

FALL  
2017



# engage

A Journal for  
Church of God  
MINISTRIES

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Five Ways We Quench  
the Holy Spirit

The Tithe of Tithes

Connecting People With God

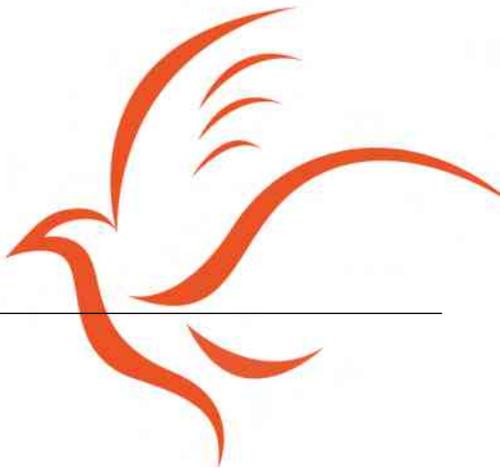
Waterproof Your Faith

Four Ways a Pastor Can  
Show Love for People

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# The Privilege of Tithing

**I**N THIS ISSUE, General Overseer Tim Hill addresses the topic of tithing as part of his “Let’s Talk About It” series. You may have already read it, as this is just one of several venues where the document has or will be distributed. If you haven’t read it, you are encouraged to do so.

In the article, the General gives the foundation and biblical principles for tithing. Period. The tithe of tithes, or what some refer to as the Church of God “franchise fee,” is simply an extension of what God outlines in Scripture as pleasing to Him.

Like my parents, tithing for me has always been a given...the proverbial “firstfruits” of my labors. Even in the toughest of times, the tithe has been the first check written after payday. If for some reason I missed a week, it hung in my conscience the same as a missed car payment. Fortunately, tithing doesn’t carry a late fee!

Unfortunately, many in our movement seem to have lost that firstfruits mentality. Somewhere along the way that holy guilt of not paying tithes has been tamped down or quashed altogether. Perhaps part of it is the reluctance to address the topic from the pulpit in our culture of trying to please everyone.

It’s time we got back to the core principle of tithing: It is a privilege to give. Like

the uneasiness we get when we help out someone begging on the street (not knowing what they will do with our donation), we should relax in knowing that “God has this!” (See Malachi 3:10.) ■

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

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by J. LEE GRADY

# FIVE WAYS WE QUENCH THE HOLY SPIRIT

How would we respond today if God wanted to repeat the miracle of Pentecost in one of our carefully scripted Sunday meetings? Would we EMBRACE THE UNEXPECTED WILDNESS of that Acts 2 moment. Or, would we TELL THE SPIRIT TO BEHAVE?



**P**ENTECOST was an abrupt heavenly invasion. It wasn't planned in a staff meeting; it came "suddenly," according to Acts 2:2. The noise of wind was not on the program; neither were flames of holy fire.

No one in that prayer meeting in the Upper Room in Jerusalem expected to speak a supernatural language. Certainly Peter did not expect to give his unrehearsed sermon, and I'm sure he was surprised when 3,000 people were converted. The church was born in a moment of unearthly, unimaginable strangeness.

We will celebrate Pentecost this year on June 4. Would we have room for this miracle today if God wanted to do it again? Would we welcome the interruption? I fear we have enacted so many human controls that the Spirit is totally left out of our Sunday experience. If we don't give Him free reign, worship can become a man-made ritual that is stripped of God's power.

The apostle Paul warned us not to "quench" the Spirit in 1 Thessalonians 5:19. *Quench* means "to extinguish a fire." I fear that today our trendy churches have been equipped with state-of-the-art fire extinguishers that do a professional job of eliminating any risk of a holy outbreak. Let's be mindful of the most common ways that we quench the Holy Spirit.

**1. We ignore the Holy Spirit.** Many churches today make no mention of the Spirit. He is, as author Francis Chan says, the "forgotten God." We play it safe by focusing on Jesus and salvation—yet we forget that Jesus talked incessantly about the Spirit. And it was Jesus who told His followers that they must be "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). We are not being faithful to Christ if we don't take people into the deeper waters of the Spirit that He Himself promised.

**2. We limit the gifts of the Holy Spirit.** There are thousands of churches in this country that teach that the gifts of the Spirit no longer function. Even though the apostle Paul said, "Do not forbid speaking in tongues" (1 Corinthians 14:39 NIV) and "Do not despise prophecies" (1 Thessalonians 5:20 NKJV), speaking in tongues and prophecy are off-limits—along with healing and miracles.

It was a lack of faith that created the doctrine known as "cessationism." Respected Bible teachers have convinced whole sectors of the church that God no longer operates supernaturally. Christianity has been reduced to an intellectual argument, devoid of power. And even in churches that wear the Pentecostal label, we have created such tight controls on our meetings that the gifts can't function.

**“GOD FORGIVE US. We cannot use the Spirit or His gifts to achieve our selfish agenda. Either we submit to His plan, or He withdraws and lets us play our silly games.”**

**3. We misuse or abuse the gifts of the Holy Spirit.** We Pentecostals and Charismatics have sometimes quenched the Spirit more than Evangelicals who deny His power. We have whacked people to the floor or waved our sport coats in the air to prove our “anointing,” manipulated audiences with mood music, used fancy titles to fake apostolic authority, and manufactured counterfeit miracles to con people to give in offerings.

God forgive us. We cannot use the Spirit or His gifts to achieve our selfish agenda. Either we submit to His plan, or He withdraws and lets us play our silly games.

**4. We misrepresent the Holy Spirit.** How often have we heard, “Thus says the Lord,” or “God told me this,” when the Spirit had nothing to do with the message we cooked up on our own. When we give the Spirit credit for messages that did not originate from Him, we take the Lord’s name in vain. There are many popular “prophets” given platforms today, but some of them bring lying words and false visions. Never let a charming false prophet mislead you with flattery, manipulation, exotic visions or promises of wealth.

**5. We divide the Holy Spirit.** When the apostle Paul corrected the Corinthians

for quenching the Spirit, he addressed sexual sin and the abuse of spiritual gifts. But first He challenged them on the way they were treating each other. “Has Christ been divided?” he asked in 1 Corinthians 1:13. We grieve the Spirit when we judge each other, build walls, divide ourselves racially, follow personalities or create camps according to doctrine.

The secret of Pentecost is found in Acts 2:1: “They were all with one accord in one place” (KJV). Can that be said of us today? We are divided between black and white, white and Hispanic, Republican and Democrat, Protestant and Catholic, denominational and non-denominational, Evangelical and Pentecostal. We are fragmented and weak. We have quenched the Spirit with our disunity.

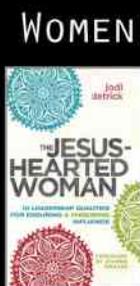
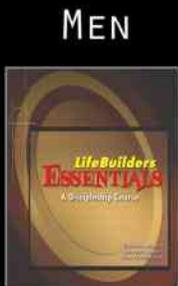
Please join me in praying for a new Pentecost. Let’s throw away our fire extinguishers and invite a fresh heavenly flame to engulf the church. ■

*J. Lee Grady was editor of Charisma for 11 years before he launched into full-time ministry in 2010. Today, he directs **The Mordecai Project**, a Christian charitable organization that is taking the healing of Jesus to women and girls who suffer abuse. This article originally ran in Charisma News.*

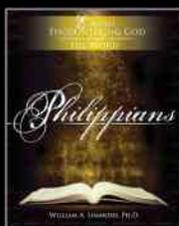
Over 60% of Millennials (age 20-29) and 42% of those 30 and over say they would be willing to study the Bible if a friend invited them to do so.

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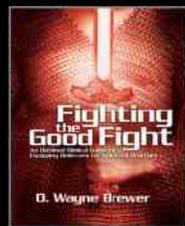
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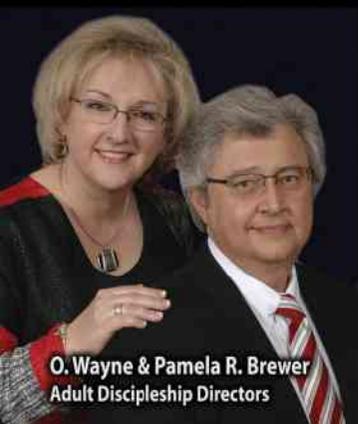
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O. Wayne & Pamela R. Brewer  
Adult Discipleship Directors

by RICK WARREN

# FOUR WAYS A PASTOR CAN SHOW LOVE FOR PEOPLE

**P**ASTOR, you set the tone and atmosphere in your congregation. If you want to know the warmth of your church, put the thermometer in your own mouth.

I've visited some churches where the pastor's lack of love is the main reason the church isn't growing. Some pastors, by their cold demeanor and lack of personal warmth, virtually guarantee that visitors won't come back.

And in some larger churches, I've gotten the impression that the pastor loves an audience, but doesn't like people.

Great preaching without love is just noise in God's view.

Every time I speak at Saddleback Church, I repeat a simple reminder to myself. I never preach or teach without thinking this:

*Father, I love You, and You love me. I love these people, and You love these people. Love these people through me. This is not an audience to be feared, but a family to be loved. There is no fear in love; perfect love casts out all fear.*

Let me suggest some practical ways that you can demonstrate your love:

## MEMORIZE NAMES

Remembering names shows that you're interested in people. Nothing sounds sweeter



to a second-time visitor than hearing you use his or her name. While I don't have a particularly good memory, I work hard at remembering names. In the early years of Saddleback, I took pictures of people and made flash cards to help me remember their names.

I knew every person's name in our church up to about 3,000 in attendance. After that, my brain fried. I ask new members in the membership class to tell me their names on three different occasions to help me remember it. When you work hard at remembering people's names, it pays great relational dividends.

## **PERSONALLY GREET PEOPLE BEFORE AND AFTER SERVICES**

Be approachable. Don't hide out in your study. For the first three years of our church, we met in a fenced-in high school where everyone had to exit through the same gate. Each week, I personally greeted every person that came to our church. They couldn't get out without passing by me!

One of the best ways to warm up a crowd is to meet as many people as you can before you speak to them. Get out among the crowd and talk to people. It shows you are interested in them personally.

## **TOUCH PEOPLE**

At Saddleback we believe in a high-touch ministry. We give a lot of hugs and handshakes and pats on the back. Today, our society is filled with lonely people who are starving for the affirmation of a loving touch. So many individuals live by themselves and have

told me the only loving physical contact they ever get is at church. When I hug somebody on Sunday morning, I often wonder how long that hug will have to last.

Study the ministry of Jesus, and you see the powerful effect of giving people a look, a word, and a touch. Look people in the eyes when you talk with them. Eye contact says, "You matter to me." Give everyone a word of encouragement. Offer a warm, personal touch to show you really care.

## **USE A WARM, PERSONAL STYLE IN WRITING TO VISITORS**

We have a series of letters I've written to first-time, second-time, and third-time visitors, telling them how glad we are to see them. I don't sign them with "Dr. Warren" or even "Pastor Warren." I simply sign them as "Rick." I want visitors to feel they can relate to me on a first-name basis.

If you send a letter to visitors, write it like you talk to people, not in stilted, formal language. I received a visitor letter once that said, "Our church would like to acknowledge your presence with us last Sunday and extend to you a cordial invitation to return on the next Lord's Day."

Does anyone really talk like that? Instead say, "It was really great to have you. Hope you can come back."

One of the most important issues every pastor must decide is whether you want to impress people or influence them.

You can impress people from a distance, but you have to get up close to people to love and influence them. ■

# THE



# OF TITHES

*Let's Talk About It*

by **TIM HILL**  
General Overseer

I AM AWARE that the topic of denominational financial support, at least for some, has been one of frequent discussion. In writing this article, I'll try not to be overly theological, blindly loyal or stubbornly denominational, but I will do my best to articulate past historicity, present accountability, and future responsibility.

Recently, in the April 2017 Executive Council Meeting, I shared a presentation entitled, "Priorities, Paradigms, and Purpose." This presentation suggested several items that I personally believe the Council should consider and deliberate in the foreseeable future. I will write more about those items later. However, among them, I spoke about a "Kingdom-building" budget that must help feed and give undeniable support to the ten core values of the Church of God. Early in the presentation, I made the following observation:

"While our organization's credit history describes our past, our checkbook describes

our present and our budget describes our future, all three describe our priorities."

