

WINTER  
2017



# engage

A Journal for  
Church of God  
MINISTRIES

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Bombed Sunday's Sermon

Why Lent Matters

Cultivating the Church as a  
Learning Community

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## Praying for Our Leaders - II

IN THE LAST ISSUE of *Engage*, which was released less than two months after the July 2016 International General Assembly, this column pleaded for prayers for our newly elected general overseer and the Executive Committee. It was a simple, straightforward request for the next four years of their leadership.

The weekly bulletin at my local church lists prayer requests, and in that section, there is a request to pray for our government leaders. The first one on that list, every week for the last eight years, has been President Obama.

Regardless of your opinion of him, his beliefs, or his political party, Barack Obama has been the president. Now, we head into a different era, but with perhaps the same type of moral dilemma with our new president, Donald Trump. The same can—and must—be said about him. First and foremost, he is the president, and we are biblically instructed to keep him in our prayers.

Art Rhodes addresses this topic in a terrific article in this issue. His experience in the political realm is extensive and qualitative.

Just like we laid hands on our new general overseer last July in Nashville, let's symbolically do the same for our new president and other government leaders. ■

*Engage* journal is published in the interest of providing resources for Church of God pastors.

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# CHANGING CHURCHES: What Do You Look For?



IN THE UNITED STATES today, half of adults (51 percent) say they attend religious services regularly—at least once or twice a month. Meanwhile, 49 percent of American adults now attend religious services just a few times a year, rarely or never. A majority of them (27 percent of all U.S. adults) say they have never attended religious services more often than they do now. But a substantial proportion (22 percent of all U.S. adults) say they now go to religious

services less often than they did at another point during adulthood.

Many of those whose religious attendance has become more frequent cite a change in their beliefs as the main reason, saying their increased attendance reflects the fact that they have become more religious or felt a need for God or religion in their lives. By contrast, among those whose attendance has waned, the most commonly offered reasons have to do with practical concerns,

including many who say they are too busy to attend or cite other practical difficulties with getting to a church.

About half of U.S. adults have looked for a new religious congregation at some point in their lives, most commonly because they have moved. And when they search for a new house of worship, a new Pew Research Center study shows, Americans look first and foremost for a place where they like the preaching and the tone set by the congregation's leaders.

Fully 83 percent of Americans who have looked for a new place of worship say the quality of preaching played an important role in their choice of a congregation.

Nearly as many say it was important to feel welcomed by clergy and lay leaders.

About three-quarters say the style of worship services influenced their decision about which congregation to join.

Location also factored prominently in many people's choice of congregation, with seven-in-ten saying it was an important factor.

Smaller numbers cite the quality of children's programs, having friends or family in the congregation, or the availability of volunteering opportunities as key to their decision.

Perhaps as a result of the value they place on good sermons, church leadership, and the style of worship services, many people—even in this age of technology—find there is no substitute for face-to-face interaction when seeking informa-

tion about a new religious home. Fully 85 percent of those who have looked for a new house of worship say they attended worship services at a church they were considering, and seven-in-ten say they spoke with members of the congregation or to friends or colleagues about their decision.

Looking for information online may be growing more common, especially among young people and those who have looked for a congregation recently. But online information still appears to be far less important to potential congregants than experiencing the atmosphere of the congregation firsthand.

The single most common reason people give for having looked for a new congregation is that they moved: Roughly one-third of adults say they have searched for a new place of worship because they relocated. By comparison, fewer people say they sought a new congregation because of a disagreement with clergy or other members at their previous house of worship (11 percent) or because they got married or divorced (11 percent). About one-in-five adults (19 percent) volunteered that they have looked for a new congregation for some other reason, including other problems with a previous church, changes in their own beliefs, or for social or practical reasons. ■

*This information was excerpted from a recent Pew Research Center study on the religious landscape of the United States and was published in the October edition of FINISH Report produced by the general overseer's office.*

# Are You Ready for UNCHURCHED GUESTS?

by BRYAN CUTSHALL

**A**LMOST EVERYWHERE I GO, I hear, “our church is very friendly.” I am quite certain that the people who attend that church truly believe that. After all, everyone knows where to park, how to get around in the building, where to sit, and they are very comfortable dropping their children off at

the nursery. You can tell when a church has great “home culture” because they will say things like, “see Sister Smith,” if you need more information. Of course, everyone knows Sister Smith. Home culture makes the church feel comfortable, cozy, and familylike.

I am often asked the question, “what do you think is the greatest contributor to



a church that has stopped growing and has plateaued?" My short answer is that usually their incredible *home culture* has blinded them to their poor *guest culture*. You can easily recognize home culture in the announcements, the way offerings are received and especially in the casualness of an unsecured children's ministry with no check-in/checkout-system. But, *unchurched guests* see the church from an entirely different experience than those who are comfortable there. *Unchurched guests* do not know where to park, where to sit, how to get around the building, and they are terrified to leave their babies and children with strangers. Churches that are guest friendly are very intentional about making *unchurched guests* feel welcomed. They never ask *unchurched guests* to stand up, raise their hands or any other thing that singles them out and embarrasses them. Keep in mind that people changing from one church to another do not apply to these rules, only people with an unchurched background.

### **HOW DO WE WELCOME AN UNCHURCHED GUEST?**

Guest culture starts with a first-impressions team. The hospitality starts either on the parking lot or at the front door. The best age for door greeters are between the ages of 14-21. Older adults are much more dependable, but no one makes an *unchurched guest* feel more at ease than a happy unintimidating smile of a young person. Teens view them as a potential

friend. Parents view them as a first impression that makes them want to raise their kids there. Older adults see these young greeters as respectful young people.

Your next line of defense is in the sanctuary. I call these sanctuary greeters or you can call them ushers. Their primary job is to shake everyone's hand on the fourth to fifth rows they are responsible for serving. All they have to do is show up 10 minutes before service and shake hands, greet first-time guests, and receive the offering for their rows. You will never outgrow this method. Even if your church runs 5,000, it's still just four rows. The key to making this work is finding people who are already sitting on one of those rows. They will be the best person in the church to spot a new face. Since they shake the same hands every Sunday, a new person will be easily identified. They will give them a brightly colored medium size bag with brochures, a sermon CD, mints, and a prayer card in it. This is done to *flag* that person, so that everyone will know he/she is a first-time guest. Their bag is never mentioned from the pulpit, but all the leaders know to look for the "orange" bag, or whichever color you choose. So, without anyone standing up, sitting down, or raising hands, your guest has been properly identified and welcomed privately. The sanctuary greeter will also give them a *prayer card* to fill out. Only ask for a cell phone number and social media contact info. You can get their address later, if they start coming. Most people know by now that form letters in the

mail have almost no effect anymore. Instead of having the pastor or the church secretary to call them, ask a *seasoned intercessor* to call them and follow up on their prayer card. This method is much more effective than guest cards and calls from the church office.

You also want to make sure children's ministry and nurseries are following up also. By simply asking for the mom or dad's cell phone as the official number of the child when they check in, you can obtain this information. You may even ask the unchurched mom if she would like to receive pictures of her child during service to assure her that they are doing well. You may be surprised when she says, "yes." On Friday of the next week, send a text message *to the child*, not the parent, telling the child you enjoyed having him/her and hope to see him or her soon.

Ask a  
**SEASONED INTERCESSOR**  
to call them and follow  
up on their prayer card.

**Here is a short list of ways you can follow up on an unchurched guest:**

- First 24 hours – social media follow-up
- First 48 hours – prayer call from a seasoned intercessor (preferably a senior adult)
- First week – Text the kids on Friday

- First week – handwritten card, if you have address.

- First month – invitation to meet the pastor either at a breakfast, luncheon or after service gathering

- First three months – get them in a small group. *THIS IS VITALLY IMPORTANT, because they need to be disciplined.*

- First six months – get them serving on a team.

### Quick Recap:

- Use teens for front-door greeters.
- Use sanctuary greeters instead of traditional ushers. (They can receive the offering too.)

- Use prayer cards instead of guest cards.
- Use senior adults for your pray card follow up. (Real prayers, but not too long.)

- Use cell phone numbers for the child's check in number. Just text mom if there is a problem.

- Text the children on Friday and invite them back.

- Don't send form letters – ever!

Ask for social media information, not addresses, you'll get it more easily.

- Ask your guest to come and meet the pastor at a meet-and-greet type of event.

- Get them involved in a small group as soon as possible. *THIS IS CRITICAL.*

- Recruit them on a team in the first six months to give them ownership. ■

*Bryan Cutshall, Th.D. is president and founder of Church Trainer. ([www.churchtrainer.com](http://www.churchtrainer.com))*

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■ by ART RHODES

# NOW THAT THE ELECTION IS OVER...



**T**HE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION in the U.S. is finally over—and we can breathe a sigh of relief. Or can we? What is more important, should we?

In the weeks and days leading up to the election, everyone seemed to be ready for the campaigning to be over. The closer we got to Election Day, the more we hoped—and even prayed—that it would be over soon.

And now, here we are just a few days from the inauguration ceremonies for the 45th President of the United States. The election cycle—a process that seemed to go on forever and ever—has finally come to an

end and a new administration is about to take the reins of our nation's government.

But many are still not satisfied with the results. One candidate won two million more popular votes than the other, but did not win the presidency. The other candidate overwhelmingly won the electoral votes (but lost the popular vote by those two million votes) and will be inaugurated as President of the United States on January 20, 2017. And it seems like the division in our nation may have actually grown rather than dissipated following the election.

The surprising fact is that almost every major news organization in the country predicted the race incorrectly, even on

Election Day. The pundits and the 24-hour news programs were stunned by the results, along with a good portion of the American people. However, God was not surprised, not in the least.

According to Scripture, it is God who “deposes kings and raises up others” (Daniel 2:21 NIV) because “the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes” (Daniel 4:17 NIV). Further, there is no doubt that what He has purposed, He will bring to pass, and no government or person can thwart, stop, or deny His will (Daniel 4:34-35 NIV).

So do the wishes of 125 million voters not matter? And if God’s will is going to be done anyway, should we just not worry about voting because God “has this”? Absolutely not. It is very clear that the political process is one of the many ways that God uses to accomplish and carry out His will and purpose.

In one sense, elections are like sporting events. There is a winner and there is a loser. Regrettably, we have created a culture where everyone is told they are a winner, no one keeps score, and everyone gets a trophy. Politics—and life—are not exactly that way. There are winners, and even though we may not agree that the right candidate won or lost, we live in a democracy where the political process was carried out, and we must respect that process that has served us so well for almost 250 years.

Regardless of whether your candidate won or lost, we now have an obligation to uplift our new president in prayer. We must earnestly pray for all our political leaders and governmental authority figures, praying the guidance and wisdom of God over each of them, recognizing the admonition from 1 Timothy 2:1-2 that “petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (NIV). We certainly cannot expect God to bless our nation if we are not willing to lift our political leaders up in prayer.

Finally, we must understand and recognize, without equivocation, that healing is not going to come to our nation until we, as believers saved by His grace, change our ways. 2 Chronicles 7:14 clearly tells us that “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (NIV).

Our “land” needs a healing. It will not come from a new president or a new Congress. It will come only when we humble ourselves, pray, seek the face of God, and then turn from our wicked ways. May God bless our nation and our new president—and may God be Lord over our nation. ■

*Art Rhodes is President and CEO of the Church of God Benefits Board, Inc.*



by JACKIE  
DAVID JOHNS

# Nurturing an Educationally Diverse Congregation

**M**ARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. famously stated, “The most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o’clock on Sunday morning.” Over the years, I have reflected on how that statement is true on so many levels. While most congregations seem to include small numbers of racially “other” congregants, churches remain essentially racially monolithic. But our divisions are not strictly racial in nature. The church is also segregated along socioeconomic lines and correspondingly by levels of education. It is perhaps this last division that is most difficult to bridge.

I hold a strong conviction that the church needs educational diversity. The uneducated and the highly educated need each other, and both groups have great gifts to provide each other. The church is malformed and undernourished whenever such diversity is not dynamically present. But, how does one build a church where high school dropouts and academic scholars can enjoy deep Christian fellowship with each other and serve God in unity?

I was blessed for 27 years to serve as pastor of the New Covenant Church of God in Cleveland, Tennessee—a congregation my

wife and I founded through a small group meeting in our home. One of our core values from the very beginning was diversity. We desired to be a church that was diverse racially, ethnically, generationally, economically, and educationally. God graciously allowed this vision to become a reality. I am confident we had one of the highest concentrations of Ph.D.'s of any congregation in the Church of God, about fifteen to twenty percent. At the same time we had about the same number of GEDs and high school dropouts, and everyone in between.

There are a few core values that I believe helped us to achieve this.

- We cherished diversity, all types of diversity in Christ. Diversity enlarges a congregation's pool of knowledge, skills, and spiritual gifts for the edification of the Body. We learn much more from those who differ from us than from those who merely echo back to us our own way of reading reality.

