

Fall
2016



A Journal for Church of God Ministries

engage

IN THIS ISSUE

What Really Matters In Ministry

Why We Need Overseers

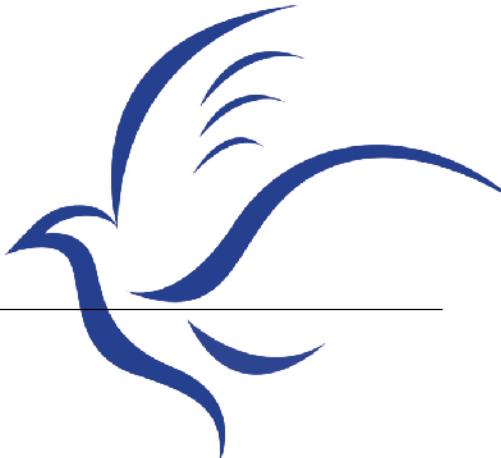
Your Spiritual Crisis Has 215 Likes

The Sending Church

Ministering to the Hurting

FALL 2016
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CONTENTS

- 3** From the Editor
- 30** PENTECOSTAL MINISTER FLASHBACK:
What Young People Expect of Their Pastor
- 46** Church of God Highlights

Bobby Rose

ARTICLES

- 4** Election of New Leadership Highlights
76th International General Assembly *Cameron Fisher*
- 10** Why We Need Overseers *David Cooper*
- 12** Your Spiritual Crisis Has 215 Likes *S.D. Kelly*
- 16** Ministering to the Hurting *Kelly Myers*
- 20** A Sending Church *John Lombard*
- 22** Intern Residency Study Identifies New Trend
- 24** Ethics In Relation to Former Pastors *Tom George*
- 26** What Really Matters In Ministry *Brad Bridges Sr.*

RESOURCES

- 36** LEGAL NOTES *Dennis Watkins*
- 38** MONEY MATTERS *Art Rhodes*
- 40** FAMILY FOCUS *H. Lynn and Mary Ruth Stone*
- 43** RESOURCES - Book Review *Tom George*
- 44** POINTS FROM THE PASTORAL STAFF *Justin Sharpe*

Praying for Our Leaders

THE PRIMARY purpose of *Engage* is to reach out to pastors, staff, and administrators to assist them in their ministries.

Although the primary audience is heavily weighted to the Church of God, the publication appeals to ministers across denominations. Except for a small section in the back, we generally steer clear of articles that would only appeal to a Church of God audience.

With this issue we take a bit of leeway to report on the 76th International General Assembly. As is the case with every Assembly, the proceedings are important, but this one was exceptional, particularly as it pertained to the leadership. There were four new additions to the five man executive committee, highlighted by the election of a new general overseer, Tim Hill. Of the 18 spots on the Council of Eighteen, there were 13 changes, including several who have never served on the Council before. Then there were three new men placed in the four available spots in World Missions and Youth and Discipleship.

There is a new face on the Church of God leadership...or should I say, faces. Let's keep all of them in our prayers as we move into this new period. ■

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

Church of God Executive Committee

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David M. Griffis, *first assistant*

J. David Stephens, *second assistant*

Wallace J. Sibley, *third assistant*

M. Thomas Propes, *secretary general*

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Election of New Leadership Highlights 76th International **GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

DELEGATES FROM around the world came together July 18–22, 2016, for the Church of God International General Assembly. The event was held at the Music City Center in downtown Nashville, Tenn.

This is the 76th time the 130 year-old movement has held its General Assembly, and this year the event was attended by over 12,000 delegates.

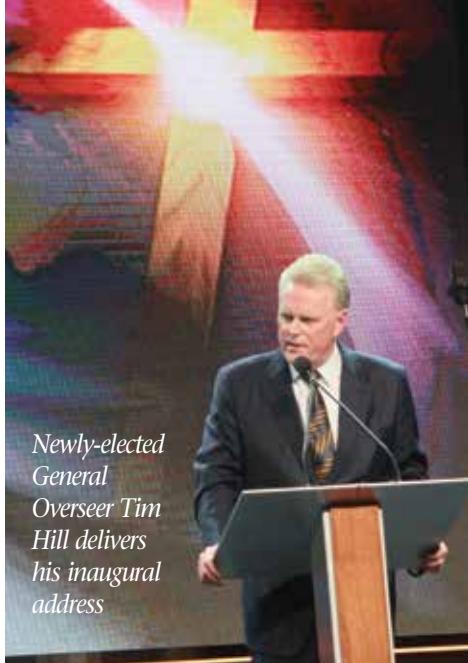
Moderated throughout the week by outgoing General Overseer Mark Williams, the

highlight of the Assembly was the election of a new general overseer, Rev. Timothy M. Hill. Hill's election, along with other nominations, was confirmed Friday afternoon, July 22, at the International General Assembly, a session of the same name, and the event which involves the gathering of all registered delegates aged 16 and older.

Hill, 56, is the 24th person to serve as general overseer of the Church of God, dating back to when A.J. Tomlinson was first bestowed the title in 1909. Hill's experi-



The Church of God Executive Committee elected at the 76th International General Assembly to a four-year term (l-r): John D. Childers, secretary general; Raymond F. Culpepper, first assistant general overseer; Timothy M. Hill, general overseer; J. David Stephens, second assistant; David Ramirez, third assistant. Ramirez is the first Hispanic to serve on the Executive Committee.



Newly-elected General Overseer Tim Hill delivers his inaugural address

ence in ministry includes evangelist, pastor, state overseer, and a former member of the International Executive Committee of the Church of God from 2004–2012. He will serve as the church's top leader until 2020, and will be eligible to be reelected to a second four-year term.

Elected at the International General Assembly and joining Hill on the five-man International Executive Committee will be Raymond Culpepper, first assistant general overseer. Culpepper is a former general overseer (2008–2012) who for the past four years has been state overseer of Alabama; J. David Stephens, who was elected to his second four-year term as second assistant general overseer; David Ramírez, third assistant and former field director for Latin America who was elected as the first Hispanic to serve on the Committee; and John Childers, secretary general, who for the past four years had

been assistant director of World Missions under Hill.

Also elected were the two leaders of the Office of Youth and Discipleship for the Church of God. Moving up from assistant director to director was David Blair. Rob Bailey was elected to serve as his assistant; previously, he had been serving as the Youth and Discipleship director in South Carolina.

The two leaders of World Missions elected to serve for the next four years were David Griffis, director, who for the past eight years has served on the International Executive Committee; and M. Thomas Propes, assistant director, moving from his previous post of the last four years as secretary general. Their election marks the first time two sitting members of the previous International Executive Committee were elected to the two top missions posts.



Prior to the first business session, some 2,000 ordained bishops participated in foot washing and the Lord's Supper.

On July 19 and 20, fifteen new members of the Council of Eighteen were elected by their peers from the International General Council—the group being comprised of ordained bishops registered and present for the Assembly. Elected were Tony Stewart, a pastor in Tampa, Fla.; Kip Box, now serving as state overseer of North and South Dakota; Ishmael Charles, pastor in Tortola, British Virgin Islands and field director for the Caribbean; Mitchell Corder, state overseer of Tennessee; Gerald McGinnis, pastor in Knoxville, Tenn.; Dennis McGuire, International Evangelist; Nick Park, pastor in Drogheda, Ireland; Eliezer Bonilla, pastor in San Antonio, Texas; Tim Oldfield, pastor in Columbus, Ohio; Keith Ivester, state overseer of Florida; Gary Lewis, state

overseer of South Georgia; Loran Livingston, pastor in Charlotte, N.C.; Sean O'Neal, overseer of Arizona; Michael Baker, president of the Pentecostal Theological Seminary and chancellor of the Division of Education; Jimmy Smith, World Missions representative; Samuel Santana, overseer of Southwest Hispanic; Kevin McGlamery, a pastor in Huntsville, Ala.; and Travis Johnson, pastor in Homestead, Fla.