## **PAST HISTORICITY**

As general overseer, I daily live with the fact that I, along with the Executive Committee and the Executive Council, am entrusted with the responsibility to ensure that the Kingdom resources which flow through this denomination are effectively and honorably utilized in ways that testify of Great Commission purpose and accountability. Most of the funding that allows the Executive Council to formulate and direct the basic ministry budget each year is generated through what has historically been referred to as the "Tithe of Tithes." Simply put, the phrase "Tithe of Tithes" refers to the practice of dedicating 10 percent of the monthly amount of tithes given by local church congregants, with one half (5 percent) dedicated for the ministries and administrative function of Church of God State/Regional Offices and one

half (5 percent) dedicated for the ministries and administrative function of the Church of God International Offices. From an International context, one-fourth of the amount coming to International Offices is dedicated to Church of God World Missions. It should also be noted that much of the World Missions areas participate in the tithing system as well. Tithing outside the United States is admirably honored and helps to fund ministry within those particular regions outside the United States where the Church of God is represented.

When establishing the system of a local church “tithing” on the tithes that it took in, our early church leaders seemed to have recognized a simple principle—only that which is shared can be multiplied. Now called by many the “principle of multiplication,” it was an acknowledgement of the truth found in Romans 11:16 (NKJV) that “if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.” Tithing was seen as more than a source of income for the denomination. Those early church fathers rightfully believed that if believers could be blessed by tithing, then a corporate blessing could also be on the local church if it also tithed.

Historically, the prescribed amount of the Tithe of Tithes has experienced some adjustments as the Church of God matured as a movement. Over the years, the General Assembly adopted measures that incrementally reduced the Tithe of Tithes amount sent from the local churches, purposefully allowing local ministries more flexibility while requiring state/regional offices and International Offices to recalibrate methods, means, and ministry

to “do more with less,” with the goal of experiencing growth to make up and hopefully go beyond the initial difference in income. The rationale was that “with more funds available locally to spur growth, the denomination would also experience growth as well.”

Although few are around that remember such, the Tithe of Tithes, combined with missions giving, was set at 25 percent in 1938. It stayed at 25 percent for the next 36 years.

The first reduction was introduced in 1974 and phased in over the following 16 years, bringing the total Tithe of Tithes down to 15 percent. The most recent reduction began in 2010 and was completed in 2014, resulting in a total Tithe of Tithes of 10 percent.

## **PRESENT ACCOUNTABILITY**

The current budget year for the Church of God International Offices will close on August 31, 2017. The revenue projected by the previous Executive Council, and supervised by the current Council, is \$19,761,180. This is the projected tithe amount received from local churches available for budgeting purposes after the General Assembly designated allocation for World Missions has been distributed. The World Missions percentage is projected to equate to \$6,587,060—one-fourth of the overall budget. Combined, these figures total \$26,348,240.

While the budget allocation amount of more than \$26 million is a lot of money to fund ministries around the world, please think about these things as you process this information:

- It is important to note that the Tithe Fund doesn't provide entirely for any of the

denomination's ministries, nor many of the administrative functions of the denomination. Each year specific allocations are made to these areas of ministry to help bridge a division's responsibility of raising funds in order to totally address their financial obligations. Simply put, many divisions of the church would be unable to function if they did not raise money on their own to supplement their budget allocation.

- It is also important to note that divisional budget revenue is largely fed by fundraising, partnerships, sales, gifts, grants, conference registration fees, tuition, etc. All of these combined with the Tithe Fund "basic budget" allocations bring about a larger operational budget. For example, while Care Ministries' annual operational budget is well over \$10 million, the Tithe Budget allocation for Care Ministries is just under \$500,000 for this current year. Similar scenarios as this exist throughout the church.

- While \$250,000 of the current year's budget was designated for Church Planting, the Executive Council in recent meetings has been able to target available funds of \$1.5 million to create the "Church Planting Bank."

- Finally, I would note that while the tithe figure of 5 percent represents revenue for ministry at the international level, ideally a similar amount should also be reflected as a grand total when combining the Tithe figures among all states and regions.

The projection is that \$531,696,800 in tithes will be given in Church of God congregations in the United States this fiscal year, meaning that \$53,169,680 in Tithe of Tithes will be divided among state/regional

offices and the Church of God International Offices. More important, that means that \$478,527,120 will remain in the local church to reach the harvest in 6,500 communities where the Church of God has a presence.

## **FUTURE RESPONSIBILITY**

It can be said, without argument, that God has blessed the Church of God through the generosity of hard-working and faithful people who willingly give to support the ministries of our movement. Do we have enough revenue? Rather than answer that with the expected "No," I will simply say that "as our days are, so shall our strength be." God always meets every need. Obviously, there is always a desire to generate more in order to do more, but without doubt, the Church of God has been entrusted with tremendous resources. This fact brings to bear the truth that "to whom much is given, much shall be required."

As a denominational leader, I am required and even spiritually obligated to:

- Be accountable to everyone who helps finance and labor in the harvest.
- Be accessible to those with questions, observations, and even commentary regarding denominational revenue and expenditures.
- Be active in inspiring ministry growth without becoming administratively burdened down in the process.
- Be attentive to the call from local churches and pastors for more expedient and effective resources.
- Be aggressive in guarding against institutionalism that lends to funding failures rather than successes.

- Be adaptable to new methods that produce more money for the harvest, rather than self-absorbing those funds and losing them to administrative machinery.

- Be aware that trust is the foundation of lasting relationships—not branding, not denominational loyalty, not legislation—but trust.

### **So Here Are Some Realities:**

The vast majority of churches are, and regularly remain, current with their Tithe of Tithes. Like clockwork and with uninterrupted consistency, more than 65 percent of the churches in the USA send their Tithe of Tithes on time each month. However, there is a growing and even alarming number of churches who have fallen woefully behind since the economic recession of 2008.

There are some pastors who are challenged in council meetings by those who ask “what are we getting for this money we send to Cleveland every month?” Often that question is accompanied by pressure to consider diversion, dollar limits, and even nonparticipation.

For some, the challenge and responsibility of making church payments, paying for staff, developing programs and providing for family contends with their commitment to honor the Tithe of Tithes system developed by the General Assembly.

While there may be a few pastors and churches that could, but for some reason do not participate in the Tithe of Tithes process, by and large most pastors feel awkward and even embarrassed that their tithe delinquency has grown so large. Some feel isolated and have even withdrawn from fellowship

opportunities and functions in which they have traditionally participated.

And yes, unfortunately, there are those who see the 10 percent as a “franchise fee” or a “tax,” rather than a tithe. Does that bother me? Sure it does, and on several fronts, but I will save that discussion for a later date.

### **My Commitment Is This:**

- I, along with the Executive Committee and Executive Council, will work to ensure that pastors can answer the “Value Add” question every day of the year. When the “What do we get out of this?” question is asked by their members, pastors must have an immediate answer. Our people want to know that their Kingdom dollars are going toward Kingdom dynamics which effect change in this world. They want to know that our mission is the Great Commission and that our distinctive as a denomination is clear. They want to know that their children have a future as part of a “difference-making” movement that impacts the culture they wake up in every day. Local leaders want to know that they can be resourced, equipped, and valued as part of a movement that God has raised up for end-time impact.

- I will work with the Executive Committee in finding ways to bring every pastor and church that has fallen behind in tithing back on board in Christ-honoring ways that break the ceilings of limitations, awkwardness, and regret. At the same time, we will affirm accountability and helpful preventatives that provide corrective steps to keep the local pastor and church from reverting back into the same old patterns of financial lapse.

- I will join the Executive Council in honoring and celebrating the vast majority of churches of every size who consistently tithe in order for the Church of God to experience maximum ministry around the world.

I could list all the tithing scriptures. I could cite all the appropriate passages from the Church of God General Assembly *Minutes*. I could give you all the typical statements you would expect from a denominational leader . . . but you know what you know and you believe what you believe about tithing—personally, locally, and denominationally. My goal today is to continue to build a bridge of trust that will reconnect each of us back to our mission of fulfilling the Great Commission.

## CONCLUSION

So, while I have not come close to answering every question, and I may have created more questions than I have answered, I hope I have at least exposed the 800-pound gorilla in the room and brought him from behind the curtain of restrained conversation so we can at least have conversations about this challenge and make progress together. ■

*Note: The fiscal year-end report of the Church of God International Office can be accessed by any **credentialed minister** via the online reporting portal. Visit [www.churchofgod.org/online-reporting](http://www.churchofgod.org/online-reporting).*



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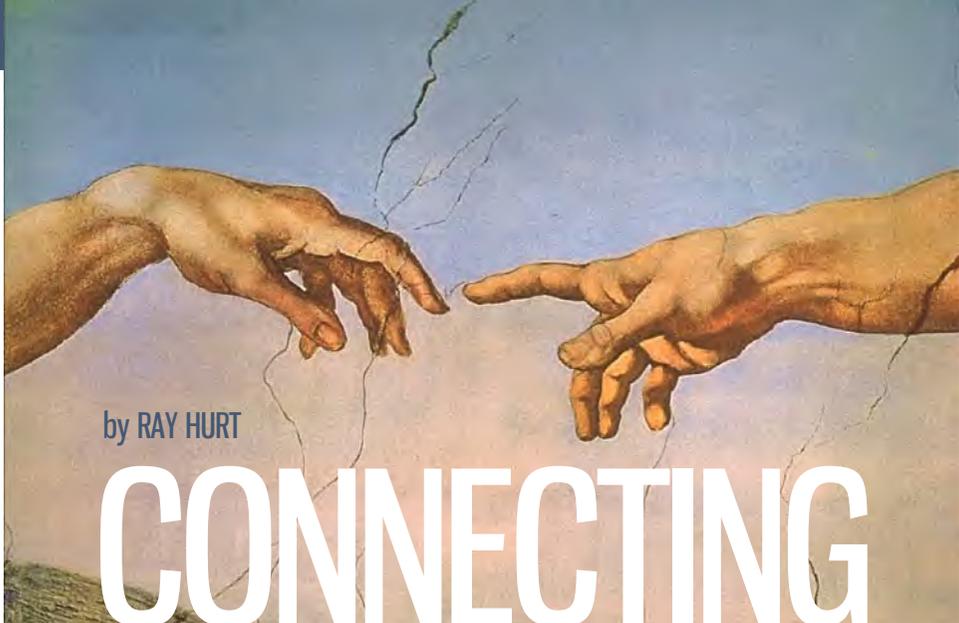
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by RAY HURT

# CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH GOD

**T**HE FAMILY WAS laughing, joking, having a wonderful time until little Billy stepped out too far into deeper water. No one knew how to swim and there was no time to call for help. In a moment of inspiration, Dad said to someone, "Take my hand and wade out to Billy, and I will pull you both back to shore."

Ministers are in the business of rescuing lost children drowning in the dark depths of a sinful world. We extend our hand out hoping they will grab hold and be pulled to safety. They don't know how to swim out of trouble. Many times they don't even realize the danger. And everyone has heard stories of how drowning men have actually pulled rescuers under.

The key to this little story is that it is the Father who is the anchor, and for Billy to be

rescued, someone had to be willing to give a hand, not only to Billy, but also to the Father who is more important. The minister does not have the power to save, but when he places his hand in the hand of the Father, there is a mighty saving force pulling against the waves, pulling against the clutching depths.

Long ago I realized the only way I could help people was to be the connecting hand that pulled them to God. It is a priestly function with a prophet's power. It is a call to take up the cross of Christ! Jesus was on mission. He had purpose. He was focused on one major goal. Jesus said it: "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10 KJV).

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world

through him might be saved” (John 3:17 KJV). This mission, this ultimate purpose did not end on the cross. Jesus raised up disciples to take that burden and carry it all over the world (see Matthew 28:19). This mission so dominates the call of God to service, that it clearly motivates the church above all other concerns. In Acts 2, the first message preached by the apostle Peter resulted in thousands being converted. Phillip preached Christ to Samaria in Acts 8. Paul even instructed Pastor Timothy to do the work of an evangelist.

I listened to a discussion of a group of seminary students having lunch together some years ago. They were Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, others, and one lone Pentecostal. They agreed together that it was incorrect for a minister to put converting unbelievers at the top of their priority list. It was socially out of bounds to try to push their faith. Actually, the lone Pentecostal objected passionately. It seems many have abandoned the mission of reaching the lost. Without that pressing passion, they don’t feel forced to reach for the Father’s hand, because they can ignore the floundering, sinking Billy. If you do not have to reach out into dangerous waters, there is little need to grab hold of the powerful hand that pulls to safety.

Ministers who have taken on the mission of Christ to reach sinking souls realize they can’t pull them to safety. All they can do is connect them with the Father’s hand—the One who has the power to break them free from the depths.