- We treated all people as equals in Christ and looked for and honored each person's unique set of gifts. We gave special attention to helping each person discover God's callings on his or her life. We accepted it as our shared responsibility to provide opportunities for Christian service that were consistent with the person's callings. For each person we stressed that ongoing training is an essential component of effective ministry.

- We sought to elevate persons into the offices of the church on biblical grounds rather than cultural preferences. Elders were never chosen on the basis of popular-

ity, or level of education, or success in business, or social standing. Instead, we asked simple questions about union with the body of Christ, biblical standards for moral/spiritual character, and demonstrated ministry functions.

- We recognized that one's level of education, whether high or low, was not an indicator of spiritual maturity or of calling or ability to serve. Education does not qualify someone for Christian service; it equips and empowers the called to serve more effectively.

- We valued education in all of its forms and honored all levels of academic achievement. We celebrated the completion of a GED with the same enthusiasm as the completion of a Ph.D. For each of the educational milestones, we held church-wide events that were times for members of the church to speak spiritual blessings and words of appreciation over the graduates.

One of the highest compliments I ever received came from a homebound elderly member of my church. He always introduced me to his various attendants in the same manner. "This is my pastor; I love my pastor. Do you want to know why I love my pastor and his wife? They are both highly educated and you can't tell it." I knew exactly what he meant. The pastor is the key to bringing diverse groups together. I believe effective pastoral ministry begins with listening to people and giving them a voice to be heard regardless of their educational background. Everybody deserves to be understood and loved. People know you love them if you talk with them and not at

them as the highly educated are tempted to do. People know they are loved when our conversations make them aware you hold them in high esteem without ever making them feel inferior.

Another of my cherished compliments came from a twelve-year-old. One Sunday following my absence she ran to me and threw her arms around my neck, exclaiming, "I am so glad you are back." When I inquired as to her reasons, she said: "My father preached last Sunday, and I couldn't understand a word he said. I can understand you." I have a deep personal commitment to preach with theological depth and childlike clarity. I don't always succeed on either point, but I constantly try. The meat of the Word of God is chewable without being tough or grainy. As pastor, in every sermon I had two goals for my delivery. First, I wanted to get a chuckle out of Dr. R. Hollis Gause. I knew I couldn't impress him with the depth of my theology, but if I could get him to laugh, or even smile, I knew the rest of my sermon was on solid ground. Second, I sought to have eye contact, especially with the children and poorly educated. If they were following me, I knew everyone was capable of understanding my message.

There are many obstacles to the development of an educationally diverse congregation. One's level of education influences the curriculum one wants to study, the songs one wants to sing, and the liturgy one finds meaningful. But I am convinced there are a few things that when held together will overcome all of the obstacles. First, people

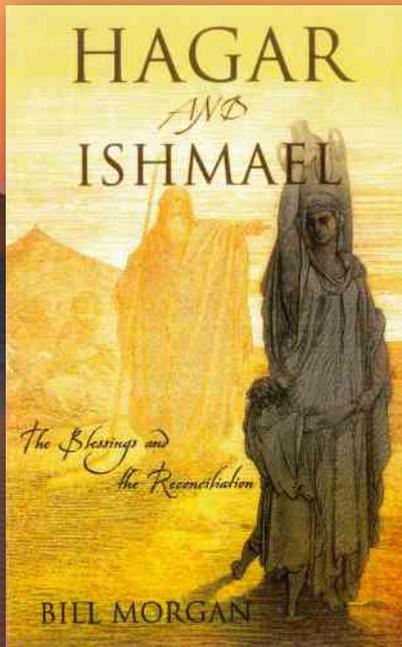
I have a deep personal commitment to preach with theological depth and childlike clarity. . . . THE MEAT OF THE WORD OF GOD is chewable without being tough or grainy.

need to know each other's testimonies of life in Christ; by our testimonies, we overcome, and by our testimonies, we come to know we are one in Christ. The life we share in Christ transcends all of our social and educational differences. Second, people need to share the joys and sorrows of their lives; in this we discover our shared humanity. Regardless of our level of education, we all experience the same core challenges in life: sicknesses and health, births and deaths, breakups and unions. Third, people need opportunities to receive spiritual gifts from persons of differing socio/economic and educational backgrounds. Fourth, the church needs to have a culture that honors its members for their growth in Christ and faithfulness to him, rather than honoring the social elite alone. Finally, the presence and work of the Holy Spirit is the great equalizer within the church. The Spirit is no respecter of persons; the Spirit uses whomever the Spirit wills to use. The church must live with a constant hunger for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, one that releases all of its members for Spirit-empowered living and ministry. ■

*Dr. Jackie David Johns is a professor at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary.*

## Xulon Press Presents ... A Unique Bible Study Recounting the Story of Hagar and Ishmael with a Refreshing New Perspective

Bill Morgan's book, *Hagar and Ishmael – The Blessings and the Reconciliation*, (\$6.99, paperback, 9781498405645; \$4.99, e-book, 9781498405652) presents a refreshing account of Abraham's sons. The author uses biblical evidence to show readers how eventually the two brothers, Isaac and Ishmael, were united as witnessed at the burial of Abraham. Many Christians focus primarily on the separation of Hagar and Ishmael from Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and their descendants. Revisit the story, learn how God shows his love, pours out His blessing and demonstrates that His promises are eternal and his love conquers all things – even death. Morgan also delves into how eternal life does not come by works, however, accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is how eternal life becomes one's inheritance. This book is ideal for personal or group study – guaranteed to challenge and encourage each reader's faith as a believer.



Bill Morgan has been a member of the Humberlea Church of God in Toronto, since 1971. "I pray readers will understand that a person thinking they are an outcast of Society, will learn from Scripture how they can receive their inheritance of Eternal Life," states the author. "And live a life pleasing to the GOD of Abraham, Issac and Jacob, by accepting JESUS CHRIST as their LORD and Savior. They are special in the eyes of GOD." And JESUS THE GREAT SHEPHERD, will even call you by your name. John 10:3.

Xulon Press, a division of Salem Media Group, is the world's largest Christian self-publisher, with more than 15,000 titles published to date. Retailers may order *Hagar and Ishmael – The Blessings and the Reconciliation* through Ingram Book Company and/ or Spring Arbor Book Distributors. The book is available online through [xulonpress.com/bookstore](http://xulonpress.com/bookstore), [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), and [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com).

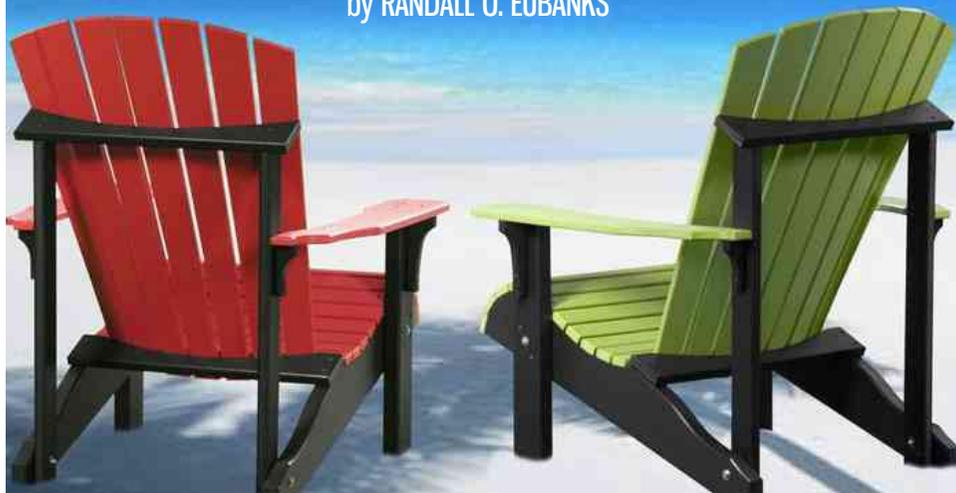
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# SABBATICAL?

by RANDALL O. EUBANKS



**W**HAT IS A SABBATICAL? That is a question that has been asked me a lot since I announced my sabbatical. One of my members said, “It’s like a vacation, isn’t it pastor?” In the Church of God pastoral system, a sabbatical is almost unheard. However, in other denominations such as the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist it is quite common.

The term *sabbatical* comes from the Old Testament word for Sabbath. And Sabbath is a biblical concept with its primary foundation found in the first book and second chapter of the Bible, Genesis 2:2-3. It is the description of God completing his work of creation. Though it is often translated

as “God rested from His labors” the literal meaning is that He ceased from His labor. This is what a sabbatical is—a ceasing from the labors for a period of time.

We understand a Sabbath in a week, but we have never gotten the concept of a Sabbath in regards to years. But this is just as much a biblical concept. Deuteronomy 5:12-15 tells us that the land is to rest every seven years, as well as the animals and mankind. This would indicate that the sabbatical should be at least one year.

Doctor Thom Rainer has given five reasons that a church should give their pastor a sabbatical:

1. A pastor has emotional highs and lows unlike most other vocations. In the course

of a day, a pastor can deal with death, deep spiritual issues, great encouragement, petty criticisms, tragedies, illnesses, and celebrations of birth. The emotional roller coaster is draining. Your pastor needs a break—many times a break with no distractions.

2. A pastor is on 24-hour call. Most pastors don't have an "off" switch. They go to sleep with the knowledge they could be awakened by a phone call at any time of the night. Vacations are rarely uninterrupted. It can be an exhausting vocation, and a sabbatical can be a welcome time to slow down.

3. Pastors need a time of uninterrupted study. It doesn't usually happen in the study at church or home. There is always the crisis or need of the moment. Church members expect sermons that reflect much prayer and study. The pastor's schedule often works against that ideal. The sabbatical can offer much needed, and uninterrupted, study time.

4. Pastors who have sabbaticals have longer tenure at churches. While it cannot be proved as a cause and effect relationship, one can be confident that pastors who have sabbaticals are much more likely to stay at a church because they are less likely to experience burnout.

5. Pastors who have sabbaticals view the time off as an affirmation from their churches. Pastors have been heard to say things like: "I know my church loves me because they give me a sabbatical." Pastors need affirmation. Sabbaticals can accomplish that goal.

Doctor Rainer went on to estimate that only about five percent of churches offer sabbaticals. In almost every case with which he is familiar, the relationship between pastor and congregation is very healthy.

In the Church of God we must take into consideration our church government. It is important that the pastor has his administrative bishop on board in the process. It will take time and a well-executed plan. The pastor will need to make certain that he has someone (in my case an executive pastor) that he can trust to carry through that plan. It will then be his job to make certain that his leadership is on board with him. It will be necessary that the church have the resources to meet the financial needs of the pastor and the staff in his absence.

Certain dangers come to mind when a sabbatical is discussed. First, the uncertainty of the congregation—will they want someone else to be their pastor by the end of the sabbatical? Will the person to whom you commit the church try and take advantage of the situation and create an atmosphere of unfaithfulness in the congregation? Will the financial arrangement be sufficient to meet the needs of the pastor? Will the congregation continue to progress in the absence of the visionary-leader? Will leadership support the pastor in this sabbatical? These are the areas in which the pastor must be sure to do his homework. He must work hand in hand with the congregation. He must secure faithful staff personnel.

As the prophet Isaiah invited Israel to a spiritual rest, I wish to invite pastors to a rest in their duties and to seek a **SPIRITUAL REFRESHING** so they can continue to do the work to which they are called.

Each pastor must consider his or her own financial situation. It is common in the educational field for the person on sabbatical to receive 60 to 70 percent of their normal pay. There are also situations where educational expenses are added to the partial salary. Some requirements are that the field of study must be in association with what is taught or is intended to be taught. It may be a great help to a church for the pastor to learn either in areas of church growth, counseling, or organizational skills.

The person who takes a sabbatical must focus on what he wants to accomplish during this period. It may be a time to further his training, an additional degree, an internship at a ministry where he wishes to be involved, a period of rest and freeing the mind from the cares of ministry, and even the expansion of his ministry from a local, to a national or even international sphere. I am excited that one of my heart's desires is coming to fruition in that I am working to

be able to go on the mission field and teach pastors as I have been allowed to do in my home state.

Just a personal note, I so appreciate the cooperation of Dr. Raymond F. Culpepper and his encouragement during this process. He has made possible the renewing of a long-held vision of teaching combined with a missions burden I had placed within my heart at Lee University. Various state youth directors and missionaries have allowed me to experience the mission field and sustain that vision. I also wish to express appreciation for those in World Missions, such as Dr. David Griffis, Dr. Robert McCall, and Dr. Dwain Pyeatt in the Division of Education. Though they have multitudes of projects, they have taken their precious time to assist me in fulfilling a calling and a vision.