In addition to International General Assembly business, there were numerous meetings, seminars, and special events throughout the week. In addition, various ministries used the Assembly gathering to recognize achievements and present awards. Among the recognitions that took place were state-level awards to churches



The Council of Eighteen—Front row (l-r): Mitchell Corder, Samuel Santana, Gary Lewis, Tony Stewart, Sean O'Neal, Eliezer Bonilla, Kevin McGlamery, Dennis McGuire. Back row, (l-r): Keith Ivester, Travis Johnson, Gerald McGinnis, Kip Box, Jimmy Smith, Ishmael Charles. Not pictured: Michael Baker, Loran Livingston, Tim Oldfield, Nick Park.



One of several outreaches during the Assembly was "Church Under a Bridge," part of WAKE Nashville

for World Missions support, chaplaincy ministries, and distinguished educator awards. Lee University and the Pentecostal Theological Seminary held alumni fellowships on Wednesday evening, and several states and regions gathered for luncheon meetings.

Perhaps more than in the past, there were multiple opportunities to hear from world-class speakers, educators, and ministers. A pre-Assembly conference on Monday welcomed five special speakers, including Ed Stetzer, Gabe and Rebekah Lyons, Gordon Banks, Samuel Rodríguez, and Christine Caine. Caine also keynoted a women's service on Tuesday night. Interjected into the business over the three days of the International General Council were four "Special Orders of the Day," featuring addresses by respected church leaders from outside the Church of God. They included Dallas-based pastor Tony Evans, Pastor Larry

Stockstill, formerly of the Bethany Church in Louisiana, Jimmy Evans, founder and CEO of MarriageToday, and Stetzer. On Wednesday, five simultaneous "Lunch and Learn" events were hosted on the first level of the Music City Center.

Making a special appearance at the Wednesday night opening service was Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam who welcomed the 8,000–9,000 delegates gathered in Halls B and C of the Music City Center that night. Keynote speaker for the Wednesday service was Rev. Tim Oldfield, senior pastor of the Potter's House Church of God in Columbus, Ohio. On Thursday, Pastor Ana Ruth Diaz delivered a message in her native Spanish. Diaz is founder and principal pastor of the Oasis de Amor Church of God in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

Following the Thursday service, which featured a Parade of Nations, representing most of the 162 nations where the Church

of God has a presence, and an outdoor concert took place on 5th Street outside the Music City Center. The event was dubbed “Throwback Thursday,” and featured a number of gospel groups, including the Lee University Voices of Lee and the lead act—gospel artist, Jason Crabb.

Two outreach events took place during the week, highlighted by four days of a youth endeavor entitled, “WAKE.” Students took part in serving the underprivileged of Nashville through feeding the homeless, distribution of food, school supplies and clothing, and participating in a church service under a bridge.

Children attending the International General Assembly had their own set of activities, which included the introduction of a new “Kid’s Praise Track,” and a variety of activities through Kid’s Church. Also included during the week were special seminars for children’s pastors.

A full Exhibit Hall featured over 80 vendors, offering a variety of ministry resources. Pathway Bookstore had a presence, as well as several corporate sponsors, a Wall of Remembrance, and a historical display. For the first time, a health fair, offering screenings and health checks was part of the Hall.

On Friday night of the Assembly, newly elected General Overseer Tim Hill delivered his inaugural address where he unveiled his vision for the FINISH Commitment, a carryover from his term as director of World Missions and the FINISH Challenge.

A final announcement on Friday came from General Overseer Hill as he revealed the next International General Assembly will return to Orlando, Florida. Dates for the meeting are set for July 31–August 3, 2018.

A list of elections and appointments from the International General Assembly, as well as DVD recordings of major sessions are available at www.churchofgod.org. ■



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WHY WE NEED OVERSEERS

by DAVID C. COOPER

OFTEN TELL MY pastoral team, “You can’t oversee what you do not see!” Ministers—just like business people—have to “mind the store” and stay on top of things to maintain quality control.

If you don’t stay on top of it, it will come out from under you! Churches often erode slowly over time because they don’t oversee the details. In one study of businesses that went bankrupt, the top two reasons for bankruptcies were: (1) the lack of customer service, and (2) the failure to pay attention to details.

Some people tell us not to sweat the small stuff. But, if you don’t sweat the small stuff, you’ll never enjoy the big stuff. The big stuff is just a collection of the small stuff.

That’s why we need overseers. They watch over the details of the church and the ministry to ensure that we remain true to the commission of Jesus, that we maintain the highest

standards of excellence, and that we practice good stewardship of our resources.

As Christians, we are taught, “If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Timothy 3:1 NIV). I’ve overheard people say that when a man aspires to be an overseer that he is only trying to climb the ladder of success. Quite the contrary! He desires a noble task. It is a godly desire, which is put in a man’s heart by the Holy Spirit to serve as an overseer in the church.

Personally, I didn’t like it when we changed the titles from general overseer and state overseer to presiding bishop and administrative bishop. I like the word overseer because it describes who he is and what he does. (I still refer to my spiritual leaders as overseers.)

I have enjoyed the privilege of working with our overseers and ministering in most of our states at camp meetings, prayer confer-

ences, and leadership training. Every overseer I have met—along with his wife—are some of the greatest servants of God I've ever had the privilege of knowing. They work hard, pray faithfully, and possess a real care and compassion for every pastor and church under their watchful care. They have always allowed me to be myself, to preach and to teach according to my gifts, to share my music, to dress the way I want to dress, and to embrace my ministry in every way.

As a member of the Council of Eighteen, I have come to the conclusion that the wisdom and insights of our overseers are the most valuable voices in the church, more than the pastors—and I'm a pastor. Why do I say this? Because pastors oversee only what God has given to them locally and regionally. We have a limited vision of what God puts under our care. Overseers, however, care for everyone and every church in our movement. They possess a broader view of what's happening in the church by virtue of the breadth of their oversight. While overseers need to learn from pastors about what it really takes to pastor in today's world, pastors need to listen to the counsel of their overseers.

Just like pastors don't want overseers telling them how to pastor their churches, pastors don't need to be telling overseers how to do the ministry of oversight with which they have been entrusted. Pastors need to trust and to submit to the oversight of the overseers God has given to them. After all, they watch over us; we don't watch over them.

I started in the ministry as a youth pastor the summer before my last year at Lee University. The pastor needed me to cut the

grass at the church, as well as pastor our young people. I hadn't discovered that pastors are not only to "preach the Word," but they are to also "discharge all the duties of their ministry," which sometimes means cutting the grass! (That's in 2 Timothy 4:1-5, by the way, if you haven't discovered it yet!) I felt that such a task was beneath my dignity.

I made the mistake of sharing my sentiments one day with my mother on the phone. She set me straight fast. She said, "David, God expects you to submit to the authority He puts in your life, even when you disagree. God will never bless your ministry if you don't learn to submit to authority." She blew me away!

Then she reminded me of the Lord Jesus himself: "Then he (Jesus) went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them ... and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:51-52 NIV). We, too, will grow in wisdom, influence, and favor when we learn to obey the leaders God puts over us. The first part of the word overseer is over. They are over us in the Lord.