For me, this has meant that every day I must start that day by reaching for the Father’s hand. Without His power and pull, no one can be rescued. My abilities are limited, and the world will pull me under if I depend on my own strength. Without a prayer life that connects me with the Father, it will be impossible for me to bring Billy’s hand into the hand of the Father. People know when we have been with God. There is a sense of spiritual presence that radiates from a person who has been intimate with God. Moses’ face shown with the glory! (See Exodus 34.) The Sanhedrin noted that the ignorant and unlearned disciples had been with Jesus (see Acts 4:13). Paul proclaimed, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13 KJV). When a minister has been with God it will show; it will be sensed. He will enter the sanctuary not as a hireling laborer, but a true worshiper, leading by example in reaching for the hand of God in passionate worship. People will see and sense a sincere longing in such a minister to get his hand in the hand of the Father.

In connecting people to His power as a priest of God, my tools are simple. I need the Spirit and the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). I have already pointed out that it is impossible to supernaturally affect the lives of others unless we have made a personal connection with the source of saving power. Paul was keenly aware of this when he said, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-

away" (1 Corinthians 9:27 KJV). We need our hand in the hand of the Father. We need to walk in the Spirit if we are going to connect people with God.

We must not only have that personal connection with God through prayer and worship, but we must also live in the Word. The writings of the early church repeatedly emphasize the power of the Word to create secure, affective mature disciples (John 6:63; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:12-14). The preaching of the gospel was believed to be worthy of double honor (see 1 Timothy 5:17). Today, many ministers and their followers fail to understand the significant power of the Word. Many no longer believe the Bible to be Word of God. It is this lack of respect and faith in the Word that has stunted the growth of many disciples and stolen the faith that the Word creates (see Romans 10:17).

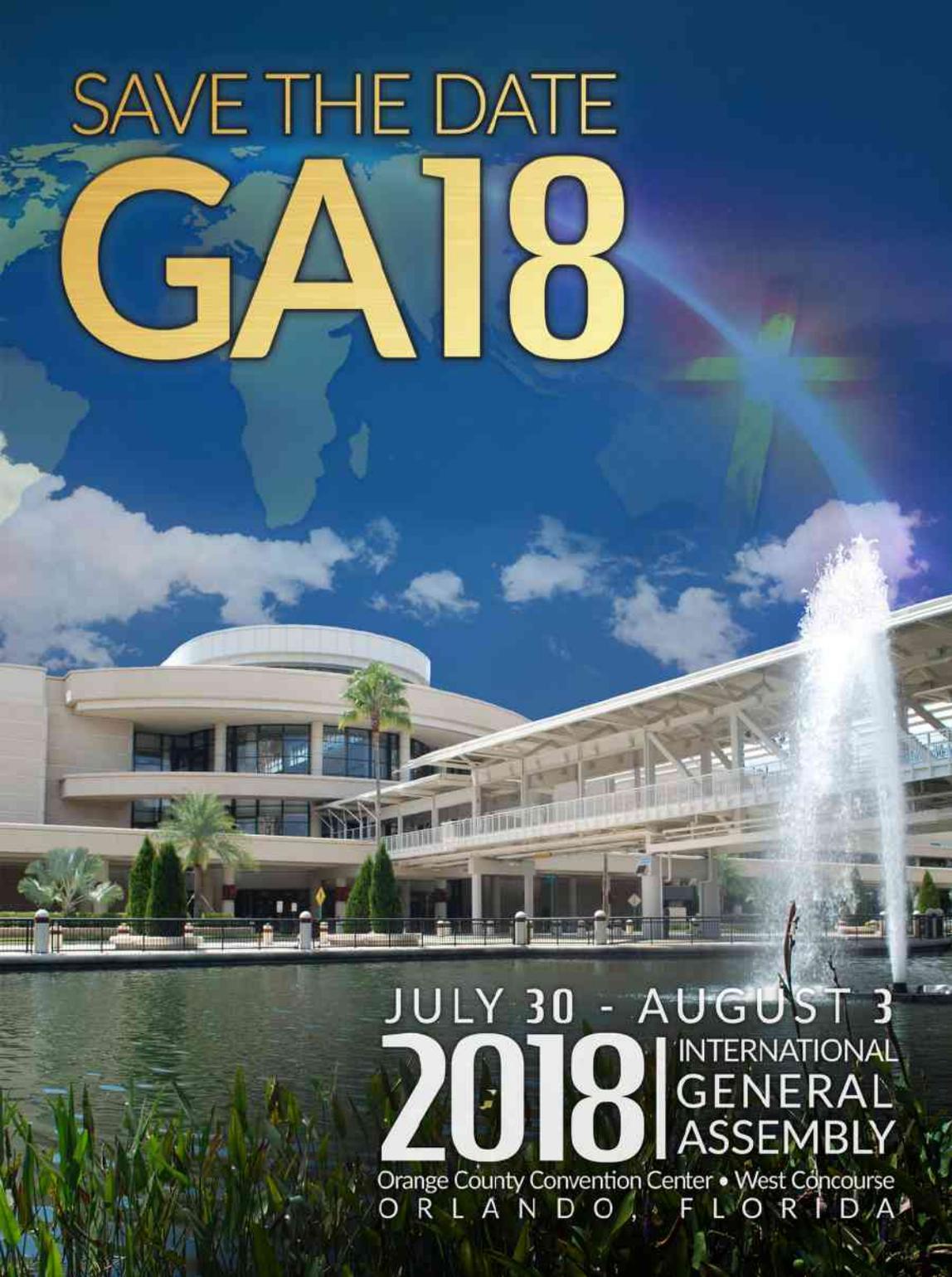
Finally, to understand our call to connect people with God, we have to know that discipling is not finished until we not only pull them out of the depths, and put their hands in His hand, but also equip them for service. Paul wrote, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11, 12 KJV). I have been asked many times how we have grown to such a body of believers, having had Sundays with over 2,000 in attendance in a town of less than 6,000. Our entire staff lives by my rule: "Don't let me catch you

doing something you can train somebody else to do." Even now we are committed to teaching and training. Our staff meetings begin with a training session. All staff members are to have at least two people they are mentoring for ministry. Almost everyone on our staff came up through our training programs. They are the product of determined discipleship and motivated mentoring. As lead pastor, I still meet regularly with around 12 young ministers to train, equip, and mentor them for ministry.

Our commitment to connecting people with God is to give them a hand out of bondage. It is to place their hand in God's hand, help them learn how to grow in grace, and develop spiritual enablement. We are committed to guiding them through our system of introduction to the belief structure of the church, the discovery of their call, and the pathway to fulfilling that call. Some find their way into our Music Department, others into children's, students, seniors, compassion, etc. ministries. If they desire to move beyond ministry on that level, they are introduced to our mentoring program and to our ministerial development program that includes denominational licensing and local ministerial development.

To *connect people with God* you have to be personally *connected*, you have to be personally *committed*, and you have to be personally *called!* ■

**Dr. Ray E. Hurt** is pastor of the Princeton Church of God in Princeton, West Virginia.



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# KNOWING AND NO-ING:

## Ten Things to Help Youth Ministers Prepare for Student Suicidality

by CASEY S. COLE

**E**VERY MINISTER can remember their first true crisis phone call. Mine came on a Friday night around the end of my first year as a youth pastor. When the name of your favorite eighteen-year-old shows up on your phone around 1 a.m., you know that caller is not calling just to say, “I love you.” When I answered the phone that night, I knew Katie was in trouble. I knew there would be tears—both hers and mine. I knew there would be heartbreak. I knew there would be a follow-up ice cream outing to talk about it. What I did not expect was the suicidality.

Katie was smart, talented, beautiful, personable, and extremely sweet and kind. She was the perfect high school girl, the dream student. Every student pastor would have wanted

her. She couldn't meet a stranger and was happily engaged in all areas of her small community. She had all the potential a high school senior could have, and her future shown as



brightly as her smile. Yet, a deeper look into Katie's eyes revealed that her smile was a well-constructed mask that covered deep wounds.

Katie had the rough family life that so many of our students have. A few months prior to the call, Katie had broken up with a long-term boyfriend for a new, older guy who everyone warned her was bad news. I cautioned her then, but I saw in her eyes that she didn't care what I had to say about this one. Her heart was set, and I could see my own eighteen-year-old self in her and knew how my youth pastor must have felt then.

As much as every youth pastor hates to see a student "missionary dating," we all pray they'll get it out of their system and move on with little-to-no harm. Katie was not so lucky. That night she told me she found out she was pregnant last week. Two days later she told the man, and immediately he cut all ties to her. Two more days later, she miscarried. I tried in that moment to wrap my head around the roller coaster of emotions and the depth of her grief. She called me, because she didn't know what to do. What scared me the most is that I didn't know what to do.

I realized then that all the Greek words, exegetical tools, and program-planning ideas I knew were of no use in that moment. My training had not prepared me for this, and I felt helpless when Katie told me she didn't want to live anymore. Nobody had told me this was part of the job. I was supposed to make Jesus cool and make pizza appear. I didn't have personal experience to fall back on. I didn't know the first thing to say, and "I'm sorry" did not seem to be cutting it.

When I answered the call that night, my husband woke, too. Thanks be to God, crisis is nothing new to him. His job at the time was crisis intake at the local hospital. I put Katie on speaker phone so that he could hear. He mouthed things to me so that I could respond properly to her. Some of his responses surprised me and were difficult to ask her. I would have never asked if she had a weapon or a plan to actually take her own life. He urged me to ask anyway. He assessed that while she had suicidal ideation, she was not in immediate danger. He talked me through creating a safety plan with her, and a third party was brought in to be with her that night as we gathered long-term resources for her. Today, Katie has a wonderful husband and a darling baby girl. There is always hope.

We must be prepared to deal with suicidality as part of our ministries. While this might seem like a daunting task, the good news is you don't have to be a clinical psychologist to be properly prepared. Unless we are mental health professionals, diagnosing and treating students is not our job. It's our job to connect them with the proper resources. Below are a few things that every student minister can know to serve students better. The first are circumstances for which we must learn to say "no."

- **No texting.** If a student sends you a text or social media message with suicidal ideation, call them immediately. Tone doesn't translate via text, and it's a great legal liability. Find out where they are. If they don't answer, leave a message. Tell them to call you or you will call the police.

“PAY ATTENTION to those who disengage or change drastically, but remember it could also be the smiling student of perfect appearance.”

• **No diagnosis.** It's not our job. It's much more complicated than we might think. We are untrained and certainly don't want regrets; neither do we want to overreact. Our input, however, can be helpful to professionals.

• **No secrets.** In most circumstances, their guardians need to be informed. We may feel torn if the student asks us not to, and we worry about losing their trust. We must be more worried about losing *them*. Also, be sure to tell appropriate pastoral staff so they can support you and the student.

• **No joking.** Be careful not to tolerate joking about suicide or homicide. Try to eliminate any jesting vocabulary of death. This is not to say one should ignore the topic pastorally. We need to address it before it comes up, so students don't feel alone and can play offense.

• **No shaming.** Students who are suicidal do not need to “get in trouble” for their struggle. Most students who battle with suicidality deal with rejection, loneliness, and belonging. They need to know they matter.

• **Know what to ask.** Be brave enough to ask if they have intentions, a plan, or means to cause harm. These may seem like hard questions, but they are necessary.

• **Know resources.** We are not alone in this. There are call lines, crisis numbers, in-take centers, and all kinds of therapy services available. Student ministers should know what is offered in their area, *before* the crisis hits. Make sure your whole student staff knows these resources.

• **Know their location.** Don't let them leave a safe location, and don't let them be alone. If you or someone else can't get to them quick enough, call the police, but do not lose contact with the student. Also remember to get them the long-term accountability that is best for them. You can't be with them every moment of every day.

• **Know who's at-risk.** Be aware of those students who have a higher likelihood of suicidality. Students who struggle with their sexuality and students who engage in self-harm are especially at-risk. Pay attention to those who disengage or change drastically, but remember it could also be the smiling student of perfect appearance.

• **Know the plan.** Connect with them *first*. Let them know you are there with them and for them. Second, genuinely listen to them as a spiritual presence. Compassionately be the presence of God in the moment. Third, assist them. Help them find the resources for intervention, but also follow up. Fourth, be prepared to let the clinicians do their job psychologically, but be prepared to do yours as a priest of their soul. Love them all the way through the process.