As the prophet Isaiah invited Israel to a spiritual rest, I wish to invite pastors to a rest in their duties and to seek a spiritual refreshing so they can continue to do the work to which they are called. "For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, to whom He said, 'This is the rest with which You may cause the weary to rest,' and, 'This is the refreshing'" (Isaiah 28:11-12 NKJV).

Before each of us lie many unfulfilled dreams that only God can enable. May we experience all He has for us, as we are obedient to His leading. ■

*Randall O. Eubanks is pastor of Church at the Brook in Millbrook, Alabama.*

# WHAT TO DO AFTER YOU BOMBED SUNDAY'S SERMON

■ by BRANDON COX

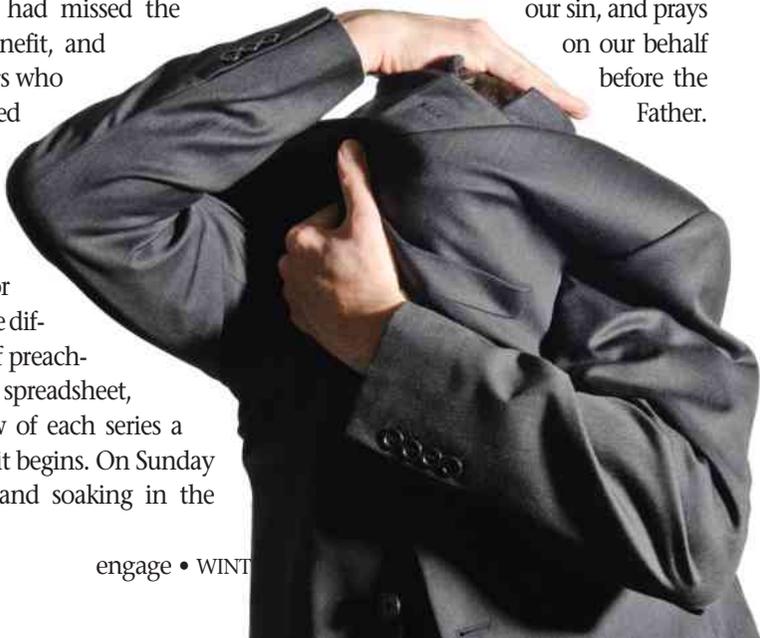
**P**REACHING, as a pastor, is hard. It's *not* hard to get up and say something inspirational. It is hard to get up and rightly divide God's Word, build a bridge from an ancient culture to our own, and then to call people to an appropriate response to God's revealed truth consistently week after week.

On a recent Sunday, I "kind of bombed." Most of the congregation probably couldn't tell, partly because they're so nice, but I knew driving home I had missed the mark. For my own benefit, and for the benefit of pastors who may read this, I wanted to use a blog post to explore where I think I went wrong.

You must understand that every pastor prepares messages a little differently. I plan a year of preaching in advance using a spreadsheet, then write an overview of each series a couple of weeks before it begins. On Sunday night, I start reading and soaking in the

primary passage and theme for the following Sunday. On Tuesdays, I study hard and usually by Wednesday, I have an outline. I purposely wait until Saturday to turn it into a publicly presentable outline and slideshow so that I can meditate through it as I get it ready for others to hear.

My message that Sunday was a tough one. I tried to explain how Jesus perfectly fulfills the responsibilities of our high priest before God—how He grants us access to God's presence, offers Himself as a payment for our sin, and prays on our behalf before the Father.



I started by mentioning the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer and then plunged into Jesus' priestly prayer offered in the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John. And that's where I think I missed some marks.

• **I failed to really explain the content of the passage well.** I was trying to cover too much ground—to preach a lengthy passage filled with details in a single sermon forced me to skip over a lot of content that was not only good, but which probably raised some good, powerful questions in the minds of my listeners.

John 17 can easily be broken into multiple parts. Jesus first prays for Himself, then for his 11 remaining disciples, and then for all believers who will ever follow Him in the future. The chapter should probably have been used as a three-part message series. Or I should have used a different, shorter

passage altogether for a single message, perhaps from Hebrews 7, where Jesus' priesthood is explained a little more succinctly.

I think I probably left the congregation with a vague familiarity with Jesus' prayer rather than an intimate awareness of its depth.

• **I failed to make relevant applications.** I brought out of the first portion of the passage that Jesus was asking God to use the "hour" in which He would be crucified and raised from the dead to bring glory to Himself. I could have turned my attention, then, to *your* crucial hour of decision. But I failed to make that jump.

In the second part of the prayer, Jesus asks the Father to sanctify His disciples through His truth—His Word. He mentions "the world" 19 times in the chapter, and asks God to protect us. I spent time in a bit of a rant

about the problem with dividing sacred from secular and how we really ought to be sacred in the middle of the secular. It's an OK point to make, but it's not what my particular congregation really

struggles with. I should have, instead, talked about the kinds of threats that come to our spiritual growth from the culture, and how we can root our lives in God's Word as a primary defense.



I was trying to COVER TOO MUCH GROUND—to preach a lengthy passage filled with details in a single sermon forced me to skip over a lot of good content.

And in the third part of the prayer, Jesus asks the Father to keep all future believers unified in love. Again, I ranted a little about how this isn't really a call to nondenominationalism or to institutional unity, but rather to a spiritual kinship shared by all believers around the world. It would have been a great opportunity to explore the specific ways we can show love for one another within the body of Christ. But again, I failed to make that jump.

• **I failed to drive home a single appeal, a single call to action.** I'm a firm believer that a simple presentation of the gospel and an appeal to trust in Jesus ought to follow every message ever preached. But I also think every message demands its own specific call to action. I gave several on Sunday—pray for some lost people, trust that Jesus is praying for you while you hurt, and be accepting of people like a family taking in a newly adopted child.

All of those are good calls to action, but it's always most powerful when we take the one big idea of the message and ask people to offer one response to God.

I'm not embarrassed, and I'm not beating myself up as I write this. My tendency is usually to start thinking about how I'm going to make course corrections next week, and that's where my mind is today. This is partly because, as my wife reminded me on Sunday afternoon, nobody bats a thousand, we all experience failures and setbacks, and what is most important,

God can use even the weakest of messages to work miraculous change in the hearts of people.

And that's what happened Sunday. A man whom I deeply appreciate approached me quickly after the second service with a question. "You mean, Jesus prays for *me*? I've never heard that before," and tears welled up in his eyes as though he'd never realized that Jesus is personally attentive to his deepest pain before. I affirmed his newly discovered understanding of Jesus' personal compassion, then prayed with him.

It may have been a weak sermon, but it was a good day!

So what's next? What do you do when you just didn't preach your best message? Here's what I like to do:

Pray about it, thanking God that He is glorified in our weakness and trusting that He can still work miracles.

Move on. Learn from it. Focus on next week. There are many more people to reach with God's truth. Keep going!

This coming weekend, I can't wait to see how God uses His Word! ■

**Brandon Cox** *has been a pastor since he was 19 and has served churches, large and small, including serving as a pastor at Saddleback Church. Currently, he is planting a purpose-driven church in northwest Arkansas. He also serves as editor of [pastors.com](http://pastors.com) and Rick Warren's Pastors' Toolbox, and authors a top 100 blog for church leaders—[Rewired: Using Technology to Share God's Love](#).*

# WHY LENT MATTERS



■ by SILAS SHAM

## PREPARING FOR LIFE AFTER DEATH

**W** EIRD. STRANGE. BIZARRE. These were some of the thoughts that flooded through my head the first time I worshiped with Pentecostals who celebrated Lent. I was in my early twenties at the time, and I found the season of Lent disorienting and disarming. What was the point of fasting for forty days anyways? Fast-forward six years, and I am now the associate pastor at a church that has a long history of shaping its life around the life of Christ through the celebration of the Christian calendar. We regularly mark the seasons of Advent, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost, as well as Ordinary time.

So what is the season of Lent about and why should we care to observe it? Before this question can be answered, we need to consider why the Christian calendar matters for Christians of all worship expressions and backgrounds.

As a Pentecostal who grew up going to church at least three times a week since birth, I had never learned about or observed the seasons of the Christian year. I always thought (because I was taught to think it) that things like the creeds, the sacraments, and the festivals were exclusively ‘Catholic’ practices. They were understood to be at most unnecessary and at worst destructive

for us as Pentecostal Christians. After all, we are people of the Spirit who are empowered to live in freedom from legalistic practices and beliefs. Of course, my family and I did celebrate a few significant dates throughout the year: Christmas Day, Easter Sunday, and Pentecost Sunday. However, these celebrations always felt to me disconnected from the rest of the calendar year. Reflecting on my upbringing, I think it would be fair to say that we were really good at celebrating singular events like the birth of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, but aside from these we didn't have any consistent markers of time that oriented our lives as Christians through the year. To use a football analogy, we loved celebrating touchdowns and field goals, but all the plays in each drive that made scoring possible were practically ignored.

The Christian Calendar can generally be understood as having two major divisions. For the first half of the year, from Advent through Easter, Christians focus on the story of Christ's incarnate mission, His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. We begin with Advent and continue through the day of Epiphany, fixing our attention on Emmanuel—"God is with us." The birth and ministry of Jesus "capture" the Church's imagination. Then, after a period of Ordinary time, we move into the season of Lent. This is a time to focus on "God being for us." After forty days of fasting and preparation, we enter the heart of the Christian year as we remember the events

The final season of the calendar is known as **ORDINARY TIME**, when Christians strive to embody "GOD THROUGH US" as we work toward the creation and reconciliation of all things into the image of Christ.

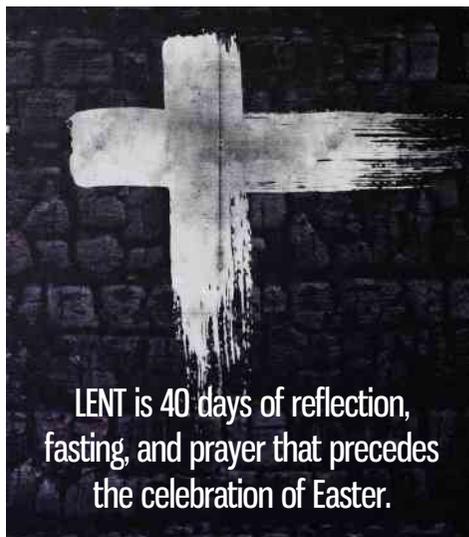
of Christ's last days, mourning the sorrow of His death, and celebrating the joy of His resurrection and ascension.

If in the first half of the year, the church actively retells the story of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection, then as the church moves through Easter toward Pentecost, we begin to prepare our hearts to join in the story of Christ on earth. Following Holy Week (the week preceding Resurrection Sunday), we acknowledge "God in us," recognizing that God did not just die, rise from the grave, and leave us to fend for ourselves. Instead, God dwells in and among us, inviting us by the power of the Holy Spirit to join in Christ's sanctifying work which propels us forward into the final season of the calendar known as Ordinary time. In Ordinary time, Christians strive to embody "God through us" as we work toward the creation and reconciliation of all things into the image of Christ.

The Christian year teaches us the story of Christ, a story that includes us as well as God—God with us, God for us, God in us, and God through us. This is what Christians around the world have used for centuries to help navigate life lived in the tensions of this world as it is being redeemed by God, but is not yet entirely perfect. Perhaps this is something we Pentecostals might want to integrate into our spirituality as well.

Having established where Lent fits within the scope of the Christian calendar, let's revisit the question at hand: What is Lent? Simply put, Lent is a season of preparation. Pastor Dan Tomberlin explains, "Lent is a season (40 days) of reflection, fasting, and prayer that precedes the celebration of Easter." Starting on the holiday (or holy-day) of Ash Wednesday, Christians from many traditions reflect on the life of Christ as He was driven into the wilderness by the Spirit and tempted in the desert for forty days and forty nights in preparation for his earthly ministry (Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-14). Through the practices of Lent, we annually revisit what it means to submit our will to God's will in *prayer* (Luke 22:39-46), what it means to submit our yearnings for this world in favor of a different soon-coming Kingdom in *fasting* (Matthew 4:1-11), and what it means to submit ourselves to others in service through *almsgiving and charity* (Mark 10:45).

During Lent, we recognize that faithful remembrance is not just an intellectual endeavor. To be human is not to be just



a thinking animal. Consider how we talk about memory. On the one hand, there is a kind of remembrance that seems to operate exclusively in our minds. We remember facts for a test, or details of an event. On the other hand, think about how remembering the birth of a child, or the death of a parent seems to extend beyond our cognitive processes and carry us down into a depth where our bodily and spiritual senses are all engaged in an act of remembrance that brings us into communion with the one we are remembering. It is in this spirit that Christians enter the season of Lent.