I leave you with the challenge of Scripture: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:17 NIV).

Let's remember to thank the Lord for the overseers in our lives, to pray for them, and to encourage them. ■

David Cooper is the senior pastor of Mount Paran Church of God in Atlanta, GA, and serves on the Church of God Council of Eighteen.

Your SPIRITUAL CRISIS Has 214 LIKES



When our spiritual journeys are traveled in public,
is there any room for the still, small voice of God?

T'S BEEN NEARLY two decades since the psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett coined the phrase "emerging adulthood" to describe young people between the ages of 18 and 29. Previous generations, Arnett observed, moved from adolescence into adulthood without much preamble; it used to be common to marry right out of high school, start a family, and work a steady job.

But then things started to shift. Arnett observed young adults milling about the waiting room before entering adulthood, compounded by an uncertainty about how exactly to start "adulting." And yes, that verb is now in regular circulation, thanks to a website of the same name that promises to teach young people "how to become a grown-up," "in 468 easy(ish) steps."

Around the time Arnett published his groundbreaking work, Britney Spears, the poet of emerging adulthood, wrote a song called "Not a Girl," a song which could be considered the ballad of the in-betweeners.

*I'm not a girl / Not yet a woman
(I'm not a girl don't tell me what to believe)
All I need is time / A moment that is mine
While I'm in between*

Neither Arnett nor Spears probably fully understood the development that would end up reshaping emerging adulthood more than any other—the emergence of the Internet as the dominant social context of our time. The Internet today is a pervasive presence, a thoroughgoing part of existence. Young adults still experience the intensity of being in-between, living in

the “age of identity exploration,” as Arnett put it—only now they experience it online.

It is easy to forget just how new, and how startling, this shift is. In the past, a person could try on different personas as he milled about, waiting for things to really start. He could work out his belief system, his network of friends, his relationship with his parents—all of it in relative privacy. The idea of making any of this truly public, available in principle to anyone and everyone, present and future, while it was still in process, would have been unimaginable (not to mention impossible).

Today, most Americans use social media: 62 percent of all adults are on Facebook, according to the Pew Research Center. That rises to 82 percent for those between the ages of 18 and 29, the same demographic that Arnett identifies as milling about the waiting room of adulthood. Facebook may have the reputation of no longer being the trendiest social network, but reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated. Add other social media platforms to the mix—Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, and so on—and it adds up to this: being a young adult means being online. Being online offers young adults “their very lifeline to the world,” as Arnett stated in a summary of his most recent research on the topic.

THE COMMENT SECTION EFFECT

Does it matter that young people are inching toward adulthood, developing their beliefs, their practices, their core identities, all while using social media as a “lifeline to the world”? The short answer is: we don’t know yet. The Internet hasn’t been around long enough to fully assess its effects on

human experience. But in the meantime, the question of social media’s influence takes on added complexity for young Christians.

Along with the usual concerns all young people share—finding stability, a meaningful job, a relationship that makes the heart sing—for those who profess Christian faith, there is a far greater one: working out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Matters of the soul, your place in the church, questions about the goodness of God or even His existence, questions of death, eternity, sin, the problem of evil—matters that have been of concern to young people all along—are now all being worked out in public, in real time. This process used to be a sometimes-agonizing, always-private rite of passage. Not any longer.

Think of Augustine in the fourth century—the hedonist, the follower of various philosophers before becoming the famous convert to Christianity, the Augustine who finally lands on saying, “You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” Now imagine following along with Augustine as he documents this entire process, in the manner of a life lived online, as it is actually happening. We read about the late nights, the partying, the nine years as a Manichean, the complaints about his overbearing mother, the workload of being a teacher, the years with his concubine and lover. Pretty juicy stuff.

If Augustine had a blog, readers might have lost interest just about the time his restlessness resolved in finding Christ. Or, maybe readers would have talked him out of finding Christ. Maybe the comment section of Augustine’s blog would have altered his entire journey toward sainthood.

Blogger Micah J. Murray grew up in the midst of Bill Gothard-infused fundamentalism and came of age at the same time as the Internet. Murray has spent the last few years writing in detail about the experience of losing his religion before finding it again—with qualifiers—in a series of posts with titles such as “I Don’t Know if I am a Christian Anymore” [sic] or “The Day I Stopped Believing in God.” Dedicated readers follow along. It’s self-confession as online reality show—a sort of pilgrim’s regress.

Murray seems in no way disingenuous. There is no sign he is making a calculated attempt to appeal to his fellow emerging adults. On the contrary, his sincerity is heartfelt, with the pain of losing the God of his youth almost palpable at times. Murray’s readers offer equally heartfelt responses to his personal narrative, sharing painful stories of their own. The comments section of nearly every post is a litany of theological and experiential struggles, a congregation of emerging adults, nearly all of whom offer the same perspective.

This sort of public call-and-response has its appeal, but it runs several risks. The first and most obvious is that the very act of documenting one’s every move on the spectrum away from or toward belief will influence and alter that trajectory. It’s similar to what is called the observer effect in science. In life, as in science, you can’t watch something without changing the qualities of the thing being watched.

The risk is compounded when the process takes place in a forum that is entirely your own, unvetted by voices other than the ones you allow. In spite of the Internet’s potential to connect us to the diversity of

Christian faith, past and present, too often it becomes a set of claustrophobic corners.

The young Christian becomes limited by a context in which time is always immediate, history is limited to one’s own personal existence, and the only readily available responses consistently confirm one’s own experiences. Theological difficulties are mediated through self-expression. It’s a waiting room full of people echoing what you just said, and little else. No wonder faith narrows and chokes, maybe even suffocates, in this setting. Everybody is trapped in the same room and nobody seems to know where the exit is. Maybe we should amend Sartre this way: hell is relentless, real-time commentary by other people just like yourself.

A SOLITARY PLACE

A few years ago, in an effort to understand the mindset and rationale of young adults who are leaving religion in droves, Larry Alex Taunton of the Fixed Point Foundation surveyed self-professed nonbelievers across college campuses. Most of the participants in Taunton’s project came from a Christian background. And for most, Taunton wrote in a piece for *The Atlantic*, “the Internet factored heavily into their conversion to atheism.”

In the connected world we live in, it is inevitable that the Internet, generally, and social media, specifically, will “factor heavily” into the process through which young adults develop their identities. Railing against this reality is like demanding that we all use film cameras instead of digital, contending that the process of developing film, with its long delays and darkroom solitude, produces superior pictures. How much does

process matter, anyway? Maybe taking the long way around to arrive at the same destination—that belief in God is a delusion, that evangelical Christianity lacks sufficient liturgy—does not offer an inherently better route.

But then again, maybe it does. Some processes suffer from upgrades; newer does not always mean better. Technology offers a means of connecting to other human beings in new and expansive ways. But in some cases, these connections harm more than they help.

And one of these cases might just be the one most central to working out one's own salvation with fear and trembling: the cultivation of the soul. The process of finding God, or, in more current parlance, finding your identity as a believer in God—the ongoing work of cultivating the soul—benefits from time and silence. Both of which are anathema to a life lived primarily online. The Internet is a noisy and crowded place: the tweets and retweets, posts, likes, and shares taking place at merciless levels of sociability, all running counter to acts of contemplation.

The medieval mystic Meister Eckhart said, "There is nothing in the world that resembles God as much as silence." Another mystic, the Puritan theologian Isaac Ambrose, agreed, devoting the month of May each year to retreating from his public work and heading to the woods long before Thoreau had the idea. In Ambrose's 17th-century account of the contemplative life (with 17th-century spelling), he says "I know not what other's experiences may be, but if I have found anything of God, or of his grace, I may thank a wood, a wilder-

nesse, a desert, a solitary place for its accommodation."