The same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead lives in us, to give us the wisdom, love, and courage of God. You, too, are not alone. ■

*Casey Cole is a lecturer in theology at the Lee University School of Religion in Cleveland, Tennessee.*



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# HOW DO YOU SEE IT?

by JEREMY ISAACS

## Understanding the Unique Vision of Your Local Church

**W**ANT YOU TO ENVISION a sunset. It doesn't really matter which one. Maybe you envision the sunset over your house. Perhaps it was the sunset over the ocean or mountains where you vacation. Regardless of what you pictured, think about all the possible sunsets from those reading this article. Which one is right?

That's not a trick question. If everyone pictured something different, they can't all be right could they? Now picture *the church*. I think you see where I'm going with this illustration. If you picture the little church you grew up in, and someone else pictures the large Baptist church where they got saved, and yet another person pictures the gathering of eight adults in their living room in preparation of planting a church later this fall... which one is right?

My point isn't to argue for any sort of universalism, but to insist that everyone has a different idea of what the church looks like. This only becomes a problem when you gather a group of people together and the expression of church in practice is different

from the expression of church in their head. If you've ever had someone schedule a meeting to discuss the worship style, student ministry, Sunday school vs. small groups, (insert your favorite potentially divisive issue here), you were meeting with someone who saw a different sunset than you did.

The solution is to identify and communicate the unique *vision* of your local church.

I would contend that the *mission* of every church is the same. Somewhere between the commission to "go and make disciples...teaching them to obey" and the instructions to the Ephesians to "equip the saints to do the work of ministry" is where we find most churches. So if the mission is the same, what separates us?

### VISION

Author Seth Godin talks about "purple cows" in his book, *Purple Cow: Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable*. He encourages you to imagine you are driving down a country road with cows on every side. Black and white cows after black and white cows tend to run together in your periphery. Then you see it—a purple cow.

You would pull over, get out of the car, and take a picture. It's so unique that it stands out.

I believe this is the required tough work of every pastor and leadership team to tackle. We must identify our "purple cow." What makes us unique? We aren't asking what makes us *better* than other churches; rather, we're just asking what makes us *different* from other churches in our community.

There are a number of ways you could begin this process but I'm going to give you three ways to get started.

**1. Evaluate the collective gifts of your current attenders.** The words of Paul to the Corinthian church regarding spiritual gifts help us to see the collective body in function. How has God gifted your church? Perhaps He has uniquely gifted you in ways that make it obvious how you can best serve your community. Some churches are ridiculously gifted in the arts. Other churches have an overabundance of those with the gift of helps and a heart to meet needs. It's easy to copy someone's vision statement, but does it fit your body?

**2. Identify the "tribes" of people who already attend your church.** There is a group, or groups of people, who already identify with the ministries of your church. Without using this as an excuse to be exclusive, what if you identified the things about your church that are appealing to these tribes. Perhaps even ask them. You might discover some of the things that you do really well, or help you reach people. Once you identify the tribes and you know what connects them to your church, you can use this to help you determine the unique vision for your church to reach others.

**3. Develop a burden for an issue in your community.** One of my favorite Bible stories is that of Nehemiah. His effort to rebuild the wall is inspiring. However, it is important to note that he was immediately burdened to do the work when word reached him of the condition of the wall. Later, when he arrived to the city, he quietly rode around the devastation, allowing God to birth a burden and a plan in him prior to the work beginning. Nehemiah spent four months developing the vision so that the work could be completed in 52 days. Don't rush the cultivation process.

What is happening in your community that breaks your heart? When was the last time you rode around your city asking God for a burden and a plan to be part of the solution? Some communities struggle with issues of violence and are desperate for peacemakers. Other cities boast higher than normal averages for rates of divorce. A church committed to equipping husbands and wives would be a purple cow in that city. Do you know the climate of adoption or foster care in your community? When was the last time you spent an afternoon volunteering at the community health clinic or sitting in the lobby of the Assisted Living facility? If you will position yourself near the need, I promise God will help you see how you can help.

## A FEW WORDS OF CAUTION

**Make sure it's a God-vision and not just a good-vision.** Saturate your discovery process in prayer. While it's definitely okay to look at other churches or resources, I would make sure that the loudest voice is the One who called you to this place. He knows best what needs to be done.

**The Enemy will fight back.** Nehemiah faced criticism when the work began. So will you. When you become laser-focused on the task at hand, the Enemy recognizes that he will lose the easy access he once had, and he will not stay silent. But when you are confident that this vision is from God, you can stand firm, because He has gone before you.

**The people will grow weary.** Nehemiah realized that people wouldn't fight for a wall. So he repurposed their work. He had them stand with their families while doing the work, but when it came time to fight, they were to put down their tools and fight for their sons and daughters. He was casting the vision in a different way. You will have to vary your approach. It has been said that "vision leaks," so you must constantly find new and creative ways to keep it in front of the people.

Your community needs you to know what

your sunset looks like. When you find it with clarity, it makes ministry simpler. Your vision becomes the filter by which you do ministry. Those things that don't fit must be evaluated, adjusted to fit the vision, or ended to allow those resources to be reallocated.

Put in the hard work of seeking God's vision for your church. Then consistently communicate it. If you do, there will come a day when you ask someone what the sunset looks like and they might just describe the same one you see in your head too. ■

*Jeremy Isaacs serves as lead pastor of Canton Church, about halfway between Atlanta and the North Georgia mountains. He recently released his newest book, written with his brother Jason, Toxic Soul: A Pastor's Guide to Leading without Losing Heart. You can find out more at ToxicSoulBook.com.*

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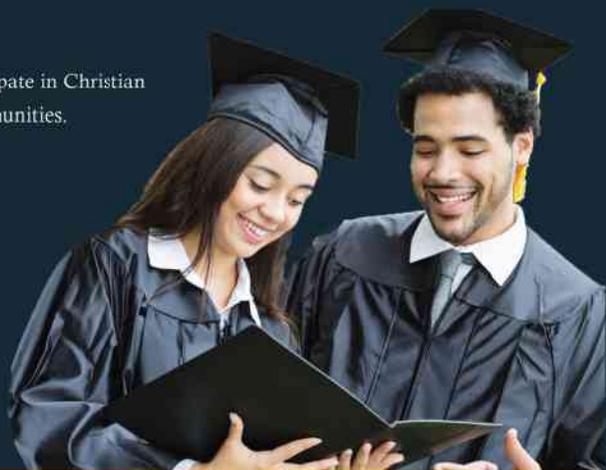
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**H**AVE YOU EVER been reading through the Bible and felt a verse leap out from the pages at you? Hebrews 4:12 reminds us that the Word of God is still active and alive, even in this day and age! Usually, when a verse jumps out at me, it has an obvious spiritual implication. Jesus knows that I need the truth to be plain and simple. Typically, passages that grab my attention are the life-altering moments that Jesus shares with someone who is battling an illness, or the physical manifestations of God's glory to Old Testament prophets. These are the star-studded Bible stories from which we preach and teach. However, as I was reading through Genesis the other day, I had an odd, yet very powerful experience with Scripture. The verse that came alive to me had no obvious spiritual implication, but it transformed me. This verse is found in the story of Noah.

Noah is known far and wide; his story has been told millions of times in Sunday school classrooms, preached in pulpits all around the nations, and dramatized in different Hollywood films. It is an absolutely fantastic story of the Lord's faithfulness that often gauges my trust in Him in a gut-wrenching way. Oftentimes, we see Noah as a bold, heroic character who faced the task of building an ark large enough to hold two of every animal. We see all of the facts that make the story so beautiful, but do we really see his face? Let me explain what I mean.

When I was in Sunday school and I heard the story of Noah building the ark, I pictured a tan, middle-aged dude wearing a bright orange construction hat, driving a big yellow bulldozer, carrying a tool belt packed full of supplies and equipment. In my mind, the wood was perfectly pre-cut and waiting in piles beside him, ready for easy use. The weather

# WATERPROOF YOUR FAITH

by ELIZABETH WARREN

was a nice seventy-two degrees and the clouds just so happened to provide the right amount of shade to avoid a sunburn. I mean, if anyone deserved nice weather, pre-cut wood, and helpful tools to build a huge ship, it was Noah, right? However, the story looks a lot different when you place it into the proper historical and cultural context.

During the time of Noah, darkness surrounded the earth. Genesis 6:5 states, “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (NIV). Reread those words: *every* inclination was *only* evil *all* the time. The people from Noah’s generation were infected with pride, with the idea that God was not necessary for survival. They had forgotten His sovereignty and His goodness. The fall of man had started unraveling a dark path that excluded God and exalted humankind. Even in all this mess, even when the fate of mankind seemed doomed, the Lord made a way for hope to enter the scene. Genesis 6:8 states, “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (NIV).

When I think about the strength it must have taken for Noah to stand for God in a generation that tried to deny His existence, I am amazed. Picture Noah being taunted by his friends, distant relatives, and strangers for still honoring God. Imagine him being called the “town crazy” as he began cutting wood for an unseen storm. The rain hadn’t even started falling and he was already crafting an ark! In modern times, that would be the equivalent of someone walking around on the sunniest

day of the year in full rain-gear attire, with an umbrella in hand. If we’re being honest, we might even be quick to call that person crazy. When I look past the facts, and I see Noah’s face, I understand that he didn’t just face the spiritual challenge of trusting God’s direction and the physical challenge of building the ark. He also faced the emotional challenges of isolation and mockery. He was heroic in his faith, but we must never forget that he was human. This is a beautiful truth that makes Noah so much more relatable to us. Standing for God is never easy, especially in a generation when no one else will. Following a call that seems strange to man comes with great difficulty. The challenge is great, but the reward is so much greater. Think about it! Where would we be without the ark? Where would we be without Noah’s trust in the Lord and God’s outstanding faithfulness to His creation?

If you go back to the beginning of this article, I talked about Scripture being alive and having the power to leap out from the page at us. During this incredible Old Testament story, the oddest verse struck me speechless. It is found in God’s instructions for the ark. Genesis 6:14 states, “So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out” (NIV). At first glance, this verse may not seem to hold any sort of spiritual implication. In fact, when I first read this sentence, it appeared like God and Noah were just having some good, old-fashioned “man talk.” How gloriously wrong I was! There is so much more lying underneath the surface of God’s instructions; He shows His glory in the smallest of details! What may seem like “man talk” was

## “Storms brew all around us and the Enemy would love nothing more than to watch us sink. However, WE DON'T HAVE TO ACCEPT DEFEAT AS OUR FATE.”

the foreshadowing of a beautiful atonement the Lord would make for us on the cross.

Pitch was commonly used in the building of ships, specifically due to its sticky nature. It was a substance that literally waterproofed the seams of wood. When I dug a little bit deeper into this passage, I realized that pitch is translated to *kaphar* in the Hebrew language. Under Strong's Concordance, *kaphar* means “to cover, purge, make an atonement, or make reconciliation.” How incredible! The Lord, in all His goodness, allowed the ark to be a representation of the reconciliation He would make for us on the cross. Noah's ark, in all of its splendor, wouldn't have been able to withstand the power of the storm on its own. If Noah had decided to skip the process of coating the ark, the seams of the wood would have been exposed to the powerful force of the floodwaters and may have cracked under pressure. The pitch took the ship from being a great spectacle to being an unsinkable vessel for God's redemption. The spiritual implications we can derive from this simple verse are astounding.

It is no surprise that we live in a fallen world. We are constantly surrounded by broken people and shattered circumstances. Storms brew all around us and the Enemy would love nothing more than to watch us sink. However, we don't have to accept defeat as our fate. The beautiful thing about Noah's story is that it teaches us to trust God, through-

out each circumstance. Before the flood even came, and prior to the rain even falling, Noah had to prepare himself. The same is true for us. Before the storms of life start raging, we need to take the Lord's presence and use it as pitch. If we coat ourselves daily with all God's goodness, He prepares us for battle and makes us waterproof. He is the one who gives us the strength to make it through even the harshest of winds and waves. *Without* Him, we are nothing. *With* Him, we are unstoppable.

When the waters rise in your life, when the floodgates start to open and you begin to feel overwhelmed, what will you do? I encourage you to let His presence be the anchor of your soul, the stronghold that keeps you steady in the midst of every single struggle. Just as the pitch transformed Noah's ark into an unsinkable vessel, God's glory in your life can transform you into an even stronger force for His kingdom! The psalmist said it best:

But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you (Psalm 5:11 NIV). ■

*Elizabeth Warren is a soon to be graduate of Lee University, and is currently interning under the Discipleship Division at the International Church of God Headquarters. This article is a small look into her book, titled, Anchored Deep: Finding Security in the Midst of Life's Storms, which is soon to be published.*

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by DR. LUIS O. RODRÍGUEZ

# THOUGHTS ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: Context, Mentoring, and Process

**A** GLANCE AT JESUS' ministry reveals a profound sense of intentionality. Everything He did, every act of kindness, every miracle performed, and every word spoken was structured toward an ultimate purpose. John Maxwell defines this purpose or intentionality as the power to "influence" the thoughts, actions, and goals of others. In this sense, Jesus defines leadership by way of a purpose-oriented endeavor that involves a profound sense of personal development.