In our shared embodiment of Christ's preparation for ministry in the wilderness, we remember the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. We acknowledge the wildernesses that we must face in our lives, and we approach each desert in confident

expectation that we will overcome in Christ, our elder brother, and his victory for us. We posture ourselves through fasting so that we are reminded that the things of this world cannot satisfy our deepest longings. We surrender worldly ambitions and desires that threaten to control us. As we fast, we realize that the things that seem vital for our survival lose their luster in the light of the King of kings, and Lord of lords. This is how Christians can live in a world that is already being sanctified, but is not yet fully sanctified. This is how Christians can live with expectant openness to the movement of the Spirit in the world and in our lives. This is how Christians can breathe in rhythm with the Father, knowing that our hope is not in vain.

During Lent as we individually pray, fast, and serve others, each person's act of remembrance will take a unique shape. However, even though the habits of Lent differ from person to person, Lent also brings Christians together and roots us in the corporate life of the church as we break our fasts on Sunday with our brothers and sisters in Christ. During this season, we are soaked in the waters of trial and struggle. But Lent is ultimately transformed by the celebration of Easter Sunday. As we join with Christ in this celebration, the Lenten season prepares us to pass through death with Christ rather than around it, in order to get to Resurrection. Throughout the six weeks of Lent, this cycle is rehearsed every week to remind us that though sorrow may

last for the night, joy comes in the morning. In Lent we celebrate the inbreaking of God's healing of all things that is not yet complete, but has already begun and will indeed come in full.

In the Lenten season, it is easy to lose ourselves in the hustle and bustle of Easter productions, egg hunts for the kids, holiday meals with family and friends, and the busyness of spring. However, the season of Lent and the Christian calendar are not programs that can be "added" into our busy ministry schedules. As we celebrate the season of Lent and observe the whole Christian calendar, we are intentionally centering our lives on the story and mission of Christ so that we might participate in God's redemption of this world with Christ by the power of the Spirit. Austrian composer Gustav Mahler once said, "Tradition is not to preserve the ashes, but to pass on the flame." As pastor and shepherd, may we not overlook the gifts that our fathers and mothers in the faith have given us. This year, may we consider how the Christian calendar and its distinct seasons are training and (re)shaping our view of reality so that we might recognize how our lives are put to death, and Christ's life is taken on. Let us celebrate the joy of Easter Sunday in the wake of Lent, and may we let the Spirit paint the story of Christ on our hearts, and in our lives. ■

*Silas Sham, MTS-PT, M.Div. is associate pastor at New Covenant Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee.*



# Let's Create a Culture of ANOINTED LEARNING

■ by DANIEL TOMBERLIN

**M**Y FIRST DAY at East Coast Bible College (in 1978) was very enlightening. We assembled for our first session of Old Testament Survey. Our instructor, Ken Bell, informed us that his class would not be a “glorified Sunday school” and proceeded to spend the next forty-five minutes introducing us to the canonization of Scripture. As Dr. Bell concluded, one of our fellow students exclaimed, “I wish I had never heard this!” In our first day we learned more about the nature of inspired Scripture than we had learned in our young lifetimes attending church. For one of us, it was too much to bear.

There is a myth among Pentecostals that education often leads to apostasy. Do some university students encounter challenges to their faith? Do professors provoke critical thinking? The answer to both questions is, “Yes!” But, the purpose of higher education is to prepare the student to engage the

mission of Jesus Christ in a highly skeptical world. If higher education provokes young men and women to forsake the faith, then maybe the real culprit is the local church that failed to prepare the student for the rigors of life in a fallen world. The college classroom is the intellectual boot camp for the soldier of Jesus Christ. It can be tough, but ministry in the world is tougher.

Church of God ministers should be prepared to engage young men and women for the sake of the faith. Young adults ask serious questions about human sexuality, evolution, and religious pluralism.

- Why did God create me this way? What does the church teach about sex? Why does the church teach against same-sex marriage?

- My pastor taught me that God created the earth in six days and that humans are created in the image of God. My science teacher is teaching me that the earth was formed over billions of years and that



humans evolved from lower-life forms. How can I make sense of this?

- Some of my friends are Muslim and Hindu. Don't we really worship the same God? Doesn't God love all of us?

Many church leaders have difficulty with these discussions beyond quoting a few biblical proof texts. But young people want more. Young people are inquisitive, and if we are going to reach and keep them, we must offer informed answers to their questions. We can no longer simply proclaim, "Because the Bible says so." This generation does not assume the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Just as the ancient Christians prevailed against the Roman Empire by offering an informed explanation of the faith, in our time, pastors must be well informed so that our explanation of the faith is challenging and compelling.

If we are to seriously engage the world with the gospel, the Church of God must

create a culture of learning. This must begin with the local church, primarily with student ministry. Church of God students routinely study algebra, literature, and the sciences in high school. But when they attend Church of God student ministry, the Scriptures are often presented as a collection of Bible stories. High school students are ready to be introduced to the meat of the Word—biblical and theological foundations. Church of God student ministry should seek the development of young adults who can make informed moral decisions and engage their world with the gospel. Pastors should encourage academic excellence among high school students, encourage them to consider a university education, visit university campuses with students and help them negotiate the challenges. Local churches should financially support the educational endeavors of young people who seek to enter the ministry.

If the local church is to succeed, we must have pastors who can lead a culture of learning. Apollos was a successful leader—eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in Spirit, and teaching accurately about Jesus (Acts 18:24-25).<sup>\*</sup> However, he lacked theological understanding about the Holy Spirit. When Paul preached in Ephesus, he asked, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2). Because Apollos had never heard of Pentecost, he could not teach his church about the fullness of the Spirit. A pastor can’t teach what a pastor doesn’t know! Priscilla and Aquila recognized his gifts and discerned his lack of understanding. So, “they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26). Many Pentecostal pastors are sincere, eloquent, and fervent in Spirit. But, like Apollos, they lack theological knowledge. The ministerial development programs of the Church of God (CAMS, MIP) offer a basic foundation for ministry, but cannot adequately prepare ministers for all challenges. Just as Apollos submitted himself to the teaching of Priscilla and Aquila, Church of God pastors should engage in lifelong learning.

Denominational leaders must lead by example. Church of God leaders have sometimes been ambivalent about ministerial education. Leaders should present a united front in promoting the educational mission

of the church. Regional administrative bishops should schedule seminars on various theological subjects for the ongoing training of ministers. Leaders should give priority to formal education as criteria when making leadership appointments; and leaders should discourage the use of fraudulent titles and unaccredited degrees. Denominational leaders should offer greater financial support to educational institutions so that endowments can be established with the goal of providing reduced tuition for qualified students who pledge to serve the church.

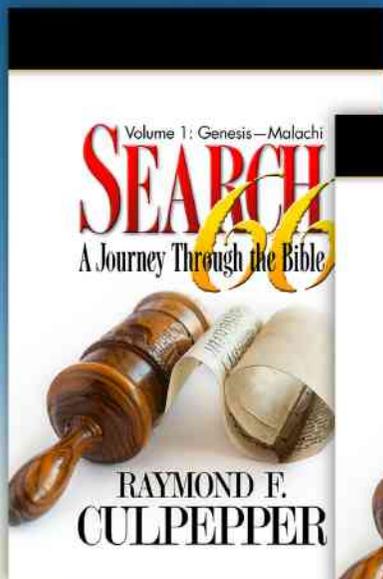
Developing a culture of learning is not forsaking the empowerment of the Spirit. Rather, it is hearing the call of the Spirit to sanctify the mind, to train anointed minds, to prepare ministers of the gospel who do “not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). An anointed and trained minister will not be timid or fearful as he/she faces the challenges of this word. Instead, he/she will go forth in power, love, and a disciplined mind (2 Timothy 1:7). An anointed mind is a terrible thing to waste. ■

*Daniel Tomberlin, D.Min., serves as pastor of the Vidalia, Ga. Church of God and Ministerial Development coordinator in South Georgia. He publishes a blog at [DanielTomberlin.net](http://DanielTomberlin.net).*

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# SEARCH 66: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

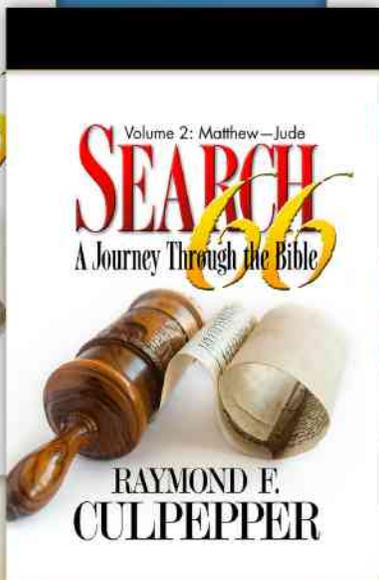
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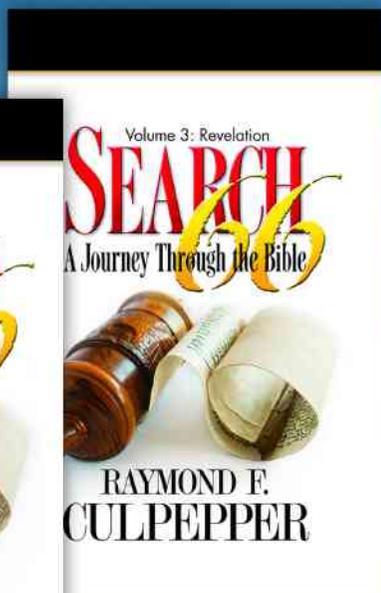
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# CULTIVATING THE CHURCH AS A LEARNING COMMUNITY

■ by FRITZ DEININGER

**W**HEN I STUDIED for my master's degree some years ago, I took a course on philosophy of church planting. The professor asked us to write a paper on the topic "The Church as I Have Experienced It." In my reflection, I realized how much the church has not only contributed to my spiritual growth but also shaped my values, worldview, appreciation for the worldwide family of God, and the desire to serve Christ full-time.

Having been in ministry for many years, I served Christ in various capacities: in the

church as pastor, in Asia as church planter, in leadership training, and as theological educator. Over the years, I have become convinced that the church is God's instrument to educate believers in the ways and wisdom of God. The ministry of the church can be summarized as shown in the diagram on the next page, which I will explain briefly:

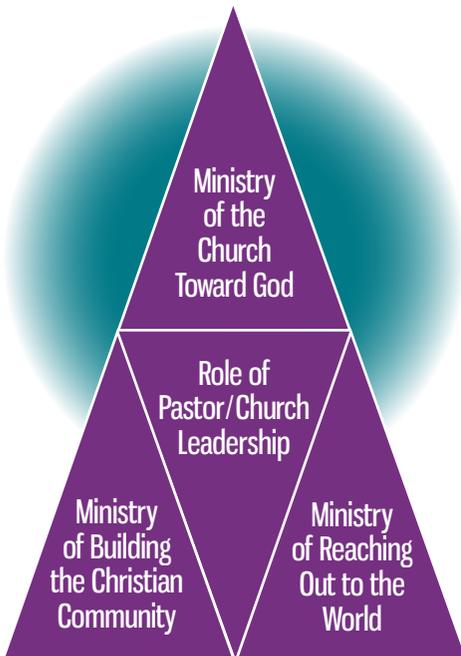
**The ministry of the church toward God** includes learning how to worship God and how to lead a life pleasing to Him (Eph. 4:1). Believers need to learn how to approach God and communicate with Him.

**The ministry of building the church as a Christian community** encourages believers to study God’s Word and apply it to their lives. They learn how to be active members of the Christian community and become part of the fellowship. Members learn how to care for each other and how to intercede on behalf of other believers and the world. **The ministry of reaching out to the world** includes learning how to reach people in society with the gospel, as well as being involved in missions. Another area is to learn how to be involved in society and to advocate changes. **The role of the pastor and church leaders** is crucial. They understand God’s design and purpose of the church, and they lead exemplary

lives in their character and willingness to learn, so that believers want to follow their example. The pastor and the church leaders are instrumental in cultivating the church as a learning community so that all three areas of the ministry of the church are developed and the members have learned to participate with confidence.

How do members experience their local church? What do they expect of the church? Do they have the biblical understanding of what the Christian community ought to be? Do they understand that being a Christian involves learning, understanding, and practicing the Word of God? If the church wants to cultivate a learning community, then it must start with the members and their understanding of the church and Christian life. Has your church ever done a survey among the members on these topics? This could be the starting point of developing the church into a place where believers enjoy learning.

Cultivating the church as a learning community is an agricultural picture. Paul uses the image to refer to the ministry of himself and Apollos in the church in Corinth. He describes their task as planting and watering. Each one had a task to fulfill which God had assigned to them. Most important to Paul: “God made it grow” (1 Cor. 3:5-6). What Paul describes applies to the church today. He and Apollos created the environment for growth. Likewise, the church today needs to be creative in arranging opportunities for the believers to learn what the Bible teaches. A learning process does not only take place



in the classroom but can also be built into many church activities.