This was their reality, and it is ours: the intimate accommodations of grace demand silence and solitude. This is required by grace's very nature. Achieving intimacy, with God or with another person, can only come from the sort of plodding care and attention that is necessarily private, the boring stuff that is never worth watching. All of this presents a problem for the 21st-century human being, as digital space is designed, above all else, for performance. Online, every action demands a reaction. This creates a tension, to say the least, with the goals of cultivating the soul and the life of the mind.

All I need is time, sings young-adult Britney, and on this point at least she and the 16th-century Christian mystic Teresa of Avila might agree. "Settle yourself in solitude and you will come upon him in yourself," Teresa wrote. Young adults need time, maybe even an Ambrosian length of time on occasion, to cultivate the soul, to emerge into adulthood and into the community of the church, more fully formed—time in "a wood, a wilderness, a desert, a solitary place."

Perhaps the one advantage we have over Isaac Ambrose is that in the age of digital space, all you have to do to enter "the wilderness" and leave the cacophonous company of your fellow human beings... is to turn off your screen. ■

S.D. Kelly writes about culture, high and low, from her home in coastal Massachusetts, where she lives with her husband and three kids and runs a nonprofit community organization. Originally published in Christianity Today, March 11, 2016.

MINISTERING TO THE HURTING

Caring for Those
Affected by Anxiety
and Depression in
Our Congregations

by KELLY MYERS, LPC



PERHAPS YOU HAVE noticed a long-time member of your congregation behaving a bit differently lately. She seems more tired and tense, talks less than normal, and you have noticed her mentioning the same fears and worries over and over. She does not attend as many meetings at church as she used to. You are confused by her new manner and wish you knew the best way to help her.

A member of your leadership team at church has in the past year grown distant from others in the church. He often sits alone and rarely looks up at you while you are preaching every Sunday. He has dark circles under his eyes, has lost weight, and is not taking the best care of his appearance. As a leader in the church, you wish he would set a better example for other members, but you do not know how to communicate this to your leader in an effective manner.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (www.nimh.nih.gov), 18 percent of the adult population in the United States suffers from an anxiety disorder and roughly 7 percent have had a major depressive episode in the past year. With more than 1 million members of the Church of God in the United States, there is reason to believe there are many who suffer from anxiety and depression in our congregations every week.

As ministers in the church, how do we best respond to those who are dealing with these issues? One of the first steps we can take is to assume that there are members of our congregation dealing with anxiety and depression. As those called by God to serve our congregations and care for them well, part of our responsibility is to understand to the best of our ability the issues that are affecting them and their spiritual lives.

In seeking to know more about anxiety and depression, it is extremely important to recognize the difference between routine feelings of stress and sadness and the mental illnesses of an anxiety disorder and major depression. A person experiencing stress is not necessarily dealing with an anxiety disorder, just as a person who is going through a time of sadness is not always dealing with major depression. Usually, stress or sadness will eventually fade over time or as circumstances change. The difference with a mental illness such as an anxiety disorder or major depression is that a person experiencing them will not typically be able to change these emotions on her or his own, nor have them simply disappear over time.

With this knowledge, the next step should be asking ourselves these important questions: Do I know the signs and symptoms to look for in these mental illnesses? Just as important, do I know how to respond best to those exhibiting these symptoms? Below are the signs and symptoms according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V*.

Symptoms Experienced by a Person With an Anxiety Disorder:

- Difficulty concentrating
- General unease and/or easily tired
- Problems sleeping
- Not having the ability to stay calm and still (restlessness)
- Irritability
- Muscle tension

Observable Signs That Someone Has an Anxiety Disorder:

- Admission of at least half of the listed symptoms of anxiety disorder

- High levels of stress and worry and the inability to control these
- Symptoms have lasted for at least six months
- Everyday functioning has been affected in at least two environments (home, church, work, etc.)

How to Respond:

- Normalize the experience (to combat feelings of isolation, share that many people are affected by anxiety disorders)
- Ask about a support system (does the individual have a few people to talk to who understand what they are going through)
- Refer to a counselor (if you feel the person needs professional help, you can find a Christian counselor in your area through the American Association of Christian Counselors: <http://www.aacc.net/resources/find-a-counselor/>)
- Offer to pray regularly for issues directly related to anxiety (for peace and calmness of mind and an awareness that God is always present in the person's life)
- Check in often (show your care by taking time to really listen to how someone affected by anxiety is doing)

How Not to Respond:

- Do not try to fix the anxiety on your own!
- Do not say that an anxiety disorder can always be cured simply by praying and reading Scripture (although this can be a huge help and should definitely be encouraged as a first step and continual practice)
- Do not try to rationalize the worry (an anxiety disorder leads people to often

have fears that are not grounded in logical thinking—trying to rationalize deep fears often leads to feelings of worthlessness or failure)

- Do not share information someone has confided in you privately (maintain trust and a good relationship by observing confidentiality of information unless the person dealing with anxiety gives you permission to share)

Symptoms Experienced by a Person With Major Depression:

- Depressed mood most of the day (feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and emptiness)
- Weight loss (without trying) or weight gain
- Diminished interest in activities that were previously pleasurable
- Changes in sleep patterns (sleeping too little or too much)
- Low energy or fatigue daily
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt over things with which the person is not at fault
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling agitated or irritated
- Thoughts of death

Observable Signs That Someone Is Dealing With Major Depression:

- Admission of at least half of the listed symptoms of major depression
- Symptoms have lasted daily for at least two weeks
- Everyday functioning has been affected (there is a big difference from how the person was functioning before and after dealing with major depression)

How to Respond:

- Normalize the experience (share that many people suffer from major depression and the person is not alone in their experience)
- Ask about a support system (does the individual have at least one person to talk to about his/her depression who understands what he/she is going through)
- Refer to a counselor (if you feel the person needs professional help, especially if issues of suicide are mentioned, you can find a Christian counselor in your area through the American Association of Christian Counselors: <http://www.aacc.net/resources/find-a-counselor/>)
- Offer to pray regularly for issues directly related to depression (for lifting of the dark feelings and knowledge that God is always present when experiencing these feelings)
- Check in often (show your care by taking time to really listen to how someone affected by depression is doing)

How Not to Respond:

- Do not expect a person dealing with major depression to simply feel better on his or her own.
- Do not expect a quick fix (depending on the symptoms present, counseling and medication may be needed to achieve normal functioning)
- Do not encourage a person suffering with major depression to simply attend more activities at church to feel better (major depression can be extremely tiring and lots of social activity can be very draining)

- Do not ignore talk of death or suicide (this is a very serious issue that requires professional help—always refer to a trained counselor or to your local emergency room if there has been a current suicide attempt)

Now that you have the signs and symptoms of anxiety disorder and major depression, you can probably see that the woman in the first scenario is dealing with an anxiety disorder and the man in leadership in the church is experiencing major depression. Responding appropriately to those in your congregation who have similar situations can be very effective ministry.

As ministers, our first response should always be empathy and concern applied with a listening ear, prayer, and comforting scriptural passages (for example: 2 Corinthians

1:3-5). Our second response, and ministerial responsibility, is to find and offer the best care possible. A Christian counselor can be a huge help to someone experiencing an anxiety disorder or major depression.