To better understand this development-oriented influence, we must take a look at Jesus' own strategies of leadership development as found in Mark 3:13-19. By looking at this narrative, three main thoughts come

to mind regarding leadership development: context, mentoring, and process.

## CONTEXT

In the book *Leadership Revolution: Developing the Vision and Practice of Freedom and Justice*, John M. Perkins states "genuine leadership is defined in terms of influence that is welcomed and desired." Undoubtedly, to achieve this level of influence, one must know the context in which the leadership development takes place. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, *context* is defined as "the parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning. The inter-related conditions in which something exists or occurs." It is the story behind the story and



without it there is no story. Every individual, community, ethnic group, or neighborhood has its unique and personal story. It is precisely that story which becomes the backdrop of the intended course of action.

In Mark 3, the context reveals that Jesus, who was being followed by a crowd, went up to a mountain, and from it, He could spot a group of people working at the shore of the lake. He observed their reality and efforts invested in their own context. Matthew's recount of the first disciples demonstrates the use of their context as a way of attaching them to Jesus' ministry. This calling includes the following statement: "[Come] follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men" (4:19 NKJV). Their obvious context was fishing, and their new reality included a new kind of fishing.

In Mark 3:13, we see how Jesus is looking intentionally to their context, surroundings, and interpersonal relations to know their likes and dislikes, thus opening the door for leadership development. One cannot avoid the necessity of contextual learning to value the preconditions and stories represented in the faces of those whom we serve. Arbitrary programs based on mono-centric strategies without looking at the internal cultural and social dynamics of a specific group devalue the nature and power of diversity. As the people of God, we must learn from each other. We must enjoy diversity in context and embrace differences to be utilized as doors of communication and interaction.

## MENTORING

Jesus' first action in this story was to go up to the mountain to oversee the dynamic

that surrounded Him. His next move was also intentional. He called to himself those He wanted and appointed 12 to be with Him. I propose that the phrase "that they might be with Him" is a mentoring statement. Before they were sent out to the field, they had to spend time with Him. Mentoring is the process in which an individual, by way of a personal relationship, acquires the necessary skills to embark into a designated mission. In the words of Ross L. Davies, a marketing guru, "Mentoring is the process of opening our lives to others." Mentoring is intrinsically relational and flourishes only if the right interpersonal communication is welcomed. The notion that real development can be accomplished through isolated programs disconnected from civilization and people is a fallacy. Development requires a community in which ideas and interchanges are fostered and encouraged. God created a community called the family in which we grow and learn. He also established the church, which is a community of believers that share the same values and beliefs.

It seems at times as if today accomplishments and title seeking replace the desire to engage in mentoring and development. The need for pragmatic expediency is hovering over the necessity of relationships and mentoring. We need to slow down and consider the hearts of the people to be able to read the undergirding issues that affect our people today. Leaders are servants, but they are also people with needs, problems, and aspirations. Mentoring is an excellent channel of influence and training because it deals with leaders, ministers, and people as who they really are—people.

## PROCESS

The process is clearly displayed by Jesus as He calls the disciples. First, they were called to be with Him. As readers of the New Testament, we know it took them three years of personal, mentoring-based training. Second, they were appointed, which speaks to the level of responsibility they were about to undertake. An appointment is a commitment to be fulfilled by the committed. Third, they were called to go out and fulfill the mission. To make sure they were prepared, Jesus gave them authority to drive out demons. In essence, they were given three core elements: a mission, a vocation, and a power. None of these elements are received instantaneously, they take a process.

Leadership development has a lot to gain from process. However, a word of caution should be observed. We cannot expect to be effective in leadership development if our programs don't have some level of flexibility, agility, and practicality.

During my days as a graduate student, I heard the story of a young man who received an evangelistic call to go out to the field. He approached his local pastor about his inner desire and personal passion. After listening to the story of this young man, the pastor replied to him, "You need to prepare for that; go to school." This young passionate man after completing a four-year college degree went back to his pastor with the same desire. The pastor replied to him, "Why don't you go back and complete a graduate degree." Many years later, they encountered each other again. The pastor, eager to find out what had happened with this young man, asked him about his inten-

tions to engage in evangelistic ministry. The young man replied, "Well, I'm more focused now in my career than in ministry." Perhaps the issue is not the degree-seeking intention, but the perception that one needs a degree to engage in evangelistic work. The desired outcome is knowledge and training, not only the acquisition of a degree or the sense of personal academic achievement, although it is without a doubt part of the desired outcome.

Praxis is the key to avoid derailing in ministry and shortfalls in attracting committed people. As we think, we do; and as we do, we think. Process is not the enemy, but our companion in leadership development. It is a lifetime friend that will carry us when irrelevant methodologies threaten to overshadow our effectiveness.

## CONCLUSION

Over my years of ministry, I have been blessed to experience contextual training development by being exposed to mosaic settings. Some of those contexts have challenged my practices, ideas, and imagination, creating in me a desire for knowledge. At times, they have looked overwhelming and impossible to overcome. However, during this process, key leaders have poured their lives over my life course, expanding my level of influence and deepening my desire to serve others. These are heroes of the faith, and they serve as a "cloud of witnesses" over my life. And, life is a never-ending process that I gladly embrace. Jesus called the disciples from their context, to be with Him, to learn from Him, and to journey with Him until the end. ■

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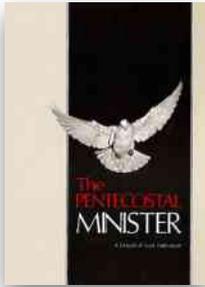
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CHURCH OF GOD



*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

## HOW TO BUILD A LONG-TERM PASTORATE

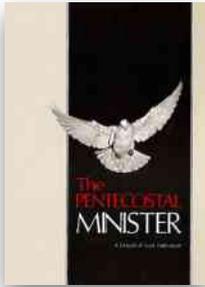
By W.W. Thomas • Spring 1981

*W.W. Thomas, observing his twenty-fifth anniversary as pastor of the West Lakeland Church of God, shares personal insights and experiences on how to build a long-term pastorate.*

**You are a successful shepherd. What principles have guided you in working with people for the past twenty-five years?**

I think one of the key features of my ministry is that I genuinely love people. Being with people, ministering to people, serving with people—all are pleasurable and delightful to me. Serving people is not a chore, or a duty, or a responsibility; it is an enjoyable experience.

When you show a personal love for the individual and a desire to be of service, people will respond. The concept of seeing what you can do for them, not what they can do for you, is the thing that motivates people to be led. The only way you can love and serve convincingly is by influence, and that influence is in direct proportion to the depth and strength of the relationship that you build with them. This relationship is built and strengthened over the years in many different ways: staying all day at the hospital when some family member has surgery; spending an evening in



prayer and counseling because of a problem in the home; remaining by a family's side in time of accident or tragedy. As you consistently minister to families and individuals in times of crisis, you build deep, meaningful relationships.

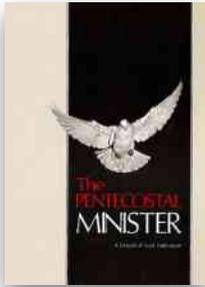
**It is evident that your people trust you and for this reason they are willing to follow you. How have you established an image of trust?**

Credibility, to me, is the most important element in the life of a pastor. Credibility, like a relationship, is built over a period of time. It involves wisdom in dealing with problems, spiritual authority in making decisions, and zest in sponsoring successful programs and activities. A lot of little things can build, or destroy, credibility. By losing my temper, I can destroy more credibility in a moment than I can build over a period of five or ten years. A rash financial decision that puts my people under pressure will cause them to question my credibility. My own spirituality—prayer life and Christian happiness—builds my credibility as a spiritual leader, as well as an administrator.

Also, I think that I have been able to achieve the image of being the pastor of everyone. This is very basic and important. I try never to be guilty of favoritism, and I avoid devoting extra time to a certain family or group. I try to involve myself in all activities sponsored by the different groups of the church. I never miss a banquet or bus breakfast, and I go to most of the ball games. I think that the very presence of the pastor, even if it is just a guest appearance and even if he does not stay for the entire evening, demonstrates his personal interest and establishes his credibility.

**You have a master's degree in business. This is unusual; why did you follow this course of action?**

Initially, I took a few courses in a general program. But once I really got into it, I realized just how important it was in Kingdom service. Managing the finances of a local church requires discipline and expertise. Billy Graham says that women and finances



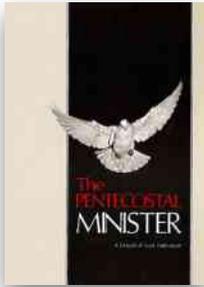
are the two main factors in the downfall of preachers. Pastors fall because they do not know how to manage money wisely. I have found that the principles I learned are transferable. Marketing concepts and financial management can be used in God's work. The West Lakeland's annual budget has increased from \$35,000 to \$650,000. The ability to manage money and to get the most out of a dollar has brought about consistent growth and the commitment of funds from members and community leaders.

**While we are on the subject of finance, how do you motivate your people to give consistently and sacrificially?**

It depends on your style of leadership. I try to motivate people by setting a personal example. It is hard to establish credibility as a pastor and a financial manager if your own finances are in disarray. I certainly am not a wealthy man by any means, but my church has never had to come to my aid or to bail me out of some sort of financial crisis. When you manage well, you set an example for the church to follow.

I also believe in tithing. It is a personal conviction. I pay my tithes every week just like a member. Some ministers feel that since they are paid out of the tithes that they should not return ten percent. Many years ago the Holy Spirit dealt with me about paying tithes. I'll never forget the week I began. It was like receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit again. It was one of the most vivid, definite spiritual breakthroughs that I have ever experienced in my life. Things began to happen. My preaching took on a new dimension. Everything that I did seemed to have a new spiritual glow and had greater impact. I could not believe that giving money could affect me spiritually like that experience did. One reason I teach my people tithing is because I want them to experience the same spiritual blessings I experienced when I began tithing.

When I am preparing to launch a financial drive, I first ask God what amount He want me to give. I give as much as 30 percent back into the church—not because I have that much money, but because I feel that it is God's plan. I embrace the law of sowing



and reaping, "Give and it shall be given unto you" (See Luke 6:38). God wants me to prosper, to be in good health, and to enjoy His choice blessings, but I must subscribe to His plan of tithing and giving. This does not mean that I will not be tested financially or physically. It does mean that I will ultimately triumph. I have been sick, and I will get sick again. But God heals. I do not have money stacked away, but all my financial needs are met. This is what God wants for me and for all His people. Our finances have increased consistently at West Lakeland, because I have practiced and preached God's financial plan as outlined in His Word.

**Let's talk about preaching. One hundred and ten sermons a year for twenty-five years is a lot of sermons! What is your philosophy of preaching today?**

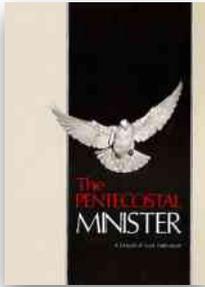
My philosophy about preaching has changed. I used to be more concerned about sermonizing; now, I am totally message-oriented—preaching to issues, preaching to heal hurts, preaching to nurture, and to promote Christian growth. I am not so much concerned about form as I am content, substance.

**What pattern do you follow in sermon preparation?**

I try to diagnose the problems of the church just as a doctor diagnoses the illness of a patient. If I sense that the church is in a real spiritual decline, I will call for a time of fasting and prayer; and I will preach sermons on revival and spiritual renewal. Preaching to meet needs is a priority. After the need has been established, I study myself full on the subject and then preach myself empty. I make notes because I feel more comfortable in the pulpit with notes, although I seldom refer to them. When you have studied yourself full, then you are ministering out of the overflow. I think this is the most effective way to preach.

**Is preaching the most effective way to guide people today into Christlikeness?**

In my opinion, there is something about preaching—simple, old-fashioned Pentecostal preaching—that nothing can ever



replace. Preaching can cause things to happen that can be accomplished by no other means. You can teach, counsel, and promote, but these can never take the place of preaching. I believe that the most effective tool in nurturing Christian growth and bringing about revival is preaching the Word of the Lord.

