

NORTHEAST REGION

September 25-26, 2026 / Freehold, NJ



YD

The NYLA Conference is built on community, ministry, and the sharing of resources that strengthen our next-gen leaders. At the heart of each gathering are our general sessions, intentional moments in which leaders are invited to worship and be renewed by the Word of God and the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit. Whether you are a student pastor, young adult pastor, youth ministry volunteer, or serving in a ministry with limited resources, NYLA is built to give you tools, encouragement, and ideas you can actually take back home and use.

Hosted in three locations, the NYLA Conference brings together Church of God youth ministers and volunteers to connect with one another, be refreshed, and leave feeling equipped, encouraged, and ready to invest in the next generation.

2026 NYLA Board: Austin Blackwell (President) : Karel Bellamy-Doss (Vice President) : Ryan Kennedy : Christopher Daniel Allen : Joel Reyes



Church of God HIGHLIGHTS

Abbreviated items of interest to the Church of God published on Faith News Network between January 15, 2025, and May 15, 2026. To read the articles in their entirety and others, please visit faithnews.cc.

Multi-Million Dollar Gift Launches New Era for SMCH



Location of the future Alpha School at SMCH

January 29, 2026-Sevierville, TN—

The largest gift in the history of Smoky Mountain Children's Home (SMCH) has been provided by Betty Madison Ogle and Dr. Steve and Cheris Madison, marking a transformative moment for the organization. The donation includes a newly constructed facility appraised at \$6.25 million. The 36,000-square-foot brick building will house SMCH's Alpha School, a dining area, a therapy department, and the newly established Worship and Arts Academy—significantly expanding the Home's capacity to serve children and families. The structure was built at 440 Parkway, the location of the former campus church, which is contiguous with the campus property.

Dr. Walt and Tammie Mauldin, executive directors of SMCH, expressed their gratitude and excitement: "We cannot begin to express our deep appreciation to Betty, Steve, and Cheris for their exceptional generosity. A new school has always been part of our vision, and now it will become a reality. Without question, this is a miraculous gift."

While the exterior of the building is complete, an additional \$2 million is needed to finish the interior. Those interested in supporting the completion of the project are invited to donate online at www.smch.org or call the Mauldins at 865-453-4644. ■

Robert White, Former General Overseer, Passes Away

April 2, 2026-Weatherford, TX— Former Church of God General Overseer Dr. Robert White passed away on Thursday, April 2, 2026, in Weatherford, Texas.

White served the Church of God in numerous leadership capacities, most notably as the denomination's top office of general overseer from 1994-1996. He was 91.

In lifelong service and a ministry to the Church of God that began with the acceptance of his first pastorate in 1954,



Robert White was a pastor, planted thirteen churches, served as youth director of Louisiana and Texas; as administrative bishop of Montana/Wyoming, Arizona, West Virginia, and Alabama; and national and international evangelist. He was appointed the first director of the Department of General Education in 1974, what is today the Division of Education. In 1976, Dr. White was appointed Director of Church of God World Missions, serving four years. In 1982, he was elected by his ministerial peers as a member of the Executive Committee, serving four years as Second Assistant General Overseer, until accepting the appointment of president of the Church of God Theological Seminary (now Pentecostal Theological Seminary) in 1986. Two years later, he would again be elected to serve in World Missions, this time as assistant director until 1990 when he was elected back on the Executive Committee as First Assistant General Overseer. In 1994 he was elected general overseer serving until 1996.

Other aspects of his service and leadership include organizing the first Church of God Women's conference; LifeBuilders men's discipleship initiative; Project 2000; and numerous boards and committees. He was elected to the denomination's Executive Council for sixteen years and represented the Church of God in more than one hundred countries, ministering in more than seventy. Dr. White made the denomination's first

contact with underground churches in China (1979) and Russia (1989), and he organized the first Church of God in Kenya.

In service outside the Church of God, Dr. White served on the Board of Administration for the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), serving on the Commission on Higher Education and World Relief Commission. White authored or edited nine books.



Dr. Robert White

Dr. White was joined in life and ministry by his first wife, Kathryn (Shires) White, who he met at the 1956 Church of God General Assembly in Memphis, Tennessee. They married five weeks later and served faithfully as a ministry team until Kathryn's death more than 53 years later. Kathryn White was a pastor's wife, Ladies' Ministries President, and International Ladies' Ministries president. She led fundraising efforts to build a Bible seminary in the Dominican Republic and a medical clinic in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. She



and Dr. White established the Kathryn Shires White International Scholarship at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary and were honored by PTS with induction into the prestigious Hall of Prophets in 2021.

Dr. White was born on December 26, 1934, in Richton, Mississippi. After graduation from his school in Richton at age 16, he attended Lee College (University) and went on to earn a bachelor's degree from Rocky Mountain College in Billings, Montana, a master's degree from Arizona State University, and a Doctor of Ministry degree from Hamma School of Theology at Wittenberg University.

“Dr. White was one of our more diversified leaders during his ministry,” stated Church of God General Overseer Dr. Gary Lewis. “His legacy of service and ministry in the Church of God is exemplary and one that demonstrates commitment and courage toward a life dedicated to the cause of Christ.”