Likewise, medication to help control the anxiety and depression can really help to restore stability to a person's life. Just as a person dealing with a physical illness (such as diabetes) will need medicine to regulate her or his body; so too, a person experiencing a mental illness can sometimes benefit from medication to regulate emotions. Our primary concern for those in our congregation should be that they are able to function well enough in life to experience a rich, full relationship with God and with each other. Being healthy emotionally contributes so much to this. Let us take good care of those that God has put under our care and be caring, responsible ministers for Him. ■



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■ by JOHN LOMBARD

A SENDING CHURCH

A WORLDWIDE HARVEST mentality is required if a church is to be a “sending church” rather than just a “gathering church.” God’s plan has always included a world-kingdom. God’s command to Adam and Eve was to populate the earth. Some of their descendants reflected the “gathering/keeping” mentality by saying, “Come, let us build ourselves a city...and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:4 NRSV). The Lord responded by confusing their languages and scattering them abroad.

The gospel of Christ is to be shared also throughout the whole world. Acts 1:8 indicates that Spirit-filled persons will witness in

their own locality and in their region, and to people of different cultures, languages, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds, as well as all over the world. Severe religious persecution against the church in Jerusalem scattered believers (except the apostles) throughout Judea (their region) and Samaria (different backgrounds). These believers proclaimed the Word of God wherever they went. The ones scattered also went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch proclaiming Christ to the Jews. Some men from Cyprus and Cyrene proclaimed Jesus Christ to the Hellenists in Antioch.

God’s blessings were abundantly upon the church at Antioch. Many individuals turned to the Lord. The church in Jerusalem “sent” Barnabas to Antioch and he encour-

aged and instructed them. He then went to Tarsus to find Saul and took him to Antioch where he mentored Saul and both of them taught the people.

The church at Antioch became a great example of a “sending church.” It was multicultural, disciplining, nurturing, and unselfish. It sent financial relief to brothers and sisters in Judea. It had gifted prophets and teachers. As these consecrated themselves and worshiped God with fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit spoke, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went” (Acts 13:2-4 NRSV). By obeying the instruction of the Holy Spirit, the church at Antioch enabled Barnabas and Saul to fulfill the “calling” of the Spirit upon them. The church at Antioch was a great church, and Barnabas and Saul were a vital part of that; but think

A sending church trusts God to supply the local needs as it releases individuals for the wider harvest.

of the many won to Christ, churches established, and disciples nurtured as a result of their being a “sending church.”

A sending church has a worldwide harvest mentality. It is a consecrating group that listens to the Lord. It is alert to God’s “callings” upon its members. It trusts God to supply the local needs as it releases individuals for the wider harvest.

As a church recognizes God’s “call” upon individuals, it encourages them and discipiles them. The church is willing to recommend them, pray for them, and stay in touch with them. The church graciously releases them at the appropriate time so they do not feel guilty for leaving to pursue God’s will.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that most credentialed ministers are “sent” by small or medium-sized churches. Many large churches gather and keep their gifted ministers. The continuing challenge is that whatever size the church that it be sensitive to God’s direction in being a “sending” church. God is still “calling” individuals to be evangelists, pastors, missionaries, chaplains, teachers, etc. God is still instructing His church to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and “send.”

As a result of the “sending” churches, and the ones being sent, heaven and earth will eventually be inhabited by “saints from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9 NRSV). ■

John A. Lombard, Jr., is a pastor, teacher, and MIP Coordinator (jlombard@leeuniversity.edu).

INTERN/ RESIDENCY STUDY IDENTIFIES NEW TREND

SEVENTY-FOUR PERCENT of large churches offer formal internships or residencies for promising lay leaders or pastors-in-training, according to Leadership Network. A recent national study of church internships and residencies, perhaps the largest ever, looks inside the leader training process of more than 300 churches and summarizes the findings in a just-released, richly illustrated report, "Leaders in Training: Internships and Residencies Help Churches Shape Future Leaders," sponsored by Southeastern University (SEU.edu). The project was overseen and authored by Warren Bird, Ph.D., director of research for Leadership Network.

Key findings include:

1. Leaders want to see other leaders developed.
2. Leaders help rising leaders mature.
3. The number of intern/resident programs has increased rapidly in recent years.
4. Most churches offer multiple programs and multiple specialties.
5. The best interns/residents come from within the congregation itself.
6. Upon completing the program, more than a third becomes church staff.
7. Almost half the participants receive academic credit.

8. Churches show a high degree of confidence about the success of their program.

9. The primary term is "intern" followed by "resident."

10. Paying for the program is a study in extremes.

11. Early fall and beginning of summer are the most popular times to begin.

12. The biggest audience for these programs is recent graduates.

To download this free graphic-rich report, go to www.leadnet.org/intern.

For interviews, contact Dr. Warren Bird at warren.bird@leadnet.org or [@warrenbird](https://twitter.com/warrenbird).

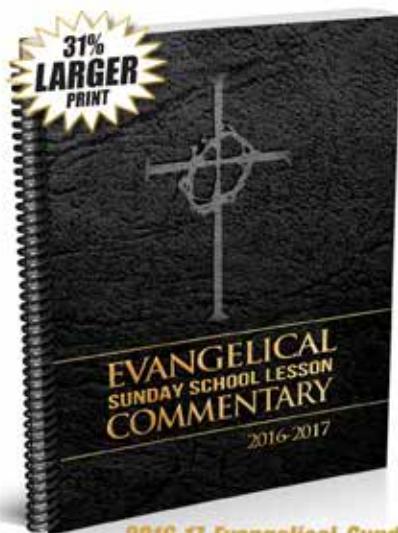
Leadership Network's role is to foster innovation movements that activate the church to greater impact for the glory of God's name. The nonprofit founded in 1984 now serves over 200,000 leaders around the world. See www.leadnet.org.

The report sponsor is Southeastern University, www.SEU.edu, a Christ-centered institution of higher learning committed to equipping the next generation of leaders so that they can go into the world as influential servants in their careers and their communities.

(Source: Christian Newswire) ■



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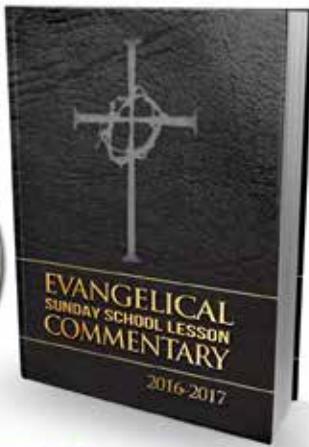
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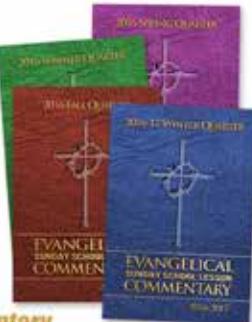
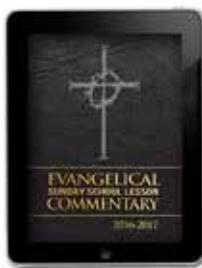
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ETHICS in Relation to Former Pastors



■ by TOM GEORGE

OUT OF SIGHT, but not out of hearing: The young minister could not help overhearing a conversation between two pastors at a church convention.

"How are things at your new church?" asked one of the men.

"Oh, much better now," the other answered, "but things sure were a mess when I got there!"

The young minister smiled. He was the predecessor of the man who found things a mess. He remembered his struggles at the church in question. His thoughts flashed back to the many nights he lay awake troubled by the desperate financial condition of the church, the embarrassment of unpaid church bills, the unfinished building he found on his arrival, and the people who had been hurt and left the church before he got there. But he also remembered the victories God had given him—the financial miracle that made the congregation's obligations manageable and left the parsonage totally free of debt, the people who came back, and the completion of the building.