The chemistry of Bible preaching can do something to people's lives that I have never seen accomplished through teaching. Yet, I place a strong emphasis on teaching. I teach on Wednesday night: I teach a Sunday school class. I have special evangelism breakthrough classes and I have classes for new converts. I feel comfortable in a teaching situation. But it seems to me that the preaching of the Word is what brings it all together in the local church.

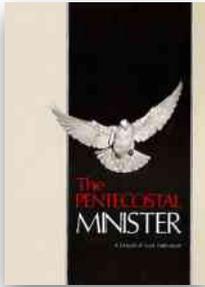
### **Let's move now to worship. What is your philosophy of worship?**

I have endeavored to lead our people into what I would define as spiritual worship. Our services are not much different from those I attended as a boy growing up in the Church of God. West Lakeland has a music director and graded choirs, but we still use the convention songbooks and our worship is typically traditional Pentecostal-type worship.

I have tried to teach our people that one's worship of God cannot be dictated by his "feelings." Worship must be initiated by faith. We must sing whether we feel like singing or not. We must pray whether we feel like praying or not. We must engage in acts of worship even though we may not feel an emotional prompting. When worship is initiated by faith, feeling will follow.

### **Including your school, you have a large paid staff. What guidelines do you follow in recruiting and training workers?**

Whether volunteer staff or paid staff, I always look for people who tend to be self-starters, who have a right attitude and who know how to relate to others. People can be changed; but change is sometimes a slow process. Frequently there is not enough

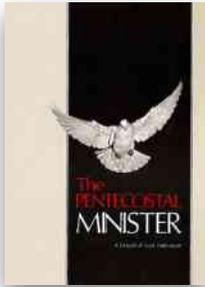


time to rehabilitate one's staff. This is why you need to employ self-starters who have a strong, positive mental attitude and who know how to relate to others.

The area of relationships is perhaps most important of all. If a person has problems in this area, whether paid or not paid, talented or not talented, gifted or not gifted, he will not be able to make it. I used to think that if I could build a church large enough to hire a staff that all my problems would be solved. I was shocked to find that this was not true. You have the same problems with paid staff members that you have with volunteers. People do not become self-starters, reflect a right attitude, or relate effectively to others simply because they are paid.

I think one of the most challenging problems a pastor must solve is relating effectively to his staff, whether paid staff or volunteers. Learning to minister to others by effectively utilizing my staff was one of my difficult transitions. I found it easier to personally minister to people as I had been doing for years. I had to come to realize that my staff is an extension of my ministry; they represent me. First, I had to set an example of dedication, sacrifice, and commitment. Then I had to be sensitive to the needs of my staff. I had to become a resource person, give directions, and be supportive. I had to become a good supervisor. I had to learn to practice business concepts, follow the chain-of-command, and at the same time be spiritually sensitive and alert.

When a staff member is not productive, he becomes a liability to the church. When this happens, I have two options: I can either replace him or redirect him. I have found that the easiest route is not to fire and replace. Sometimes this only changes the pain from the left leg to the right leg. It is better to redirect and to establish mutual understanding through personal communication—to be a good supervisor. This method of staff-building results in a staff that is loyal and productive in the work of the church. You hear a lot of talk about learning how to be the number-two man. I had to learn how to be the number-one man and to recognize the contributions and the needs of my staff.



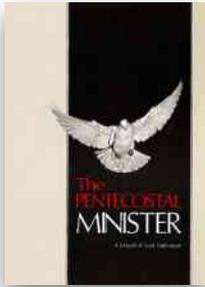
### **Many pastors suffer from tension and stress. What recreational plan do you follow to avoid this?**

My biggest sin is probably in this area. I feel very deeply about the sins against the body, and I have gone for weeks without a day off. I do not feel that this is pleasing to God. I have survived heart attacks and nervous breakdowns because I enjoy my work so much. Realizing that God is concerned about our rest, weight, and physical renewal, I have changed my routine. I felt condemned about my overweight and went on a diet and lost fifty pounds. I have also outlined several relaxation plans that I intend to follow. A pastor is doing himself, and his congregation, an injustice when he does not follow a rigid schedule of relaxation.

### **You have one of the largest Sunday schools in Florida. Do you have strong feelings about this ministry?**

It was my personal opinion, from the beginning of my pastorate at West Lakeland, that Sunday school would play one of the most important roles in church growth. And it has. Sunday school has been the vehicle whereby we have reached out into the community and affected the lives of the unchurched. It has been the means for guiding persons of all ages into Christian growth and maturity. It has provided a structure through which individuals could express their Christian witness in a meaningful way by accepting responsibility to teach, visit, and support. My most effective workers in the church today have been developed through the framework of the Sunday school.

Today, I still recognize the contribution of the Sunday school to church growth. As my Sunday school grows, so grows my church. In a time when some churches are looking for alternative ways of performing the functions of Sunday school, I am still sold on the traditional Sunday school pattern. Of all the alternatives available, I feel that the Sunday school is the most practical and effective. Although I have certain evangelistic efforts and revivals, my major outreach thrust centers on the Sunday school.



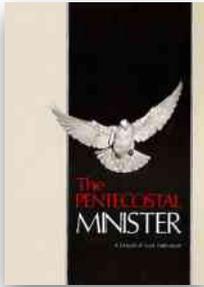
### **You still operate a bus ministry. Do you plan to follow the example of some churches and discontinue this work?**

No! Our church began the bus ministry on the premise of reaching souls for Christ and showing love and concern. We were committed to the ministry when we started, and we are committed to it today. Gas prices have increased from 29 cents to \$1.29 a gallon. The bus budget has increased from \$300 to \$3,000 a month. We believe that it is God's work, and we are not cutting off any of it, de-emphasizing it, or taking away the funding needed to improve and promote it. Our reason for getting into the bus ministry was to win souls, and that is still our driving force.

### **You have a Christian day school with 753 students. How did you get started in this program?**

One pastor who has experienced phenomenal growth made a statement that I agree with very heartily. He said that we should stop praying, "God bless what I am doing," and find out what God is blessing and do that. Based on that kind of thinking, if a person looks around today, he will find that God is blessing certain ministries, one of which is the Christian day school. One reason God is blessing this area is simply because there is such a tremendous need, both academically and spiritually. We started a Christian day school because we recognized the need and the moving of God in this area of ministry.

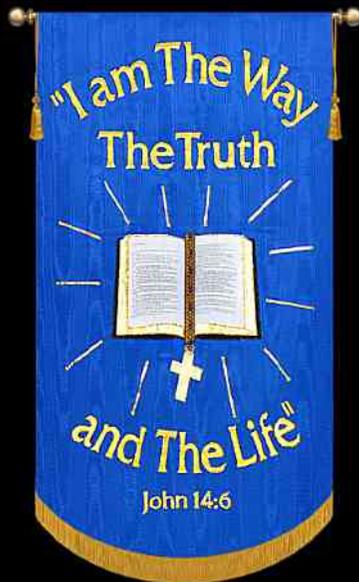
In our Christian day school every teacher is Spirit-filled, and there is found the kind of atmosphere in which children can be molded—morally, spiritually, and academically—and prepared properly for life and to fulfill their purpose for being here. Also, you can grow a church for the future. Our school has done more to influence people for the church than any other single thing we have done. A Christian day school accomplishes many things: it provides the church with finances; it establishes the church in the community; it fills up the church; and it provides qualified workers. But the underlying motive for starting a day school is to provide quality education in a Christian environment.



## SUMMARY

Presently, we are averaging more than 800 in Sunday school attendance. Our Christian school is graduating its first class of seniors. The Family Training Hour is growing and finances are increasing. Souls are being saved, and new members are being added to the church. We are worshipping in a new sanctuary, and we have plans on the drawing board for a new gym and classroom facilities. A spirit of joy and expectation exists in the church. This is the way it should be. This is God's plan. I am thankful to be part of His work in the world today. ■

## DOES YOUR CHURCH HAVE A BANNER MINISTRY?

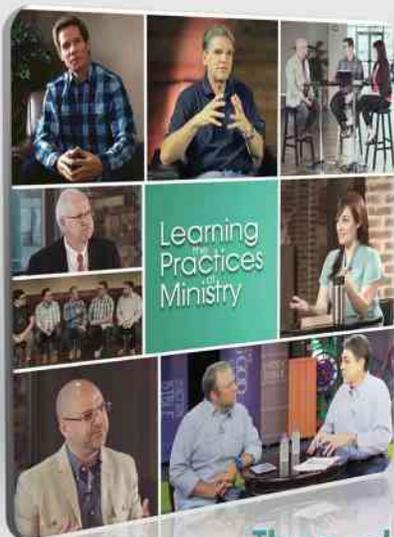


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# Some Observations About Church Insurance

**T**HE SUBJECT OF insurance for our churches continues to be one of the most important subjects that we can address. In this article, I want to discuss some miscellaneous observations about church insurance.

## **SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ENDORSEMENTS**

Some of the most serious types of claims involving church insurance relate to sexual abuse claims. These claims are so serious because they involve minors and events that greatly and negatively affect them. We always want to make every effort to protect minors from these types of events.

In addition, insurance claims relating to child sexual abuse can be catastrophic from a financial standpoint. Many church administrators mistakenly believe that their church liability insurance policy automatically covers child sexual abuse claims, when this is not the case. In fact, unless your church insurance policy specifically includes this type of coverage, it is likely

that you do *not* have coverage for these types of claims. For this reason, you should check with your church insurance carrier and verify that your policy contains a *sexual misconduct endorsement or binder* in order to make sure that you have this type of coverage. Check that out today!

## **HOW MUCH LIABILITY COVERAGE SHOULD YOU HAVE?**

This is a great question and one which you should consider every year, in terms of increasing your policy limits, if possible. I don't want to be "too free with your insurance budget money," but it is amazing how much even a simple claim can cost, in terms of both liability limits and defense costs. For this reason, I suggest that you try to carry as much liability insurance as reasonably possible.

One person told me that he felt very comfortable because his church policy contained liability coverage in the amount of \$1,000,000. However, in some cases that amount could be eaten up very easily.

I don't want to be "too free with your insurance budget money," but it is amazing how much even a simple claim can cost, in terms of both liability limits and defense costs. For this reason, I suggest that you try to carry as much liability insurance as reasonably possible.

Consider \$2,000,000 in liability coverage and also the inclusion of extra, "umbrella" type coverage, if possible.

### ADJUSTING FIRE AND PROPERTY LOSSES

In the recent past, unfortunately, we have seen several serious fire and other incidents involving church properties. Trying to navigate and resolve these claims with insurance companies is a very complex process involving the necessity of special knowledge and expertise in what is known as the "adjustment" of claims. What usually happens is that a church pastor has to deal with an insurance company representative who is trained as an expert in evaluating loss claims. In several instances, local churches found themselves being offered significantly less than they thought they had coverage for, in order to restore their church properties.

We have been blessed to find a company that is dedicated to assisting churches in this regard. The representatives of this

company are "professional adjusters" who are specially trained to evaluate church loss claims and then deal with insurance companies to resolve them. We have seen good success in the assistance of churches under these circumstances. The name of this company is "Loss Recovery Group," and if you find yourself in this situation, please contact me to ascertain if these folks might be of service to you. I can put you in contact with them.

### CONCLUSION

On the subject of church insurance, as the old saying goes: "It's not what you know that gets you, but what you *don't* know!" Learn as much as you can about this most important subject! ■

*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.*



# Understanding Social Security

**C**A large part of the income that many are counting on in retirement will come from Social Security. However, most people do not have a clear understanding about the basics of the Social Security system, and the benefits that you may be entitled to once you reach retirement age. While this forum does not allow for an exhaustive discussion about all the nuances of Social Security, we will explore some basic facts in hopes of helping you be better prepared for your future.

## ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for Social Security retirement benefits, you must earn at least 40 “credits.” A credit is equal to a quarter of work. Therefore, you can earn four credits for each year you work, thus being eligible for Social Security retirement benefits after 10 years of work. In 2017, you get credit for a quarter if you make at least \$1,300 in the quarter.

## CALCULATION OF BENEFITS

Your Social Security retirement benefits are based upon your highest thirty-five (35) years of earnings. If you have less than 35

years of earning, each year with no earnings will be factored in at zero. Benefits are not based upon your last 5 years or last 35 years, but rather on the 35 years in which you earned the most.

## AVERAGE BENEFIT

The average wage earner retiring in 2017 will draw \$1,342 a month in Social Security retirement benefits. Although we have no official statistics on such, it is estimated that most ministers draw less than the average, simply because their wage base is generally lower than the average worker. It should be noted that the maximum Social Security that a person can draw in 2017 is capped at \$2,687. The maximum amount increases annually based upon the rate of inflation.