**How can we define or describe the church as a learning community?** The basis is the common faith in Christ that brings the believers together in the Christian community. The church as a learning community is a place where believers have the desire to know God, understand His will and Word. It is a comprehensive formation in the ways of God that transforms the personal life and the contribution in society. Pastors and church leaders work together to present everyone mature in Christ (Col. 1:28-29). Therefore, the church as a learning community does not just focus on church activities or entertainment that attracts people; but it introduces the believers to the teaching of the Bible and to practice of the Christian life.

**Why should the church be cultivated as a learning community?** The first reason is that a Christian who knows the Word of God and has processed the teaching can walk in the ways of God. Stability to the Christian life comes from knowing what God says in His Word. Paul tells Timothy: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you have learned it" (2 Tim. 3:14 NIV). The example of Timothy tells us that in a learning community two things are essential: Learning from the example of people and learning from the Scripture, or in a broader sense, from books. The second reason is found in the prayer of Paul for the

Christians in the church in Colossae (Col. 1:9-14). Paul prays that the Christians will be filled with the knowledge of God's will and that they grow in the knowledge of God so that their lives are fruitful. Cultivating a learning community means to grow in the knowledge of God and His will. The third reason is the spiritual growth of the believers to maturity in Christ. In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul elaborates on growth of the believers together. They need to be prepared for works of service for the building up of the church (v. 12). The focus on building the Christian community creates unity in the faith so that the Christians become mature. As a result, they are able to discern false teaching and are not easily tempted to follow false promises. They become reliable and spiritually mature members of the church. These are just three reasons why the church should cultivate a learning community. Others could be added.

**What is the significance of cultivating the church as a learning community?** Only a few aspects shall be touched briefly. Some questions to ask might be helpful. What do believers need to learn for their personal walk with God? What do they need to learn about being part of the church? What do they need to learn for life in society? How can the pastor and church leaders teach the believers so that they are rooted firmly in their faith?

The church as learning community needs to develop a Christian way of thinking related to life in society. Paul supports the transformation of the secular worldview and encourages the Christians not to conform

any longer to the “patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind” (Rom. 12:2 NIV). The renewed mind is the basis for discerning the will of God and how to live in society. Christians need to internalize the Christian worldview, norms and standards for Christian living, and the biblical teaching that supports their faith. Important is the development of a Christian identity so that they can manage their lives well.

The application of biblical principles is part of the learning community. Christians are interdependent, and develop a community in which each member grows, and relates well to one another. Learning to love and accept one another (Rom. 15:7; 1 John 4:7, 11, 12; John 13:34) needs to be practiced among believers. Developing the personal character and attitude is challenging as Paul writes: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Eph. 4:2 NIV).

In summary, the significance of cultivating the church as a learning community is related to the personal development of the believers and in practicing biblical principles in daily life and in the church.

**What are some practical aspects in developing the church as a learning community?** The pastor and the church leaders need to be convinced that intentional learning is part of the formation of the Christian life and the ministry of the church. They need to evaluate church life and activities regarding their contribution to cultivate a learning community. They need

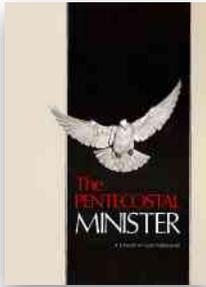
to discern how learning experiences can be built into activities. Of course, the church leadership needs to apply biblical principles to their relationships and to their responsibilities in the church. For example, how do they apply biblical principles in problem or conflict solving?

The Christian education program of the church needs to be evaluated in light of the learning experiences. Is the focus on *knowing* (Bible, doctrine, ethical issues, etc.), *being* (Christian worldview, character development, etc.), and *doing* (practice care and love, forgiveness, etc.)? Is the teaching evaluated?

Those who are teaching in the various groups in the church need training and development. For example, does the teacher of the adult Bible class know something about adult learning? Does the church have a regular program for training?

Cultivating the church as a learning community is a challenge to the pastor and the church leaders. The few thoughts in this article are meant to stimulate further thinking. It is my hope that the Christian communities become places of learning where believers are being transformed and the church is being strengthened for the glory of God. ■

*Dr. Fritz Deininger, from Germany, directs the Institute for Professional Academic Leadership, an entity of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), whose mission is to educate, and train academic deans and school officers in the majority world. He was the former dean at the Bangkok Bible College and Seminary in Thailand.*



*The Pentecostal Minister Flashback will reprint articles from the forerunner of Engage. The articles will be presented as they were originally written, so dates and cultural references will reflect the period. However, most of the advice and research is still applicable to ministry today.*

# Pentecostal Minister

## FLASHBACK

### THE CHANGING CHARACTER of the PENTECOSTAL FAMILY

By Robert E. Fisher • Winter 1988

**L**AST CHRISTMAS I received one of the most memorable gifts of my life. It was given by my daughter, Lorri. Understand that Lorri is no longer “Daddy’s little girl.” She is a mature young woman who recently received a master’s degree in human resource psychology.

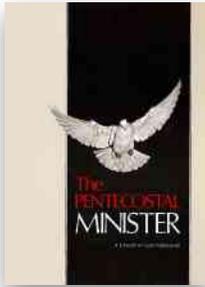
Through the years Lorri always has given me thoughtful gifts, but I knew this particular Christmas present had to be special because she wanted to sit beside me while I opened it. As I unwrapped the package, I had little idea of the spiritual jolt I was about to receive.

When I saw what Lorri had given me, I was emotionally overwhelmed. A flood of feelings swept over me that recalled a lifetime of family blessings. A spontaneous exultation welled within me of a magnitude I had seldom experienced.

Before me was a beautifully framed linen plaque on which Lorri had, with her own hand, cross-stitched the words, “Yea, thou shall see thy children’s children” (Psalm 128:6).

What made this gift so meaningful and precious was the fulfilled promise of God it embodied.

Only a few months previously I had been given the unique privilege of officiating at the dedication of our first two grandsons, Matthew and Grant. In the course of the dedication service, I told the congregation of my experience as a discouraged, lovesick



19-year-old preacher who thought my world had come to an end because of courtship problems with the girl I had hoped to marry.

I recounted how at that lowest of all low points in my life, God had given me the exciting promises of Psalm 128 which assured me that my wife (I would get married!) would be as a “fruitful vine” within my house and my children like “olive plants” around my table. The psalm ended with the unbelievable prophecy that I would see my children’s children. It was hard enough to conceive that I would be married and have children of my own; that I was to be a grandfather was unfathomable.

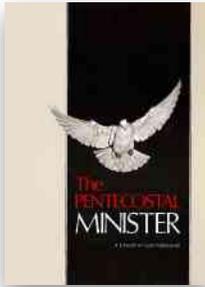
But as I stood holding those two grandsons, offering them in dedication, I joyed in the absolute faithfulness of God. And now to think that my daughter had remembered that promise and put it in a form I could treasure forever was nearly more than I could take.

That plaque hangs in my study on the wall over my desk. I have reread its words scores of times, and every time I do, I am reminded that God is a God of the family. He speaks in “family language”—of the Father, the Son, the Bride, the Marriage Supper. He compares the relationship between husband and wife to that of his love for the church (Ephesians 5:25).

He marks the fulfilling of parental responsibility as a requirement for leadership in the church (1 Timothy 3:4). And in my case, He counted family matters important enough to reveal to a despondent young preacher the prophetic news about the faithfulness of a wife not yet won, the character of children not yet born, and the reality of grandchildren not yet fathomed. In years to come, I was to learn even more explicitly the importance God places on family relationships and how profoundly those relationships were to affect my life and ministry.

### **A DRAMATIC CHANGE IN THE PENTECOSTAL FAMILY**

The family has changed unbelievably since those simpler days when God gave me the promise of Psalm 128. I could not imagine then how much more complex family issues would become for my two sons and my daughter.



The Pentecostal family has been impacted by the same cataclysmic changes that have overwhelmed families in general. However, because of the unique nature of the Pentecostal family, these changes have taken somewhat different forms.

### **Family Composition**

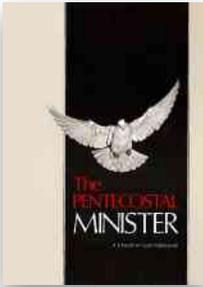
The Pentecostal message, as it was preached and demonstrated at the beginning of this century, appealed primarily to those at the lower socioeconomic level of society. With these people, a larger family was the rule, and family values and traditions were cherished. Among Pentecostal Christians, divorce was rare, and sexual contact outside of marriage was strictly forbidden. The traditional nuclear family was assumed to be God's only approved standard for family order.

Two factors have drastically altered those earlier family patterns: (1) relaxed moral standards within the church, and (2) the influx of broken and reconstituted families into the church. Today's average Pentecostal church basically reflects the family composition of society in general—three out of five families have been affected by divorce and/or remarriage. Thus, Pentecostals have been forced to rethink their polity and programs relating to the family.

### **Church Loyalty**

In the early days of the modern Pentecostal Movement, the church was the center of both social and spiritual life. Often meetings were held every night of the week, and Sunday was an all-day affair with dinner on the grounds. Needless to say, family life was inextricably tied to what was happening at the church. Also, the emphasis placed upon spiritual power and authority called for the matters of the church to take precedence over all aspects of one's life, including his family life.

With the postwar acceleration of industrialization, its consequent promise of greater affluence, and its employment of more and more wives and mothers, time for and interest in church activities were drastically reduced. This, coupled with the advent



of television, dealt a stunning blow to the primary place of church attendance and involvement.

In society, generally, the massive assault upon the credibility of leadership and the rise of the “cult of self” undermined authority in both the family and the church. The question no longer was, “What can I do for the church?” but, rather, “What can the church do for me?”

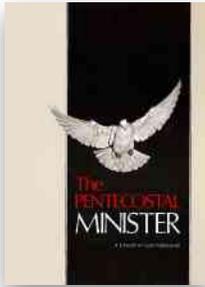
### **Moral Crisis**

An emphasis upon moral purity and personal integrity characterized the Pentecostal Movement through the course of its early years. A renewal of the Wesleyan concept of sanctification brought about a call for personal holiness in the life of believers. One’s adherence to this doctrine was judged on the basis of outward appearance, as well as inward graces. In the family, it was thought imperative to bring relationships, social patterns, dress, and entertainment into conformity with this “holiness” standard.

Through a combination of the natural generational process and the influence of the prevailing secular value system, the modern Pentecostal family has found itself reeling in a moral and spiritual crisis. In many cases, it has lost the spiritual distinctives, which previously had set it apart from the secular family.

A recent (1983) survey of youth in the Church of God (Cleveland) indicated that *less* than half have the baptism of the Holy Spirit, while *more* than half *never* have family devotions. A 1987 survey by the same denomination found that 26.6 percent of the church teenagers (males and females) had had sexual intercourse one or more times.

If the Pentecostal family, regardless of the contemporary form it may take, is to fulfill its role as a nurturing body, its member must return to a practice of the basic family responsibilities clearly outlined in Scripture (Ephesians 5:22–6:4). Also, renewed attention must be given to the distinctives that characterized family relationships in the early church.



## THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER OF THE PENTECOSTAL FAMILY

There can be no doubt that the power of the Holy Spirit which energized the New Testament church greatly impacted the family. Jesus demonstrated family loyalty, yet He taught that commitment to Christ could bring division in the family (Matthew 10:35-37).

New Testament believers were intense in their worship; they pooled their resources and lived in perpetual revival (Acts 2:43-47). Their newfound faith was all-consuming. Daily they worshiped at the Temple and broke bread from house to house. Miracles were common, and persecution was frequent.

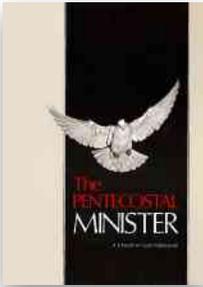
All these factors affected family life. In essence, the life of the family was the life of the church. In many cases (perhaps in most), the entire family was involved in the work of the church (Acts 16:32-34). Despite the communal aspect of their living, individual family responsibility was emphasized.

### Spiritual Power

For a church born in a Pentecostal revival, the major point of emphasis for early believers was the manifestation of power resulting from the infilling of the Holy Spirit. In their daily lives, they saw the literal fulfillment of Jesus' promise, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8 NIV).

It is not difficult to imagine how deeply family life was influenced as a result of the dramatic multiple conversions which took place immediately following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. All of a sudden, a husband, a wife, a parent, a child, sometimes an entire family, was caught up in the unremitting fervor of a new religious faith. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at many wonders and signs performed by the apostles" (Acts 2:42, 43 NIV).

The power of the Spirit was seen to be effective not only for the working of spectacular miracles such as healing the sick and raising the dead, but also for the perfecting of human relationships, especially those in the family. Paul emphasized to the church at Ephesus



that being “filled with the Spirit” would cause a believer to be submissive in the husband/wife relationship (Ephesians 5:21, 22) rather than to follow the pagan practice of self-seeking and self-assertion.