As he turned to leave, the young minister thought, *If you think things were a mess when*

you got there, you should have seen things when I got there.

This true story illustrates the all-too-common tendency of some pastors to blame the predecessor for all the woes of the church while portraying themselves as a savior sent from God. To be sure, there are times when God does use a man to rescue a congregation from difficulties that may have been the fault of a former pastor. However, even in such a circumstance, the man of God should conduct himself in an ethical manner.

Sometimes a pastor moves to another church because he feels a leading from God to minister in a particular location. At other times, a pastor moves because problems arise in the church, and either the pastor or the congregation, or both, desires a change. On other occasions, thankfully less frequent, a pastoral change is made because of a minister's moral failure. Other reasons for a pastoral change include the retirement or death of a pastor.

All of the scenarios described above create a former pastor that the new pastor must relate to in some way. How the new pastor relates to the former pastor says much about his ministerial ethics.

Ideally, when a pastor leaves a congregation and moves to a new field of labor, he will devote all his time to his new charge, leaving his former parishioners in the care of their new shepherd. In reality, it usually doesn't happen that way. Why not? Because the pastor-parishioner bond is often one of the strongest relationships outside the immediate family.

The pastor who follows a beloved long-term pastor can expect to hear the former pastor's name as much or more than he hears his own. People do not easily sever a relationship with the pastor who led them to God, baptized

them in water, received them into the church, dedicated their little ones, married their children, prayed at their bedside during sickness, and comforted them in times of bereavement.

Not infrequently, the former pastor will return to the community for weddings, graduations, and funerals. This may create jealousy on the part of the new pastor. However, the minister must realize that the former pastor is not competing with him, neither are the parishioners who invite the former pastor back for a wedding or a funeral, rejecting their new pastor. Such invitations are simply the manifestation of a strong spiritual and social relationship that has been forged between the former pastor and the church members over a period of several years.

A wise pastor will be a gracious host to the former pastor on those occasions when he visits the community. Jealousy or an ungracious attitude will quickly be detected and will undermine the new pastor's ability to build a long-term relationship with the congregation. Impeccable ethics in such situations will be appreciated by the congregation and will become foundation stones for relationship building.

In situations where a pastor moves because of problems, the incoming pastor should guard against blaming all the church's difficulties on the former pastor. Rarely can problems be laid entirely at the feet of one individual. The discerning pastor may soon learn that the former pastor did better than he himself could have done given the same set of circumstances.

Even if the former pastor bungled the job terribly, nothing will be accomplished by highlighting his failures. Be as gracious as possible. Just because a pastor falters in one area does not mean that he cannot be a great success elsewhere.

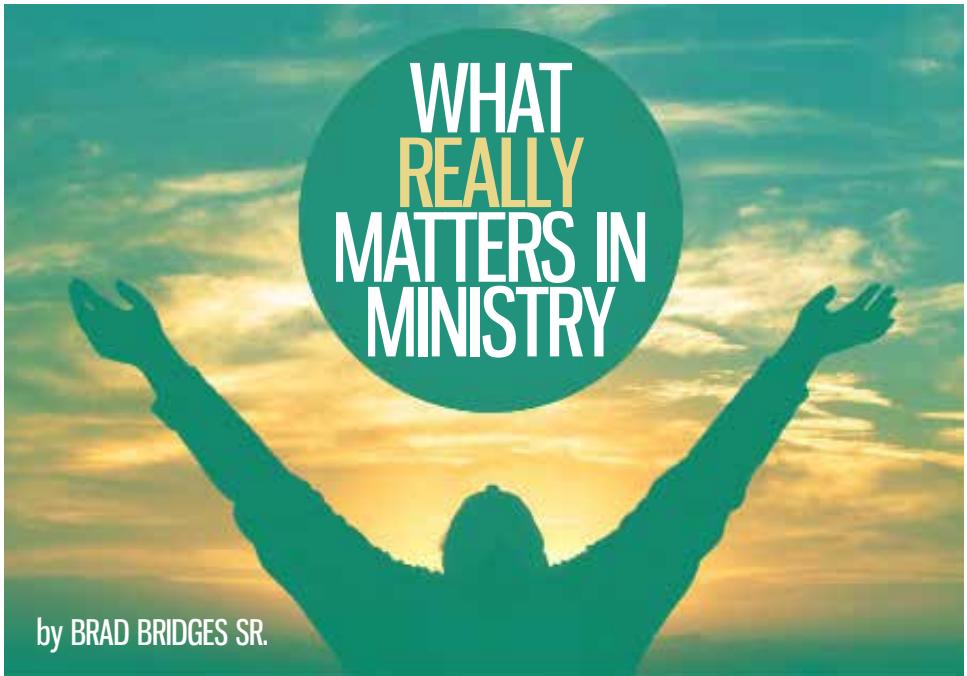
Every pastor builds relationships in his congregation. Those who are close to the former pastor will not appreciate having old grievances resurface. The new pastor will be wise to let bygones be bygones if he expects to build positive relationships within his congregation.

Moral failure by a pastor often creates a volatile situation that the new pastor must handle with great wisdom. The pastor must deal with the public scandal that accompanies a minister's sin. He must also deal with the inevitable questions and doubts that arise within the congregation. Then too he must ask himself what his attitude will be toward the offending minister.

Proper ministerial ethics require a spirit of reconciliation, not rejection. While never condoning sin, the new pastor can be compassionate and considerate and still be on firm Scriptural ground: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1 NKJV).

The demands of the pastorate make it one of the most difficult positions in the work of God, yet it is also one of the most rewarding. To realize the greatest good from our labor, we must realize that ministers are not competitors but "God's fellow workers" (1 Corinthians 3:9 NKJV). "He who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Corinthians 3:8 NKJV). As fellow workers, we must deal ethically with each other if we are to hear the Lord of the harvest say, "Well done!" ■

This article originally appeared in the June 1997 edition of the Church of God Evangel.



WHAT REALLY MATTERS IN MINISTRY

by BRAD BRIDGES SR.

GREAT NUMBERS usually measure success. Those numbers may be in dollars, possessions, businesses, or people. The greater the number you've achieved the more successful you appear in the sight of your peers, or so the assumption usually goes.

Ministry is often evaluated by numbers—the number of members in the church, the amount of tithes and offerings collected monthly, or the number of revival meetings held has too often become the gauging factors in a minister's success. Sadly, many ministers are affected by the numbers they experience, even to the point they become more concerned with the numbers than they do ministry; consequently, many don't feel successful in their ministries.

In the early nineties, I pastored a small church in a farming community in Alabama. Our first Sunday there was a cold, snowy day. We had seven attendees outside my family. I pastored that church for six years and during that time our highest Sunday attendance was fifty-three. I was often asked by people who knew me well why I held on to that small church knowing that the potential there was small and I could take my ministry to bigger places and have more "success." But, I knew I was where God wanted me, pastoring people who needed a pastor, and to this day, we are still called upon by families of that small church to minister to them.

Young David tended his father Jesse's sheep, often playing his harp and some-

times defending the flock. His responsibility wasn't heralded as anything spectacular, but he fulfilled his duties with all his might. As we read in 1 Samuel 17, Jesse sent David with provisions to the camp where David's three eldest brothers followed Saul as soldiers in his army. When arriving, David found all the men trembling in their armor because a giant of the Philistines named Goliath had challenged the armies of Saul.