Dr. White is survived by his wife, Adelia Shepherd White; son Vardaman (Worawan) White of Destin, Florida; daughter Alisa White (Elliott Herzlich) of Huntsville, Texas; and numerous grandchildren. In addition to Kathryn, he was predeceased by his parents, Vardaman and Minnie White and grandson Christopher Charles White. Funeral services were conducted on Wednesday, April 8, 2026, at the Church of God Campground in Weatherford, Texas. ■

City of Refuge Featured in New Documentary

April 12, 2026-Atlanta, GA—The faith-based City of Refuge, a non-profit outreach founded by Rev. Bruce Deel in Atlanta, Georgia, is the focus of a documentary, ‘The Greatest of These,’ released Friday, March 17 on Amazon Prime, AppleTV, and Documentary+.

The film highlights the City of Refuge’s mission to transform the lives of individuals and communities in Atlanta and beyond. Directed by Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Nick Nanton and produced by Emmy Award winner Katie Tschopp, the 75-minute film tells the remarkable story of Deel and his family. A pastor and Church of God credentialed minister, Deel moved his family to live in one of the most dangerous areas in Atlanta to create a special haven helping families transition out of crisis toward stability and opportunity. The film chronicles the mission of City of Refuge, which serves individuals facing some of life’s most difficult circumstances, including addiction, trafficking, incarceration, and homelessness. Through an innovative approach grounded in dignity and trust, the organization offers pathways toward healing, stability, and long-term transformation.

Founded in 1997, City of Refuge has become a hub of hope in one of the most dangerous zip codes in Atlanta. Operating from a repurposed warehouse in the



city's 30314 neighborhood, the organization has served more than 50,000 individuals, providing comprehensive services including housing, workforce development, youth programs, education, healthcare, and anti-trafficking initiatives.

“For nearly three decades, our mission at City of Refuge has been simple: love the person in front of you and help them see the possibility in their own future,” Deel said. “If this film helps more people understand that transformation begins with dignity and trust, then it has already done something meaningful.”

For more information on The Greatest of These and City of Refuge, visit www.cityofrefugeatl.org. Social Media: Facebook: [cityofrefugeatl](https://www.facebook.com/cityofrefugeatl) Instagram: [cityofrefugeatl](https://www.instagram.com/cityofrefugeatl). ■

Hundreds Attend Smoky Mountain Gathering

April 30, 2026-Gatlinburg, TN— Senior adults from across the country came together at the Gatlinburg Convention Center for the annual Smoky Mountain Gathering April 27-30, 2026.

The popular event included all the favorites that have attracted delegates for many years, including a service celebrating the hymns of the Red back, a banquet for retired ministers and widows, a breakfast and service honoring military veterans, and lots of fellowship.

On Wednesday night the Gathering delegates were treated to an extended



Ernie Haase and Signature Sound perform at Smoky Mountain Gathering

concert with Ernie Haase and Signature Sound, a well-known gospel quartet. The group presented a powerful package of gospel and patriotic numbers which was received with thunderous applause and standing ovations. Following the concert, General Overseer Gary Lewis and his wife, Lori, greeted the audience and unveiled a program of concentrated prayer between now and the General Assembly. The Lewis' outlined a four-faceted plan of prayer points that included family leaders, church, and harvest. Every delegate received an information card and a “stone” to emphasize the focus entitled “Living Stones.”

The Smoky Mountain Gathering closed on Thursday morning, April 30 with a service honoring veterans, followed by an awards ceremony for the Talent Showcase in drama, art, creative writing, and music.

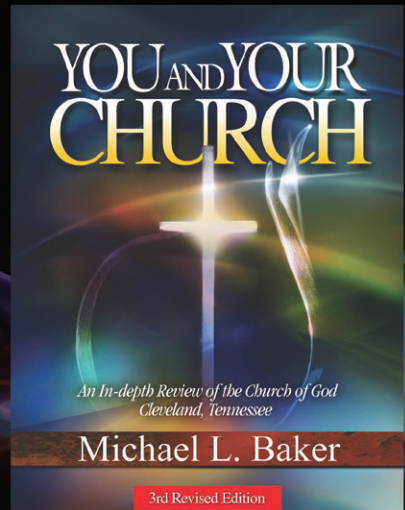
Seniors are invited to make plans for next year's SMG set for April 27-29, 2027. For more information, visit smokymountaingathering.com. ■

YOU AND YOUR CHURCH

ALL NEW up to date, in-depth Review of the Church of God!
Highlights the Organization and Growth of the Church of God
Enables the local church team to have better grasp of "Who We Are"
Excellent for New Members and Church Orientation Classes
Contains Complete Doctrinal and Practical Commitments of the Church of God.

Available July 1, 2026

\$10.99 or \$9.99 for 10 or more



888.766.9009 • adulthooddiscipleshipcog.com



Michael
BOOK DESIGN

Creative Services for the Christian Author



MichaelBookDesign.com

Smoky Mountain Children's Home



Foster Care

**449 McCarn Circle
Sevierville, TN 37862**

865-365-0386

foster@smch.org

facebook.com/smchfostercare

www.smch.org/foster



Foster a child today...change a life forever!

TT26

TEEN TALENT TWENTY-SIX



JULY 27-31, 2026

Church of God General Assembly- Orange County Convention Center
O R L A N D O . F L O R I D A

JOIN US

TEEN TALENT AWARDS FESTIVAL
JULY 31ST - POST SERVICE
IN THE MAIN HALL