### **Worship Intensity**

New Testament writings indicate an intense involvement in worship on the part of early Christians. They participated daily in prayer, fasting, and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (which probably consisted of a fellowship meal along with Communion). They took delight in being with one another (Acts 2:46).

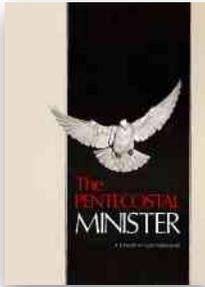
Undoubtedly, much of this worship activity involved the entire family. In fact, most worship services were held in homes. The story of Peter’s miraculous deliverance from prison (Acts 12:5-17) gives an interesting look into early church family life.

When Peter was imprisoned, an all-night prayer meeting was called at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. As the families were praying together, a knock was heard at the door. Rhoda, one of the young ladies present, came to answer. Upon hearing Peter’s voice, without opening the door, she ran excitedly to tell the others.

They didn’t believe her story but humored her, saying, it was probably his angel. However, as Peter continued knocking, they finally let him in and were astonished at the answer to their prayers. That this was probably a home prayer meeting and not an official church service is indicated by the fact that no major church leaders were present (v. 17). What an indelible impression must have been left upon the family members attending the prayer meeting that night!

### **Holiness Emphasis**

In His teaching, Jesus frequently called attention to the corruption and hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. The hallmark of His message was the emphasis upon selflessness and sincerity in relationship with God and others. The early church fathers often mentioned the need for moral purity and personal integrity.



Of particular concern to the apostle Paul was the tendency of the church at Corinth to be influenced by their world surroundings. He reiterated the Old Testament admonition, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you” (2 Corinthians 6:17 NKJV). He went on to admonish, “Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1 NKJV).

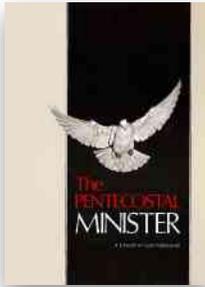
The call for holy living nowhere was stressed more strongly than in family relationships. The fidelity of the marriage bed (Hebrews 13:4), the fulfilling of parental responsibilities (Ephesians 6:4) and the care of deprived family members (James 1:27) were recurring themes for New Testament writers. A primary qualification for church leadership was success in family relationship (1 Timothy 3:2, 4, 5). Personal holiness was seen as being more credible in the confines of the home.

As it was with the early church, so it must be today—an encounter with Christ impacts the individual with the most force at the level of intimate relationships, those found primarily in the family.

### **A DELIBERATE COMMITMENT TO THE PENTECOSTAL FAMILY**

As goes the family, so goes the church and society in general. Dr. Nick Stinnett, in the book *Family Building*, states, “History has presented us with clear messages about families and the relationship between the strength of families and the strength of nations. As we study some of the ancient cultures such as Egypt, Greece, and Rome, we see a common pattern:

When these cultures were coming into the peak of their power and glory as nations, the family was strong...Then as these nations progressed along their path of destiny, the family came to be not so highly valued, the culture became extremely individualistic...The families deteriorated. When that happened the societies themselves fell.



We are at a critical point in our society. We are at an even more crucial point in the contemporary church, most especially in the Pentecostal Charismatic Movement. Despite the remarkable gains of the past 30 years, Pentecostalism is at a crossroads.

If the earthshaking scandals of the last year tell us anything, they cry out that our families are in trouble. Sexual problems stem from difficulties in family relationships.

All the warning signs are there—the scandals, the surveys, the shock of another pastoral family breakup or another local church leader gone bad. Such crisis indicators should not make us panic, but should spur us to positive action.

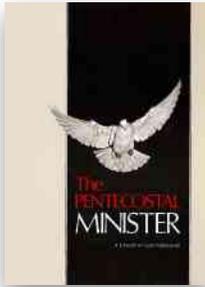
If we believe in the concentrated power for good in the Spirit-filled family, and if we further believe that the concentrated power can be multiplied and accumulated into a mighty force through the local church, we must be willing to make a commitment to turn the spiritual tide for Pentecostal families who come under our influence.

### **Family Ministry**

In the early days of the Pentecostal Movement, family ministry happened almost automatically because of the strength and solidarity of the family unit. That is no longer the case. Today, many families are fragmented, and the church should be the agency which helps put them back together.

Families must be received, accepted and loved by the church, regardless of their composition or spiritual state. Areas of difficulty (sex, abuse, divorce, remarriage, finances, parent/child responsibilities, singleness) not only must be confronted but also dealt with as an integral part of the ministry of the church. Such issues are not now nor will they be handled successfully by the school or other social institutions. The church has the answers to these matters if it has the fortitude to speak.

There must be a sensitivity to family needs when planning such things as church schedules, educational programs and building facilities. Attention to family ministry will pay off in producing stronger families; stronger families, in turn, will produce stronger churches.



The emphasis should be on the PREVENTION rather than the CURE of family ills.

## Discipling Programs

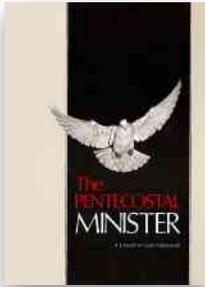
“My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). Many Pentecostal families are being destroyed because their members lack the knowledge necessary to ward off an attack. The responsibility for training and discipling has always been a major requirement for the success of the church.

However, in today’s world there are many new delivery systems pumping more and more information (unfortunately, most of it negative and/or untrue) into the brain. The church must meet that challenge by providing more and better delivery systems of its own. There is only one antidote for the lies and misinformation that confuse and bind so many people—the truth of God’s Word. Whatever it takes, the church must get the truth into the heads and hearts of the people.

The current emphasis in Pentecostal/Charismatic churches on praise and worship is commendable. However, if it in any way detracts or subtracts from the discipling process, it can be detrimental to the spiritual strength of believers. It is not enough for God’s people to love Him with all their *heart* (emotion, devotion), they must also love Him with all their *soul* (faith, belief) and with all their *mind* (will, intellect).

Practical application of biblical truths, particularly in the area of family relationships, should be at the center of a discipling program. The emphasis should be on the *prevention* rather than the *cure* of family ills. Such important subjects as interpersonal communication, sexual responsibilities, use of finances, meaning of submission, and methods of discipline should not be relegated to the schools or to pop psychologists.

The church should address these issues. From a very young age children should be taught the meaning of personal holiness and their place in the natural family, as well as in the family of God. Again, the inevitable result of better discipling programs will be stronger individuals, stronger families, and ultimately, stronger churches.



## Spiritual Renewal

Pentecostal families need a revival—an old-fashioned sin-confronting, devil-chasing, commitment-producing, Holy Ghost-baptizing *revival*. For all our family ministries and our discipling programs, there comes a time in Pentecostal churches when there must be a reenactment of the Day of Pentecost.

When things got tough for the young church in Jerusalem, they had a prayer meeting that produced some spectacular results. “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken: and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31 NKJV). That spiritual renewal affected their relationships. “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul...And great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:32, 33 NKJV).

There is nothing like a spiritual shaking to solve a multitude of relationship problems. In our commendable effort to bring a greater sense of order and decorum to our church services, we may have programmed out more than we realized of the genuine move of the Holy Ghost. Many young people attending Pentecostal churches have never seen or heard a scriptural manifestation of the Spirit.

Even more tragically, they have not been encouraged nor do they have a desire to be filled with the Spirit. If the church (and the family) is to survive the current crisis, it must appropriate the same power of the Holy Spirit that energized the early church.

Back to the personal illustration with which I began this article: I am sure I am no different from most ministers. I am grateful for my public ministry, but my deepest sense of joy, satisfaction, and contentment comes from my relationship with my family—my wife, my children and my grandchildren. This fact, coupled with the scriptural mandate for family ministry, compels me to do all I can to make certain that as the character of my family and that of other Pentecostal families I know changes, it changes for the better. ■

*In 1988, Robert E. Fisher, Ph.D., was overseer of the Church of God in Western North Carolina.*



## LEGAL NOTES

Dennis W. Watkins

# Continue to Bolster the Religious Identity of Your Church Property

**W**ITH THE CULMINATION of the recent election cycle and the election of a new president, there has been much speculation about what the future may hold under a new administration and Congress. Some already are predicting that we will see immediate and major change in federal governmental policy and enforcement on numerous fronts. While I do not have a crystal ball that can provide the answers to these questions, I would like to speak to some issues that we have been dealing with over the past months. I also want to give some suggestions for our churches to follow in consideration of continued operation of church properties.

## THE LGBT BATHROOM ISSUE

One of the most prominent issues that has been in the limelight has been the issue of LGBT rights in regards to bathrooms and gender expression or identity. In my

article for the most recent *Engage* edition, I discussed the case of *G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board* from Virginia. There was a question of where that case might end up, and even since the publication of that article, that question has been answered! The United States Supreme Court has agreed to hear this case, and it is now on track to be heard sometime into next year. The only problem for the Supreme Court for now is that there are only eight justices and a ninth justice will be appointed by the new president, so the “formula for that equation” will depend on who becomes the ninth justice.

## THE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE ISSUE

Along the same line is the question of whether the United States Supreme Court, under a new composition, might do anything to change the ruling of the *Obergefell* case that was handed down in June of 2015. That ruling required states to license same-sex marriages and to recognize same-sex

## Our churches should continue to be conservative in the operation of their properties and to keep themselves from unnecessary legal pitfalls regarding these issues.

marriages performed in other states. The answer to this question might be more problematic because many states already had recognized same-sex marriages prior to *Obergefell*. At this time, it simply would be impossible to accurately predict any major changes on this issue.

### WHAT SHOULD CHURCHES DO?

While change may occur at some point and to some extent, I think that our churches should continue to be conservative in the operation of their properties and to keep themselves from unnecessary legal pitfalls regarding these issues. Remember, the election has focused on the *federal* government, but there still is a host of varied laws and rules on the state, county, and local levels regarding these subjects. Some of these laws and rules may directly impact our churches.

In that regard, I think that your church should continue to avoid activity that might cause your church property to be classified as a “public accommodation.” The main conduct I am thinking about is renting your church out for weddings and public events, especially for a fee. While I am not aware of any church that has been held by a court to

be a “public accommodation,” don’t place your church in the possible line of fire on this issue.

Also, I recommend that your church adopt a facilities-use policy statement that clearly articulates the religious identity of your church property. That statement basically confirms that your local church property may not be used for any purpose that is not consistent with our biblical beliefs and teachings. I am providing a sample form at the link [here](#). This is the same form that I have provided in past materials. You should adopt this policy statement as your local church policy.

### CONCLUSION

My message is simple—don’t assume that change will be swift and drastic. Keep doing the kinds of things that protect the religious nature of your property! ■

*Dennis W. Watkins is legal counsel for the 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.*



**MONEY MATTERS**  
Art Rhodes

## New Filing Date for W-2s and 1099s

**W**ITH THE COMING of the new year, church treasurers are hopefully already making preparations to get out W-2s to employees, Form 1099s to independent contractors, and charitable receipts to all that may have contributed more than \$250 at any one time to the church over the year. All of these tasks are critically important and should be accomplished as soon after the first of the year as possible.

With a change in the law (Public Law 114-113), it is now more important than ever that these tasks be completed as quickly as possible. Historically, an employer/church has been required to provide its employees with a W-2 prior to January 31, and to provide a 1099 by January 31 to independent contractors who cumulatively received more than \$600 over the course of the year. These provisions and requirements have not changed.

However, previously a copy of the employer's W-2s and 1099s did not have to be sent to the Social Security Administration and Internal Revenue Service until later. If you were sending paper copies, they had to be sent by the end of February and if you were filing them electronically, you had until the end of March to transmit those forms. This delay allowed employers to correct W-2s and 1099s before they were filed with the government.

Under the change in the law, these forms now must be transmitted to the Social Security Administration (W-2s) and to the Internal Revenue Service (1099s) by the end of January. Therefore, effective in 2017, all W-2s and Form 1099s must be forwarded to the individuals AND to the appropriate governmental agency by no later than January 31, 2017.

Because of this change, it is recommended that you get the W-2s and 1099s out to the individuals as early as possible so that changes, if necessary, can be made prior to the mandatory filing date of January 31.

Further, church treasurers should consider using the government's electronic filing system to complete both their W-2s and W-3. After a simple registration process, W-2s can be completed, printed, and then filed electronically.

Just remember that if you wait to file your W-2s and 1099s with the government in February or March, you will be late. The new deadline is January 31. ■

*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.*



## FAMILY FOCUS

Drs. H. Lynn and Mary Ruth Stone

# Marriage Is a Helping Companionship

**A**ND THE LORD GOD said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18). The phrase, "help meet for him," is better understood when translated, "a help to meet him."