## FULL RETIREMENT AGE

While a person eligible for Social Security can start drawing benefits as early as age 62, a reduction in benefits occurs until you reach your “full retirement age.” For those born between 1943 and 1954, full retirement age is 66. For those born between 1955 and 1959, full retirement age gradually climbs to 67. For those born in 1960 or

later, full retirement age is 67. If you take benefits prior to your full retirement age, your benefits will be permanently reduced by as much as 25 percent.

### **BONUS BENEFITS**

When you reach your full retirement age, you are not required to begin taking Social Security. Actually, there is a financial incentive for not taking benefits. By delaying your Social Security, you will receive a bonus of 8 percent per year for each year you delay from your full retirement age until age 70. For example, if your full retirement age is 67 and you delay taking your Social Security benefits until you are 70, your benefits will be increased 24 percent. In addition to the 8 percent bonus, you also get the cost of living adjustments for the years you delay. Since the bonus does not continue after the age of 70, there is no benefit in delaying receiving benefits after then.

### **EARNINGS TEST**

As noted, you can begin drawing Social Security benefits once you reach the age of 62. However, drawing before you reach your full retirement age comes with a cost. Not only are your Social Security benefits reduced for drawing early, but you are also subject to an earnings test for wages earned. With the earnings test, you will forfeit \$1 in benefits for every \$2 you make over the earnings limit. The earnings limit is adjusted annually for inflation, but is set at \$16,920 in 2017.

### **COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT (COLA)**

One of the best benefits about Social Security is that every year the government adjusts your benefits for inflation. So as living expenses rise, the cost of living adjustment (COLA) offered by Social Security should hopefully help you keep up with those inflationary price increases. However, when there is little to no inflation, there is no COLA increase for Social Security, as occurred most recently in 2010, 2011, and 2016. In 2017, there was a modest COLA of 0.3 percent.

### **SPOUSAL BENEFIT**

If your Social Security benefit is less than one-half of what your spouse draws from Social Security, you can switch to a spousal benefit and draw at least half what your spouse is drawing. One caveat is that you cannot apply for a spousal benefit until your spouse has applied for his or her own benefit.

### **SURVIVOR BENEFIT**

If you are at full retirement age and your spouse dies, you are eligible to receive 100 percent of what your spouse was receiving at the time of his or her death, assuming it was more than what you are currently drawing from Social Security. Simply put, if you both are retirement age, the surviving spouse will continue to draw the larger of his or his spouse's monthly Social Security check, but not both. Young children may also be

eligible for a Social Security benefit after the death of a parent.

## DIVORCE

Just because you are now divorced does not mean that you have lost the ability to claim a Social Security benefit from your former spouse's earnings. You can still qualify to receive a spousal benefit based upon his or her earnings if you were married at least ten years, you are 62 years of age or older, and you are single. Your ex-spouse does not have to know that you are claiming benefits on his or her record, nor does such impact or diminish the benefit that the former spouse is receiving.

## TAXES

A mistaken assumption is that your Social Security benefits are never taxable. Based upon a change to the tax code in 1984, up to 85 percent of your Social Security benefits may be taxable. An individual with income over \$25,000 and a couple with income over \$32,000 will find that a portion of their Social Security benefits are taxable.

## MEDICARE

While Medicare is a separate and distinct program from Social Security, most people consider them together. Therefore, it is important to look at a few simple points about the very complicated Medicare program:

- If you are a minister and you opt out of Social Security before having enough “cred-

its” to earn Social Security retirement benefits, you have also opted out of Medicare, and you need to secure alternative health care insurance in retirement.

- If you do not sign up for Medicare within three months before or three months after you reach the age of 65, you may be assessed a fee for failing to do so that applies for the rest of your life.

- You can delay signing up for Medicare past reaching age 65 if you have employer-provided health insurance. Once you lose that coverage, you must sign up for Medicare within 8 months so as not to be assessed a permanent fee.

The rules for Social Security and Medicare are complicated and often confusing. Seeking the advice of someone who is knowledgeable about these arcane rules may save you money in the long run. Most important, just remember that Social Security is probably not going to be enough to cover your needs in retirement. Having a retirement plan to supplement Social Security is absolutely necessary. The Ministers' Retirement Plan, offered through the Benefits Board, can help you with your retirement needs. Visit with us today at [www.benefitsboard.com](http://www.benefitsboard.com) or call toll-free (877) 478-7190. ■

*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.*

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## POINTS FROM THE PASTORAL STAFF

Sandra Kay Williams

# How a Pastor's Spouse Works With a Staff

**T**HE ROLE OF a pastor's spouse has evolved through the years. My mother-in-law, who herself was a preacher's kid, pastor's wife, and now a pastor's mother, gave me a book almost 30 years ago, which was already outdated at that time, called, *The Preacher's Wife*.

The first false assumption among numerous unrealistic expectations in this book was that every spouse of a pastor must be a wife/woman. We know that God also calls women to pastor. (In 1 Corinthians 16:19, we read about Priscilla serving as a pastor.) For the purpose of this article, I am sharing from the female perspective and will hereafter address wives of pastors. However, there are untold numbers of men married to female pastors whose role is equally important and should be addressed as well by someone who has walked in those shoes.

The expectations of the pastor's wife can vary from church to church based on size, location, culture, and denomination. Since this article is addressing the working relation-

ship with staff, we can assume the church would be large enough to warrant additional ministers besides the lead pastor. In this instance, a pastor's wife must see the staff as members needing your love just like the other sheep who may not be serving in a leadership/ministry role. Regardless of their position, they are first members requiring the same, if not additional, care of the other sheep. Because you know the pressures and stresses of ministry, you, of all people, should be compassionate and prayerful toward the church staff. They are sometimes younger and more vulnerable in the case of attacks and spiritual warfare in ministry.

When my husband, Mark, and I transitioned from denominational leadership into the pastorate of the North Cleveland Church of God on August 1, 2017, the first thing I requested was a list of the names of our staff, their spouses, and children. I did this so I could begin to call their names in prayer each day. First Thessalonians 5:12 instructs me to "know those who labor among you" (KJV). I

organized a fun night with our staff children to assure them that we loved them and that their parents were important to us. This not only endeared these students to us but also displayed to our staff the priority we see in pastoring their children.

If you grew up in the church, hopefully you regarded your pastor's wife with great love and respect. I certainly did. My grandmother was a wonderful PW whom I admired immensely. She labored for almost five decades alongside my preacher granddaddy in a day when demands were great and appreciation was low. Reverend Travis Porter, who serves as our senior adult pastor at NCCOG, told me that he served as the youth director at my granddaddy's church in Texas. He speaks with such love and respect for my late grandmother who treated him like a son. To be sure, no one wants to be treated like a child, but definitely like family.

When a church staff is operating in love, there is a kinship and desire to support each other regardless of the task or whose department needs help. At North Cleveland, our staff pull together with great joy to make everything we do really special whether it is Mother's Day, Father's Day, a church picnic, or holiday service. Everyone lends a hand. This camaraderie develops by fostering an atmosphere of encouragement that what we do for one department we do for all. This year we adopted a #WeAreNorth motto. This is more than a hashtag; it is a statement of unity among pastors, administrative assistants, media, maintenance personnel, all staff, volunteers, and laity from nursery to seniors.

Sure, there are plenty of opportunities for landmines with multiple staff positions. We've seen the effect a divided staff can have on a congregation. When there is infighting, jealousy, jockeying for position, personal agendas, and bad attitudes, it has a way of creeping into the church body. As a pastor's wife, church matriarch, or first lady, you absolutely must not take sides. You can't afford to get involved in the conflicts of staff. Yours is the job to be a neutral peacemaker.

Darrell Waller, who has served as pastor of the Winchester Church of God in Virginia for more than 35 years, said recently in a camp meeting service: "The larger the sheepfold/congregation, the larger the load of manure you'll deal with." I'll add that the larger the staff, the greater chance for "staff" infection. As a pastor's wife, you can be part of the problems or part of the solutions. I have been both.

When one staff member comes to you with a complaint about another staff member, don't comment or offer an opinion. You don't have to defend anyone. I've made the mistake of sympathizing or even agreeing that someone was being difficult or wasn't doing his or her job in a professional or Christian manner. This always results in making the issue bigger, not smaller.

I've known some PWs who direct complaints to their preacher husband. He already has enough without adding more to the load. The best action is to direct them back to the person in question following the command of Matthew 18:15: "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over" (NIV).

Many issues can be nipped in the bud by directing people to the Word. When you are living a prayerful and godly life, your influence on the staff is greater than anything you say. Never underestimate your influence. Guard your leadership wisely. The most freeing thing for me when I started out in ministry in the late 1980s was this advice from my precious mother in law. "Just be yourself." You don't have to impress or please people, just live to please the Lord. I've told many students and women in ministry through the years, "When you live to please the Lord, you will be pleasing the right people and displeasing the right people." Not all staff and laity will like it when you direct them to the Scriptures. That is fine. You aren't out to be Miss Popular. Your goal is having God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21 NKJV).

As an ordained minister, I also serve on the pastoral team and endeavor to treat every staff member with love and respect, because I want it in return. Some staff will treat you kindly for fear of your husband (for job security). Some will treat you badly because they are mad at your husband and take it out on you. This happens in leadership on all levels. It's hard, but don't be moved by manipulation. Be wise, discerning, loving, and kind regardless of the motives of others.

Make sure everyone knows that you are his wife, not his secretary. If he signs their check, they have access to him. "Tell your husband this" or "ask your husband that" is unhealthy and must be made clear early on that staff need to contact and communicate directly with their boss. You as a pastor's wife don't need to be in the middle of anything. I despise

when someone comes whispering to me something they would never say to the lead pastor, but hope you will share it with him. DON'T! I've learned several *don'ts* the hard way.

Don't get sucked into things for which you are neither called nor gifted to do. Maybe you are capable of many things, but that doesn't mean you should do it all. Know who you are and keep it real, especially with staff. *Authenticity* is a buzzword these days, but the ministry masks and facades of years gone by are disdained and easily exposed. Transparency doesn't mean a lack of discretion; it means being genuine with everyone.

In summary, your work as pastor's wife toward the church staff is to pray for, love, guide, and encourage them; and keep your heart in check. You'll know you are succeeding in your role when you can truly love and be moved with compassion for the one(s) with whom everyone else is annoyed. See staff as friends not foes.

Your demeanor, your words, and your actions have a huge effect on church staff. I did not realize this when we started out in the pastorate. Hopefully, those who worked with us years ago have forgiven me for my "greenness" and weaknesses in those days. I still have much to learn, but I'm armed with a little more knowledge and experience to keep myself on the right path and not in the ditch. I am so very grateful for our North Cleveland staff and pray that I can be a blessing to each of them. ■

*Rev. Sandra Kay Williams has served as a pastor's wife alongside her husband, Mark, at the South Cleveland Church of God, Riverhills Church of God, and North Cleveland Church of God.*



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## BOOK REVIEWS

Tom George

# MARRIAGE: A LOVE SEAT FOR TWO Is a Practical Manual for Marriage

**B**ISHOP ANDREW C. DAUBON, senior pastor of Celestial Praise Church of God in Springfield, Massachusetts, has drawn upon his years of Bible-based premarital and marital counseling, to write what can aptly be called a manual for marriage. As Bishop Daubon's former administrative bishop in Southern New England says, "What an amazing and powerful tool Bishop Andrew Daubon has penned; it's a must read for every married couple and those who desire

to be married as well. It is designed to be read slowly and prayerfully so that you can apply the steps and illustrations to the making of a victorious marriage."

Comparing marriage to a loveseat for two, Bishop Daubon lays out

the four legs needed to support the loveseat: "Therefore shall a man [1] **leave** his father and his mother, and shall [2] **cleave** unto his wife; and they shall be [3] **one** flesh. [4] And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were **not ashamed**" (Genesis 2:24-25 KJV).

In the succeeding chapters, he expands on the meaning of the four legs.

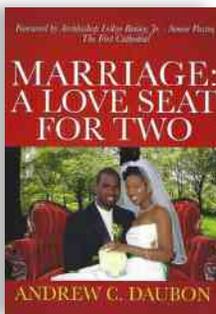
Bishop Daubon sees the first leg of the marriage loveseat as leaving. "Therefore shall a man *leave* his father and his mother" (Genesis 2:24). Chapter 2 discusses both the physical and emotional aspects of leaving. Both husband and wife must leave their respective families' worlds to create their own world together.