In the sheepfold, David hadn't been taken by the size of the Philistine's army, neither the intimidation of Goliath. In fact, David came to the camp with the same fervor of faith in God that he demonstrated while in the sheepfold. First Samuel 17:21 states that David rose up early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, and went as Jesse had commanded him. He came to the trench, as the host was going forth to fight, and shouted for the battle. David just knew when he saw the army of God's people setting themselves in array there was a victory about to be won for the people of God, and it caused him to shout a shout of victory. However, he soon learned Saul and his men weren't as believing.

David discovered Goliath had been contesting the armies of Saul for forty days with no response from anyone in Israel's camp except fear, trembling, and dismay at the challenge of the giant.

First Samuel 17:23 tells us Goliath came up while David was there and repeated the challenge with the same words, "and David heard them." Immediately, David questioned what should be done for the man who kills this Philistine and asked: "Who is

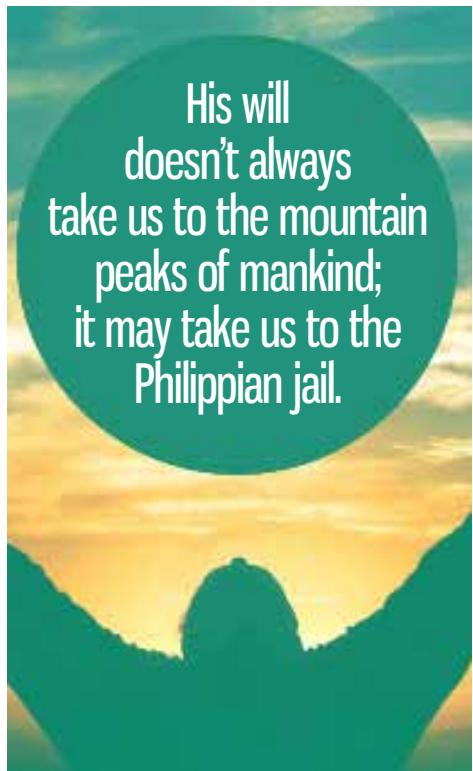
this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (v. 26 KJV). Upon hearing David's inquiry, Eliab, his oldest brother, asked David this question: "Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?" (v. 28 KJV).

Eliab saw his younger brother as insignificant in the matters at hand. He had no idea that a king had grown up in his father's house and that a king had been tending his father's sheep. Eliab's only response to David was to belittle him because David wasn't as big and noticeable as others were. It's the same principle people sometimes use when gauging ministries. If your ministry is notable then obviously you are successful. If you are obscure, it is because you haven't achieved much, so some might think. Here are a few things every minister should consider:

- Who is anyone to challenge God's calling in your life?
- Who are you to allow your calling to be challenged?
- We serve God with a spirit of victory, not a spirit of defeat.
- God has not called you to be successful; he has called you to be faithful.

Your calling in ministry will call for you to extend yourself. Those many sleepless nights, the prayerfulness and tears, along with the burden you bear for the subjects of your ministry do not go unaccounted in the eyes of God. You can't see all God is doing through you now, but His calling is not with vanity. He has called you with purpose for His Kingdom. Our payday is not here, so we

continue to press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus who spent Himself daily ministering to a people who mostly rejected Him and eventually crucified Him. Was He accepted? No. Was He honored among men? No. Was He viewed by the people of His day as successful? No. However, He fulfilled the will of God and truly was more successful than any man who has ever lived because He was faithful to His calling. "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psalms 40:7-8 KJV).



We are called to do God's will. Jesus set the example in Gethsemane when He prayed, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39 KJV). His will doesn't always take us to the mountain peaks of mankind; it may take us to the Philippian jail, or to the people of Antioch Pisidia, and Iconium who will stone us, or perhaps even before the Sanhedrin councils of men.

Wherever you are in ministry, it is because God needed someone in the place where you are. Whether you are highly acclaimed or hidden in obscurity, you are still God's minister, called by His Spirit to labor in His kingdom for His glory. Your sheep may be few to Eliab, but Jesus died for them and every one of them is important to Him. He entrusted you to minister to them, expecting you to give your best for Him. A king you are in a shepherd's coat. A portion of the song of the redeemed found in Revelation 5:10 is this: "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (KJV).

David pressed beyond Eliab's sarcasm and pursued his faith in God, which allowed God to use him on a day when all others were unwilling and afraid. David was faithful to his calling to serve God, and God was faithful to anoint David to carry out His will of victory.

God has not called us to be successful; He has called us to be faithful. Faithfulness is what really matters in ministry. ■

Bishop Brad Bridges Sr. is pastor of Mountain View Church of God in Bryant, Alabama.

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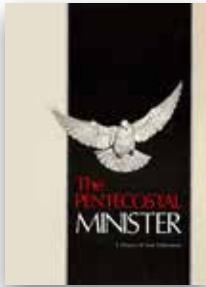
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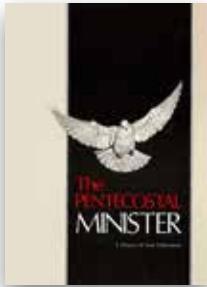
WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE EXPECT OF THEIR PASTOR

By Bobby Rose • Fall 1981

TConverted at the age of twelve—more than 30 years ago—in a small Western town, I was not exposed to many youth-centered church activities while growing up—there were very few around. I appreciated those Sunday school teachers and pastors who took an interest in me. They were, doubtless, responsible in great part for the fact that I maintained my salvation during that shaky part of my life.

As a young Christian with the call of God on my life, I saw great needs in the lives of young people, and I carried a burden for them. Much of my praying in those days was for Christian young people to overcome and to live victoriously and for unsaved young people to be saved. I rejoiced when one came to God, but I also felt great sorrow when one fell from grace. I saw that something was needed to gain and hold young people to the Lord and the church—I was not sure what.

As I grew older, I finished high school and spent a short time in Bible college. Then the evangelistic field began to open, and I began to go as God opened doors. As I began to hold revivals at the age of 18, my great burden was still for teenagers. During those years as a young evangelist, I was greatly impressed with those churches and pastors who provided some activities and



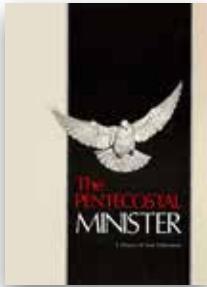
opportunities for teens. Then later, while serving as State Youth and Christian Education director, the General Department of Youth and Christian Education of the Church of God poured into me wonderful training that I might never have received under any other circumstances.

During the years I have pastored, I have constantly attended all kinds of seminars concerning youth, Sunday school, and church work. What I know and what I do now as a pastor to help young people represents the combined knowledge provided by experience and training. I do not feel that I have all the answers, and often I feel that I completely fail; but, fortunately, there are also those wonderful times of great success. Each week my church ministers to approximately 500–600 young people less than 20 years of age. We endeavor to provide the kind of activities that attract, hold, and sustain young people in the Christian faith.

WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to providing worship opportunities through our regular services on Sunday morning and at five and seven o'clock on Sunday evening, we also have a special service just for teens each Tuesday night. There is a teen choir practice from 6 to 7:30 p.m., followed by a Peacemakers Prayer Meeting, which lasts until about 8:30 p.m. This service is most beneficial for it is truly a young people's service at which a young preacher usually speaks. We have discovered that each age appeals to its own age group, and that is especially true among young people. While special services, such as revivals, are regularly scheduled, once a year we also have a special youth revival to which only teens are invited.