The Hebrew word for "help" (*ezer*) is an astounding word. Used in eleven different verses in the Book of Psalms, it always refers to the "help" of God. God is a "help" (*ezer*) for His children in seven distinct ways: strength, protection, security, trust, inspiration, creativity, and hope. These pictures of the help of God, the Creator of marriage, provide a marvelous model for the helping companionship of husband and wife.

### 1. THE HELPING COMPANIONSHIP OF MARRIAGE PROVIDES STRENGTH (PSALM 20:2).

The author prays in Psalm 20:2 for the Lord to: "Send you *help* (*ezer*) from the sanctuary, and strengthen (*ca'ad*) you out of Zion." The "strength out of Zion" is a direct parallel of the "help from the sanctuary." To receive the help of *ezer* is to also receive the strength of *ca'ad*.

In the Old Testament, *ca'ad* refers to strength in a variety of ways. It is:

- Strength received from the eating of bread.

- Strength that comes from the right hand of God.

- Strength that God gives to the saint during the time of sickness.

- Strength that comes through God's mercy.

- Strength of safety when the saint is held up by God.

- Strength of a throne that is held up by mercy.

- Strength of justice and judgment.

So is the strength of the helping companionship of marriage. It is the strength of bread and a comforting right hand. It is the strength of mercy, justice, and judgment. It is the strength of a royal throne. By its very nature, the true helping companionship of biblical marriage gives a permanent strength that lasts throughout a lifetime of togetherness.

### 2. THE HELPING COMPANIONSHIP OF MARRIAGE GIVES PROTECTION (PSALM 33 AND 115).

Four times in the Psalms the author speaks of help (*ezer*) and immediately adds, "and our shield." The Hebrew word for shield (*magen*) comes from a primitive root which means to "hedge about" or "protect." Therefore, the "help meet" of marriage brings a protection to the marriage relationship that defends one's

spouse with the vigor of a trained soldier—surrounding, covering, hedging about one’s spouse, “until death do us part.”

While it may be somewhat unfamiliar to us today, the shield was a very familiar part of the defensive armor of the ancient warrior. It was used extensively in Scripture to illustrate God’s protection for His people.

So, the helping companionship of marriage begins with the loyalty oath like that of soldiers pledging allegiance to their country. They will fight valiantly—will “gladly lay down their lives”—to protect their loving companion. Such loyal love removes fear. It brings “salvation” to the marriage. It defeats all enemies who try to destroy its excellence and brings happiness to both partners.

### **3. THE HELPING COMPANIONSHIP OF MARRIAGE BRINGS SECURITY (PSALM 70:5).**

The helping companionship of marriage also brings a sense of security. Psalm 70:5 says, “But I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: you are my *help* (*ezer*) and my deliverer (*palat*); O Lord, make no tarrying.”

The Hebrew word for “deliverer” (*palat*) means “to bring into security, to bring to safety.” Biblical marriage does more than protect in the time of danger, or when something brings a threat. It brings a sense of continual security. It is like dwelling in a castle or a fortress.

One of the wonderful pictures of marriage is that the marriage partners are presented to “meet” face-to-face—literally, “eye-to-eye.” When two people stand facing one another, the two of them literally have 360 degree vision. He can see everything behind her back where she cannot see, likewise, she can see everything behind his back.

This is the security of the helping companionship of marriage. Each partner provides a sense of security for the weaknesses of the other. They compliment one another. Their strengths are synergistic. Their combined strengths provide a citadel, a sanctuary.

### **4. THE HELPING COMPANIONSHIP OF MARRIAGE GENERATES TRUST (PSALM 115:9-11).**

Three times in consecutive verses, Psalm 115 exhorts: “Trust in the Lord,” because “he is their help” (verses 9, 10, and 11). The Hebrew word for trust is *batach*. It is a primitive root which means: “to hide for refuge.”

This Psalm primarily contrasts those who worship God with those who worship idols. But it is an amazing parallel to the helping companionship of a biblical marriage.

Those marriages which exist without the true spirit of a helping companionship are just as hollow and lifeless as the “idols of silver and gold, the work of men’s hands” (v. 4). Such “lifeless” marriages have mouths that don’t speak, eyes that don’t see, ears that don’t hear, hands that don’t touch, and feet that don’t walk.

In contrast to vain idols, God can be fully trusted. He is the *help* of His people. Likewise, a “help meet” can be trusted—mouths speak, eyes see, ears hear, noses smell, hands touch, feet walk, and trust abounds. He is alive. She is alive.

### **5. THE HELPING COMPANIONSHIP OF MARRIAGE PRODUCES INSPIRATION (PSALM 121:1).**

Psalm 121 says, “I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth” (vv. 1, 2 NIV). To the writer, the hills were a source of inspiration. They pointed

the way to the help that comes from the Lord, the Creator who made the hills.

So is the helping companionship of marriage. Many hills and mountaintops will bring moments and times of exhilaration and inspiration. However, there is no mountain without valleys. Even though they provide inspiration from afar, mountains must be climbed to escape from the dark shadows of the valley below. While mountaintop experiences are restful and refreshing, reaching a mountaintop usually requires an arduous and tiring journey.

Various types of marital problems will be encountered that sometimes become “valleys of despair.” Just envisioning the majestic mountain peaks can bring joy and inspiration. But to arrive at the top, those mountains must be climbed and conquered. Otherwise, the marriage flounders and often fails. Long after these mountaintop experiences occur, their memories continue to provide a source of inspiration to the partners of a helping companionship.

## **6. THE HELPING COMPANIONSHIP OF MARRIAGE PRODUCES CREATIVITY (PSALM 124:8).**

Psalms 124:8 says, “Our *help* (*ezer*) is in the name of the Lord, who *made* (*asah*) heaven and earth.” The relationship between the words “help” and “made” in this verse is significant.

As God is the Creator, He has endowed mankind—His highest creation—with a creative mind, soul, heart, spirit, and body. Every human of right mind is creative to a degree. Psalm 124:8 implies that creativity flows out of the relationship between the Lord who is the *help* and the person who is helped.

In the helping companionship of marriage, the two partners quite naturally evoke from one another a marvelous creativity. This

varies according to the circumstances of the relationship. This creativity is epitomized in the bearing of children. No greater work of humankind exists than the conception, birth, caring for, and rearing of a child. This husband/wife creativity is a dramatic picture of the “accomplishments” of a helping companionship. This dynamic relationship brings forth life to the world in as many unique ways as the number of children born into the world.

## **7. THE HELPING COMPANIONSHIP OF MARRIAGE BRINGS HOPE (PSALM 146:5).**

Psalms 146:5 says, “Happy is he that has the God of Jacob for his *help* (*ezer*), whose *hope* is in the Lord his God.” A true “help meet” marriage brings forth a genuine sense of hope. Without hope, a marriage is dull, empty, and lifeless. The hope of tomorrow gives energy to the living of today.

The relationship between happiness, help, and hope in Psalm 146:5 is a pattern for every successful marriage. As the present “help” provides for future “hope,” true “happiness” will be found in the home. Genuine “help” is more than a present event. It is a life. It is a life that provides the joy of rightness today because it sparks a living hope for tomorrow. The strength, protection, safety, trust, inspiration, and creativity of a helping companionship quickly dissolve like the morning dew without hope for tomorrow. But a living hope cements those separate aspects of a helping companionship into a marriage bond that cannot be broken.

These seven words provide a beautiful picture of what God himself meant when He made a “help meet” for Adam. “Uphold me according unto your word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope” (Psalm 119:116). ■



## POINTS FROM THE PASTORAL STAFF

Chuck Noel

# Points to Ponder from an ADMINISTRATIVE PASTOR

**I**N MORE THAN thirty-five years' experience in full-time ministry, I have served in many roles. But, no place of service was more challenging or more rewarding than the years spent serving with Dr. Bryan Cutshall as his administrative/executive pastor. Please allow me to share a few things I learned along the way.

The role of executive pastor is relatively new, especially in our movement. The job description will most certainly differ in each location, along with the desires and needs of lead pastor. However, whatever the job description, there are points to ponder that are common to those who serve in this way. For instance, the executive pastor is not an associate pastor. Regardless if role is largely administrative, it still has a strong pastoral element or a combination of the two. The executive pastor's job is not to imitate that of the lead pastor but rather to compliment the leader's ministry so that the lead pastor may lead to his/her strengths and employ the executive pastor to bolster weak areas.

The executive pastor who serves with excellence should be certain of a calling to serve in this way and be comfortable doing so. Know who God has called you to be! You are not the "second banana" as some would say. You are the lead pastor's right hand and you are fulfilling your own unique calling. Never allow yourself to be pigeon-holed by others into a ministry role you are not comfortable with, just because it seems to be more prestigious than serving in this vital staff leadership position. Be confident and proud of the place God has given you alongside the lead pastor and find fulfillment in that place.

Effective communication is a must for the successful executive pastor. You will be called upon to communicate with the staff, the congregation, and other leaders, as well as individual congregants. But, there is no line of communication more important than the executive pastor's communication with the lead pastor. Train yourself to communicate clearly with your leader in the

manner he/she prefers. Become proficient at informative yet succinct memos, emails, or verbal briefings. Communicate often, because a lack of communication can breed an atmosphere of suspicion and fear. It is in everyone's best interest for your leader to feel that responsibility placed in your hands is not misplaced. The amount, form, and frequency of communication will be dictated by the needs of the lead pastor. Do whatever it takes, but communicate clearly and often.

One of the goals of a successful executive pastor should be to strive to make the lead pastor look good. Remember, you are an extension of the pastor's ministry, and as such, excellence should always be the rule of thumb in everything. Demonstrate a work ethic that is not only marked by excellence but also a willingness to go the second mile and not just meet the minimum requirements of a job description. Be the kind of executive pastor that takes the time to learn the likes, dislikes, and preferences in the operating style and procedures of the lead pastor. Above all, refuse to be offended when others praise your pastor for things you may have done on his/her behalf. Learn to find joy and satisfaction in not caring who gets the credit for a job well done, as long as the job gets done well.

Many executive pastors can become frustrated because they expect their lead pastor

**One of the GOALS OF A SUCCESSFUL EXECUTIVE PASTOR should be to strive to make the lead pastor look good.**

to be their best friend. The truth is that he/she does not have to be your buddy for the two of you to be close. Master the art of being close without becoming common. Learn to differentiate between times when you are simply acting as friends and when the employer-employee relationship is needed. Care deeply for each other, but keep boundaries of respect and decorum in place. Build love, trust, and common ground by adopting and helping to implement the leader's vision for the church. Early on, establish the rules of access for you as the executive pastor. Never waste the lead pastor's time or abuse the access you have been granted by always being well prepared and ready to take notes when given time with your leader.

Although as executive pastor you are called to be a leader, it is critical that you cultivate a servant mentality. Look for opportunities to serve the man/woman of God in ways that make his/her job easier. Be the kind of executive pastor that delights in

praying daily for the protection, provision, wisdom, and blessing of the lead pastor with whom you serve. Take the initiative and ask him/her if there is anything you can do to make the load a little lighter. Never allow yourself to become jealous of any success, praise, or blessing that comes your leader's way. Above all, the executive pastor with a servant mentality will never allow "us" and "them" thinking to have a foothold in your mind and heart. The executive pastor and the lead pastor are a team working together for the good of God's church.

Staying constantly submissive is another characteristic of the successful executive pastor. Submission is often abused and most often misunderstood. It is never blind obedience. No one should ever feel the need to do or say anything that violates God's standards for living and conduct. Neither is submission obedience with an attitude. That means you may do what you are asked, but you are going to make it perfectly clear you don't like it one bit. Being submissive also does not mean you can never disagree with the lead pastor. Polite disagreement should take place in private and complete agreement in public. Submission at its heart is following the lead pastor as he/she follows Christ. It means joyfully and willingly obeying those over me in the Lord to preserve unity and peace in God's church. Keep in mind that we reap what we sow. The level of submission you get from staff members serving under you will be determined by the level of submission you model.

Perhaps the most prized quality an executive pastor can demonstrate is loyalty.

**BEING SUBMISSIVE**  
does not mean you can  
never disagree with  
the lead pastor.

When working with Dr. Cutshall, I found that the most precious gift I could give to him was my consistent loyalty and support. If you desire to be counted on for your counsel and advice, then the lead pastor must know you can be counted on to keep his/her confidences. Be the person who refuses to participate in any negative talk or gossip. Let those who are attempting to engage you know that everything said will be shared with the lead pastor and you will use names. Prove yourself trustworthy by carrying out all instructions in a precise and timely manner. And when your leader's decisions are unpopular, never allow yourself to become like Absalom and use your position or influence to try to gain favor with others. Be faithful and loyal, and I am certain God will reward you.