Chapter 3 deals with the second leg of the loveseat—cleaving. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall *cleave* unto his wife" (2:24). Cleaving, says Bishop Daubon, creates a picture to two people glued together mentally and physically. This chapter emphasizes the importance of proper communication between man and wife.

Bishop Daubon opens chapter 4 with the statement, "Once a couple commits to each other by leaving and figures out how to make it work by cleaving, it makes it possible for the third leg of the loveseat to be built. This is the physical component of coming together in marriage . . . 'and they shall be *one flesh*' (2:24)."

Trust, the final leg of the loveseat, is covered in chapter 5. "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were *not ashamed*" (2:25). Leaving, cleaving, and oneness all work together to establish trust, but they are unable to function properly without trust. Bishop Daubon emphasizes that God expects to see the couple naked and unashamed around each other and expects to see trust, the final leg of the loveseat, in place.

This book is a practical handbook on marriage suitable for use as research material for preaching, and is appropriate for study groups or individual study. It would be an excellent



resource to place in the hands of newlyweds, as well as married couples who may need to rekindle their relationship.

*Marriage: A Love Seat for Two*, ISBN 0692620508, 6" x 9", 102 pages, paperback, is available from Bishop Daubon's website [www.loveseatfor2.com](http://www.loveseatfor2.com); on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) in paperback and Kindle format; and on [www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com) in paperback. The cost is \$14.99 for paperback and \$9.99 for the Kindle version. Readers buying in bulk may call 860-944-0801 to receive a discounted rate.

## THE LOVE FACTOR IN MARRIAGE Is a Valuable Marriage Resource

**D**R. DANIEL J. VASSELL SR. has written a carefully crafted, meticulously researched book that is a practical guide for strengthening and enhancing the role of marriage in a society that too often no longer holds the institution of marriage as sacred. The author points out that divorces are soaring at an alarming rate, even among Christian couples, and "Until death do us part" rarely rings out with the same deep penetrating measure it once did. *The Love Factor in Marriage*, now in its third printing, shares a wealth of insight and understanding as Dr. Vassell unravels the devastating causes for marital failure with helpful suggestions for its healing.

Dr. R. Lamar Vest, in his foreword to the book, writes, "*The Love Factor in Marriage* can serve as a valuable resource to pastors, couples,

and singles who are anticipating marriage. It gives clear biblical instruction, valuable insight, and practical suggestions for keeping love the vital factor in the marital relationship."

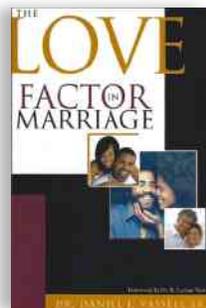
Dr. Vassell writes in the book's Introduction,

To get the full benefits of *The Love Factor in Marriage*, couples must follow God's directions, depend on Him, and ask for His daily leadership so they can have godly marriages—marriages that stand the test of time. In order for marriages to stand that test of time and be truly fulfilling, couples entering marriage must adhere to the biblical injunction: "A man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:31-33 NRSV). This is the hallmark and foundation upon which *The Love Factor in Marriage* is based.

Dr. Vassell is straightforward in his approach to marriage, dealing with divorce, spousal abuse, sexual problems, and the stages of relationship.

This book is an outstanding resource for pastors and others who minister to married couples. It is also a valuable guide for couples who are married or planning to marry.

*The Love Factor in Marriage*, ISBN 978-1-59185-605-4, 190 pages, 5.5" x 8.5," paperback, is available from Pathway Bookstore. The price is \$15.99. ■



# CHURCH OF GOD HIGHLIGHTS

*Church of God News and Events Between May 15 and September 15, 2017*

## 2017 MIP Commissioning Celebration: A Huge Success

**Cleveland, TN**—From the beginning of the MIP Leadership Seminar to the benediction of the Commissioning service, the 2017 MIP Commissioning Celebration was filled with the Spirit, joy, and inspiration.

General Overseer Hill exhorted the MIP candidates to finish their commitment to their calling in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Dr. Michael Baker charged the candidates to hold onto their calling through the Word and Spirit.

The Saturday Commissioning service attendance was estimated to be more than 1,800, perhaps the largest ever attended with more than 1,500 registered for the services.

Dr. David Ramírez, assistant general overseer and executive director to the Division of Education, remarked that MIP Commissioning Celebration should be a milestone for both the candidates and the Church of God, because

it moves the candidates into a greater opportunity for ministry. The Commissioning prayer demonstrated this highlight, as the International Executive Committee, International Office leaders, administrative bishops, state training leaders, and supervising pastors fervently prayed for the candidates to be empowered to finish their commitment to reach the harvest.

## Revival Is Happening Throughout the Church of God

*By Tim Hill, General Overseer*

A significant revival of national magnitude was recently inaugurated in late May and will continue for many amazing weeks into what has now grown by necessity to multiple locations. Crowds of more than 40,000 will attend, repenting of sin, passionately worshipping God, and experiencing an undeniable infilling of the Holy Spirit. A prevailing unity among pastors is obvious as more than 5,000 of them gather across multiple venues over this month of what has been described as nothing less than a wonderful visitation of the Holy Ghost.

This thrilling revival is diverse in its reach as it includes multiple cultural, generational, and ethnic representations. Biblical preaching is central and is accompanied by energetic praise, worship, and spirited gospel singing. This revival has spread into every state of the nation, resulting in thousands coming to Christ. While hundreds of these new Christians are just beginning their discipleship journey, others are accepting the



call into ministry and will soon begin preparing to plant and pastor churches throughout North America while others will become missionaries around the world.

One of the more noticeable extensions of this incredible move of God is revealed in the impactful ministry that will immediately continue for at least another month while spreading to even more locations with the specific purpose of ministering to children and teenaged students in more relaxed and casual settings. Principles of Christian discipleship will be modeled while these students experience community among other young believers. Numerous worship and Word experiences will be the focus of these week-long “Christ encounters,” resulting in thousands more souls being saved, filled with the Spirit, baptized in water, and following Jesus in maturing discipleship. Crowds are expected to grow by another 25,000–30,000 for these extended youth-focused and week-long spiritual convocations.

All together this revival will impact more than 75,000 people in a little less than two months. The exponential impact that these 75,000 people will have in their communities and local churches is beyond description. Their reach will no doubt be multiplied as a spiritual contagion will be released throughout North America.

Noted Christian magazines and news agencies will largely miss this story, and it will likely not be seen on many, if any, Christian television networks. It most certainly won’t be picked up by any secular or mainstream newspapers, but I assure you this revival is indeed one of notable impact and must not be missed by those who love it and are blessed by it most—the fellowship known as the Church of God.

The revival that I’ve just described is most commonly known among us as “camp meeting” and “youth camp,” and they happen every year at this time. When one considers the multiplied and annual effect of these spiritual events, it is truly astounding and even astronomical.

To some, camp meeting has become irrelevant and a target of criticism and even ridicule, but the truth is, criticism may be justified in light of what was allowed to happen to some of these meetings in bygone days. However, there is a new wind blowing and a burning Pentecostal fire has been rekindled. I have received calls, emails, and texts every day for a month; and each one testifies of a marvelous move of God accompanied by hundreds of spiritual results.

While other revivals and historical spiritual convocations have attracted the attention of printed and televised media, let us not minimize the wonderful heritage, spiritual treasure, and ongoing opportunity for life-changing revival that is a Church of God State/Regional Camp Meeting and Youth Camp.

May God visit each state and region during this amazing time.

### **Voices of Lee Video Goes Viral with More Than 11M Views**

A new music video released in July by the Lee University Voices of Lee has become an Internet sensation. The group performs, “What a Beautiful Name,” a version arranged for the group by former Voices member Phil Nitz.

The video’s success comes on the heels of a previous performance launched several weeks ago by the group, “No Longer Slaves,” which experienced similar traction on social media. The current video was staged



in the university's Chapel and filmed by Lee Communications students.

On July 5, numbers on Facebook for the Voices rendition of "What a Beautiful Name" were 11.3 million views.

"The numbers on the video are really significant," said Rob Alderman, who leads the Alderman Group, a media consulting agency that manages the social media presence for the Church of God International Offices. "There are a lot of considerations that go into account when ascribing the word "viral" to any post; for example, how long the post has been up, how much money was spent to promote it, etc. But this video is certainly in that category. For a video to be considered viral, it has to have five million views within 3-7 days. At more than 10 million views, the Voices video has more than double that."

The Voices of Lee is an a cappella ensemble led by Danny Murray that travels around the world performing for audiences of all sizes and in various venues. The group has enjoyed its

share of notoriety over the last two decades, appearing with notable performers and performing on highly rated programs, including "Good Morning, America," "The Sing-Off," and the 2013 Presidential Inauguration.

Another litmus test of social media prowess is the number of times a post is shared by others on their platforms. This latest video has been shared more than 100,000 times, including Christian actor Kirk Cameron, who said on his Facebook page on July 3, "I really love this song right now. It's so powerful. And the Voices of Lee just made it even better! You have to watch (and hear) this...all from a group of college students."

Voices Director Danny Murray said,

We are so thankful for the number of people who have indicated they were blessed by these two videos. "No Longer Slaves" had 9.5 million views and "What a Beautiful Name" is up to 11 million. We know that God touched these, and we are so thankful. Dr. Hill (Church of God general overseer) uses a phrase, "At the speed of favor..." That is exactly what we've seen here.

## 77th International General Assembly Less Than a Year Away

Plans are already underway for the 77th Church of God International General Assembly, scheduled to take place less than one year from now on July 31 – August 3, 2018, in Orlando, Florida.

The 2018 International General Assembly (GA18) is perhaps the most anticipated event of the denomination. Taking place every two years, it is where vital business of the church occurs, including election of top leaders and members of the International General Council debate issues of polity and practice as presented by the International Executive Council. At the end of the week, the International General Assembly, consisting of all registered members 16 years of age and older, debate and vote on final passage of business of the week.

The Assembly also includes a number of additional events which highlight the ministries of the Church of God. Several biennial recognitions have become traditions, such as presentation of the Distinguished Educator Award, and others hold pre-Assembly conferences for their constituents, such as a two-day gathering of

Church of God chaplains and reunion gatherings of Church of God educational institutions. The International General Assembly also attracts delegates from around the globe, culminating in a "Parade of Nations" of representatives from most of the 183 nations where the Church of God has a presence.

Plans are also underway for the popular L.E.A.D. Conference—a one-day event featuring speakers on a number of ministry leadership topics. Keynote speakers are still being finalized for the event, which will be held on Monday, July 30, a day prior to the official opening of GA18. Speakers for the evening services, as well as a theme for GA18 will be announced at a later date. In addition, a website dedicated to information regarding registration, events, schedule, and hotel accommodations, will also be released in the months ahead.

The International General Assembly Cabinet is tasked with planning for GA18 and has met several times already this year. Members have traveled to the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC), the site for GA18, preparing for the arrival of the expected 10,000+ delegates next year.

While the International General Assembly has been held at the OCCC in Orlando three times in the past (2010, 2012, and 2014), this will be the first time the event will be held in the West Concourse, across International Drive from the previous location, the South Concourse.

## Overseers Recognized for 'Ministry of Excellence'

State and regional overseers for the Church of God, gathering late August in Orlando, Florida, for the FINISH Forum Leadership Conference,



were recognized for their participation and fulfillment of a program of achievement and goals as outlined by General Overseer Tim Hill.

Hill congratulated the state/regional leaders for the Ministry of Excellence award during the opening session of the FINISH Forum on August 22. The International Executive Committee, including Raymond Culpepper, J. David Stephens, David Ramirez, and John Childers made the presentations to each overseer, also known as administrative bishops. The leaders came from all 50 states and regions of Canada and included Hispanic administrative bishops who lead half a dozen regions across the United States.

To be recognized, each administrative bishop was to provide information and statistics, as well as projected goals and objectives. Some of the criteria included number of projected

churches launched/planted, strategies for church revitalization, completion of local church property assessments, and assisting local churches in developing a FINISH Commitment plan. In addition, states/regions were encouraged to choose one of the 12 "Cities of Light" as a World Missions project and set a goal for an increase in World Missions giving.

Another aspect of the Ministry of Excellence objectives was to provide an up-to-date church and pastor demographic assessment. Reports from administrative bishops included a categorical breakdown of churches in the state/region by morning worship attendance and pastor statistics by age. Hill presented the cumulative findings from these reports to the gathering on Tuesday night. The information will assist the Church of God in establishing a clear focus on future plans and programs.



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