In conclusion, allow me to remind you that if God calls you to serve as an executive pastor, you are fulfilling an honorable and needed place in God's church. Always keep in mind those who serve alongside are just as important to the Kingdom as those who are called to be lead pastors. ■

*Chuck Noel serves as Lead Pastor of the Easton Church in Columbus, Ohio.*



## BOOK REVIEW

Tom George

# “SHADOWING JESUS” by Tim Oldfield Gives Concepts of Disciple-Making

IN THE INTRODUCTION to his new book, *Shadowing Jesus: Discovering Discipleship*, Tim Oldfield states, “The message of the gospel is not only a message of Jesus dying for our sins that we might be forgiven and cleansed; but it is also a message of conforming to His perfect image—to His walk and talk. This is growing in grace—the growth our heavenly Father looks to find in us. It is growth determined by walking in lock-step with Him, which means that we shadow Him constantly.

“A shadow never exists without an object and without light. It

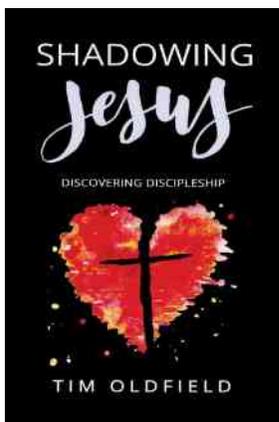
has no substance in itself. It always gets its life from the object upon which the light shines. Therefore, to shadow someone means to stay connected, becoming a reflection of the object. It means to reflect the

knowledge, wisdom, character, vision, and competency of the mentor.

“This is discipleship. As the light of God’s glory shines upon His Son Jesus Christ, we who believe and receive Jesus as our personal Savior become reflections of His righteousness, goodness, and grace. A climate of discipleship cannot exist apart from this shadowing of Jesus.”

And, in his conclusion to the book, Oldfield says, “The kind of discipleship discussed in these pages is the discipleship demanded by Jesus Christ. We could rightly call it *radical* discipleship, because it is deep-seated, far-reaching, and extreme. With Christ, it is all or nothing. To truly be His followers, there can be no in-between, no half-heartedness, no mediocrity. Any call to follow that demands less is not a call from Him.

“Today’s Christian movement in America is systematically removing the tried and true principles of the Christian walk. Responsibilities have been lessened and accountability is more frequently dismissed—all to make the church more seeker-friendly.



Sadly, many churches and church leaders have fallen prey to this culture of political correctness and tend to steer away from any teaching that might be deemed “offensive.”

“Is it possible that the more popular approach to following Christ today—the approach of eliminating biblical guidelines on behavior and encouraging professing believers to “find their own way”—is having a reverse effect on new and younger believers? Think about it. What challenge is left? Remove every mountain, every rapid-filled river, every cascading waterfall, and every barren desert, and why would anyone want to embark on a perceived adventurous journey?”

“Quite likely, younger would-be believers have not been turned off by the great challenges of following Christ as much as they have been disheartened by today’s bland—weak, flavorless, wishy-washy—style of Christianity. It’s probable that the thing people really want is to become part of something so vital, so momentous, that participating actually requires some level of sacrifice.”

In the fifteen chapters between the Introduction and the Conclusion, Oldfield lays out the biblical basis for his thesis and conclusion. The first two chapters deal with the believer’s personhood—Who am I? and Who I am.

Chapters three through nine cover discipleship—its imperatives, disqualifiers, priorities, path, preeminence, prescription, and production.

Chapters ten through twelve outline the principles of obedience, faith, evangelism, prayer, commitment, and servanthood.

Chapter thirteen covers the important subject of discipleship in the home. The author emphasizes that “if discipleship is to become all-encompassing, it must have at its epicenter the family.”

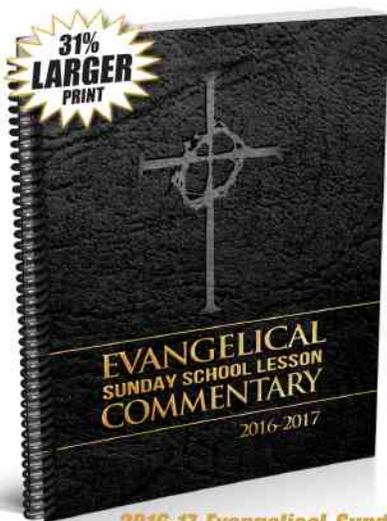
Chapter fourteen emphasizes the need for personal transformation and choosing to change. Says the author, “The idea of radical discipleship, of giving to God everything, has become foreign in America’s church culture. . . . America’s church culture has become so desensitized to spiritual and moral issues and so carnal in its thinking that the behavior in many professing Christians is no different than behaviors expressed by the secular world. Again, until we change the way we think, we will not change the way we behave. . . . The call of God is to pay attention to what He says, keep it, and guard it.”

The final chapter details the varied concepts of disciple-making. These include teaching, systematic instruction, training, correction, counsel, and handing down tradition.

This book can be used for individual study or in a class setting. Regardless of the method used, it is an excellent guide for churches that want to become disciple-making congregations. ■

*Shadowing Jesus: Discovering Discipleship* by Tim Oldfield. Derek Press, 130 pages, paperback, ISBN 978-1-59684-919-8, \$14.99.

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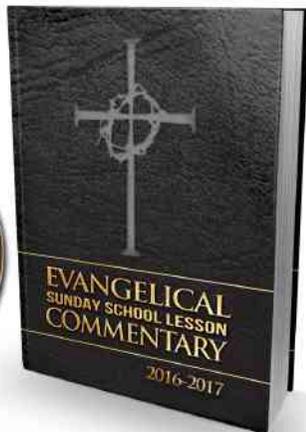
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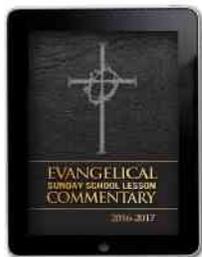
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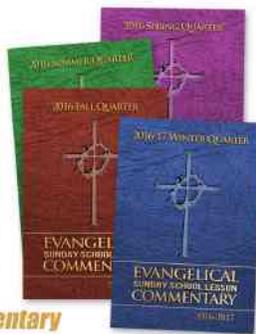
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# CHURCH OF GOD HIGHLIGHTS

*News taking place between September 15, 2016 and January 15, 2017*

## World Missions Announces 'Send the Light' Project

**September 20, 2016**—Church of God World Missions has announced the launch of the Send the Light to the Cities Strategic Initiative.

The foundational scripture for the initiative comes from Matthew 5:14, "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden" (NLT). It ties in with the FINISH Commitment of the Church of God as announced by General Overseer Tim Hill at the recent International General Assembly.

In a presentation at the September Leadership Conference, World Missions Director David M. Griffis outlined the six World Missions commitments as follows:

### **FOCUS on the Light**

We will focus on being bearers of the light of Christ, individually and corporately each moment, every day.

### **INVADE the Darkness**

We will GO into darkened places of the world where God is leading us to invade with His light.

### **NAVIGATE the Needs**

We will navigate the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of people who have gathered in 10 world-class cities, so Truth can be illuminated for them.

### **INTERCEDE for Souls**

We will intentionally present the needs of these cities to God our Creator and Provider, each day.

### **SEND the Light**

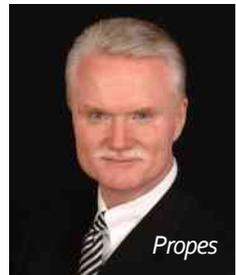
We will send materials, provide education, activate humanitarian efforts, and be zealous in our ministry to the people of these cities.

### **HEAL the Nations**

We will provide prayer, the Word, the Living Water, and love for our fellow man, which will bring complete healing to the inhabitants of these cities.

Griffis and Assistant Director M. Thomas Propes have designated the vision and direction of Church of God World Missions to engage in the Great Commission by explaining: "Our mission is to transform 10 world-class cities, full of darkness, into cities of light." Send the Light to the Cities will establish "lighthouses" in ten major cities around the globe: Amsterdam, Bangkok, Georgetown (Guyana), Kigali, Lomé (Togo), Manila, Mexico City, Prague, Paris, and São Paulo.

Director Griffis set this initiative into motion, declaring, "We will evangelize the cities, plant churches, provide an evangelism and training center in each one, and then, like the Good Samaritan, stay alongside them until they are able to sustain their own commitment to FINISH."



*Church of God Executive Council*



## **Church Planting Bank Funded with Over \$1 Million**

**September 29, 2016—Cleveland, TN**—In a historic move, the International Executive Council of the Church of God launched the Church Planting Designated Fund, also called the Church Planting “Bank,” with assets of more than \$1 million dedicated to starting and building life-giving and life-sustaining churches.

After much work by the Council’s Budget Review Committee, a proposal was submitted for consideration that would have initially funded the “Bank” with \$950,000. That proposal included funds previously allocated for

church planting, along with other funds redesignated for church planting by the Budget Review Committee. The proposal also included a commitment by the Tennessee Church of God State Office of \$100,000.

In an incredible outpouring of love and support for reaching the lost, more than \$105,000 was immediately raised from members of the Council, far exceeding the \$1 million goal.

The operations and procedures for accessing the church planting bank are currently being developed. To learn more about the church planting bank or to contribute toward the fund, please contact Mitch Maloney, Director of USA Missions, at (423) 478-7373.

## Lee University Celebrates 'Find Us Faithful' Campaign

**September 30, 2016—Cleveland, TN—** Completion of a five-year capital campaign that has seen the transformation of the south end of the Lee University campus, was the focus of a week-long set of activities that climaxed in a Friday morning service called "Celebration 2016."

The centerpiece of the event was the dedication of the 41,000 square-foot, \$15 million School of Nursing that opened last month. The three-story structure is one of the three anchor buildings on the new south end of campus. Two years ago, Lee held Celebration 2014 where a new Communication Arts Building was dedicated, which sits on a former downtown retail space. Lee also dedicated the former sanctuary of the First Baptist Church into a performance hall. The former parking area for the church is

home to the School of Nursing and a new athletic field scheduled to host the inaugural season of intercollegiate lacrosse next spring.

At 10:30 a.m., the university's Conn Center was the location of the "Service of Celebration" led by Lee President Dr. Paul Conn. The 90-minute ceremony was filled with music from a Celebration Choir and orchestra, regalia, including 66 alumni and student representatives from 1956–2020 who marched with the faculty, and special recognitions. The highlight of the ceremony was an address by President Conn.

Celebration 2016 and the closing of the five-year *Find Us Faithful* campaign highlighted the following: construction of The Chapel; construction of the New Hughes Hall, a 126-bed men's dormitory; acquisition and renovation of the former First Baptist church campus; construction of the Communication Arts Building; construction of the School of Nursing; development of the



ten-acre South campus area; increasing endowment scholarships by \$8 million, and completion of numerous small campus upgrades.

As part of Celebration 2016, recognition was given to President Conn and his wife, Darlia, who assumed the presidency of Lee on August 1, 1986, and have been leading the university for the past 30 years.

## Church of God Partners and Pastors Play Key Roles in Tragedies

**December 7, 2016**—In the last two weeks, tragedy struck in three different ways in a small pocket of southeast Tennessee and northeast Alabama. All three of the tragedies made national headlines and the local Church of God pastors, agencies, and affiliates were prominent in relief and recovery.

On November 21, six elementary-aged students died in a school-bus crash in Chattanooga. Pastor Kevin Wallace of Redemption Point Church, assisted families and conducted one funeral for a six-year old victim. He also served on a pastor's coalition to coordinate a prayer vigil that week and continues to assist in counseling the children and parents in need.

Ten days later, fire broke out in the hills of the Great Smoky Mountains where Phillip Morris serves as pastor of Parkway Church in Sevierville, Tennessee. One family of five at the Parkway Church tragically lost the mother and two daughters. Morris acted as a spokesperson, as well as counselor to three other families in the church who lost their homes.

Also assisting with the Smoky Mountain fires was Operation Compassion which established disaster relief sites at the Seymour, Tennessee, Church of God, Purpose Church of



God in Pigeon Forge, and the New Hope Church in Kodak. Product was sent from a number of OC's local and regional partners, including the Knoxville Dream Center, Transition Furniture, Steps for Families, and Crystal Springs Water.

That same week, numerous tornadoes touched down in Alabama and southeast Tennessee counties, including McMinn County where John Gentry has served as county mayor for over ten years. A tornado wreaked havoc in the city of Athens, destroying or damaging 30 homes and businesses and injuring two dozen people. Gentry, a Lee University graduate, stepped into his leadership role, including being featured on national news addressing the tragedy.

In that same line of storms, the small city of Rosalie, Alabama, was ravaged by a tornado that killed three people and injured ten others. The Rosalie Church of God was destroyed and Operation Compassion, as they did with the tornadoes that struck Tennessee counties, is deploying several trucks of products and supplies to the area to assist.