From time to time, as part of a regular service, I preach a sermon directed especially to the young people; at other times, I direct a portion of the message to them. We try to have a variety in our musical program so that there is appeal to every age group. Sometimes, the altar appeal is strongly directed to the



teens; then sometimes, I endeavor to have parents and teens pray together or to pray for one another. This helps to bridge the generation gap. Worship opportunities provide a solid foundation to minister to young people.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Nothing beats the Sunday school for reaching young people and teaching them God's Word. The strength of a Sunday school class depends mainly on two things: the teacher and the curriculum. Every session provides a learning experience. We provide graded classes in our Sunday school for all our children and teens. For some ages, however, the children are divided according to their previous scriptural training. We try constantly to challenge the young people to hide the Word in their hearts. One thing we did that I am most proud of was to conduct a Bible-Read-a-Thon; the teenagers read the entire Bible through, aloud, in the sanctuary.

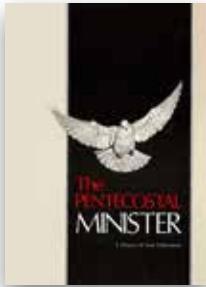
As pastor, I try to be approachable, trustworthy, and available to all my flock, including the teens. I try never to be surprised at what they tell me in a counseling situation. I try not to be condemning, but understanding; and I keep in mind the fact that Satan sets traps for all. I believe that young people need compassion, help, and good advice. I believe, too, that they need to be enlightened concerning many things. If they can understand parents and teachers, it opens a door for a better relationship. I also encourage my staff to be approachable, trustworthy, and available. Counseling can be a great learning experience.

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

We try never to be afraid to press Christians into service for the Lord. We let them know that we expect something of them, because the Lord expects something of them. This is our approach with Christian teens as well.

Some of the things Christian teens are doing in our church include the following:

1. Assistant Sunday school and Family Training Hour teachers

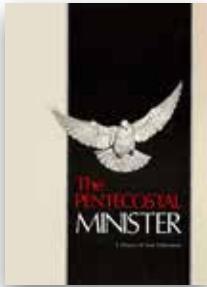


2. Teaching Sunday school and Family Training Hour classes for younger kids
3. Children's church helpers
4. Bus captains and assistant bus captains (all bus workers visit)
5. Stewards and stewardesses on bus routes
6. Evangelism Breakthrough witnesses
7. Playing music in the services
8. Singing in the children's choir and youth choirs (The children's choir sings once a month on Sunday morning, and the teen choir sings the other Sunday mornings and once a month on Sunday night.)
9. Singing solos and in small groups
10. Ushers at Peacemakers Prayer Meetings
11. Workers on various work committees for church, such as clean-up, picnic set-ups and clean-up
12. Queen of Hearts Valentine Campaign to raise money for YWEA
13. Raising money in various ways for choir trips

The Bible says, "Through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through" (Ecclesiastes 10:18 KJV). Therefore, we believe that Christ-centered activities help to keep young people from becoming involved in wrong activities.

SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Any time teenagers are brought together, they will socialize if given the opportunity. Sometimes, they will socialize even if they are not given the opportunity. Each worship opportunity, each learning opportunity, and each service opportunity—all provide a social opportunity. Once each month, after a Sunday evening service, we invite all teens out to a restaurant (Dutch treat). We try to have at least one social activity a month, in addition to going to the restaurant. Usually, it is a pizza party or a Peacemakers Prayer Meeting. There is also a Christmas banquet just for teens and a Queen of Hearts banquet near Valentine's Day. Sometimes we sponsor a Halloween party.



If I could have only a few activities for my youth, one of the activities that I would desire, first of all, is a youth choir. Participating in a youth choir can provide solutions to many of the problems common to young people. It gives opportunity for service, worship, learning, and social activities.

I believe, however, the greatest thing that I can do for young people is to be concerned about them. All human beings should be treated with dignity befitting the highest of God's earthly creatures. Jesus treated little children just as special as He did grown-ups. The Savior of the world took time for little children, for fallen women, for helpless cripples, for beggars, and for convicted thieves. He ate with sinners and publicans, associated with those who had committed fraud, forgave liars, and drew attention to poor widow women by commanding them. If He had time and consideration for such as these, if He treated them with dignity and respect, how much more should I honor the church of tomorrow. How much more should I care for those who are sheep, even the lambs of my fold. Within every human heart there is that desire to be a part, to have someone to care for us, and to see our worth—the desire to feel accepted and, most of all, loved.

Some may question, "Do teens really expect all these things of their pastor?" I doubt that you could find a teen who would list all that I have mentioned; but after more than 25 years of labor in the field, I think at one point or another, I have heard expressed or sensed all these as desires and expectations of young people. As a pastor, you may be able to add to this list, or you may consider this list too long.

I would not want you to think that I have been able at all times to provide all that was needed by all my young people. It has been an indescribable joy, however, to have spent a great deal of my time and effort in *trying*. ■

Bobby Rose is the pastor of the Church of God in Riverview, Michigan.

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An Interesting Recent Court Case

THE ISSUE OF transgender bathrooms in public schools and other locations is a highly visible and contentious one at the present time. This issue was discussed at our recent International General Assembly. Since that time, a ruling by the Supreme Court of the United States is worth noting.

GG V. GLOUCESTER COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Just barely over a week prior to the date of submission of this article, the United States Supreme Court indicated an interest in this subject by granting a Virginia public school system permission, at least temporarily, to keep bathrooms separated by biological sex.

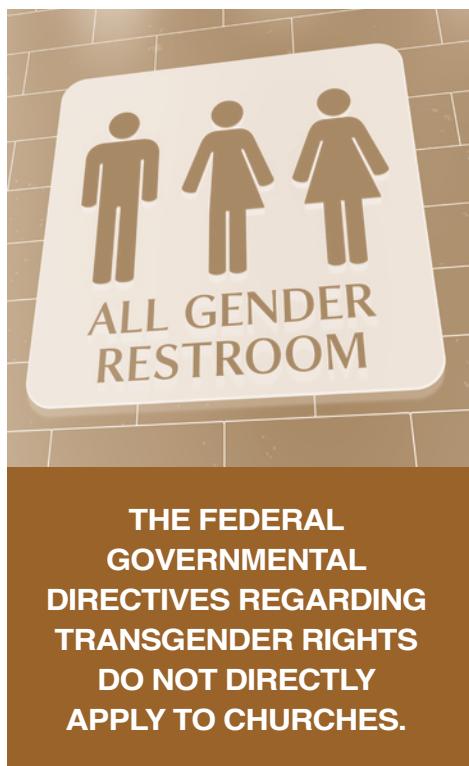
A female transgender student, now identifying as a male, in Gloucester County, Virginia, desired to use the male bathroom facilities. The county school board refused to give this student access, and a lawsuit was filed on the student's behalf by the American Civil Liberties Union. A U.S. District Court ruled in favor of the school system, and the case was appealed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, which ruled in favor of the transgender student.

The county school board then appealed this matter to the United States Supreme Court, which issued a stay halting the lower Court's directive and implementing the school board's decision. The justices held in a five-to-three decision that the county school board was not required to obey the Court of Appeal's Order, and that it could enforce its prohibition of allowing a transgender student to use the bathroom of the sex by which he/she identifies. The Court's four conservative justices were joined by Justice Stephen Breyer who joined with the other conservative justices "as a courtesy" to preserve the status quo until the Supreme Court decides whether to hear this case.

TREND OF THE COURT OR SNAPSHOT IN TIME?

The true future of the direction of the Court on this issue is being interpreted by both conservatives and liberals in light of this decision. Liberal lawyers are claiming that when this issue does come before the Supreme Court, it will rule in favor of recognition of transgender rights in public schools. On the other hand, conservatives are calling it an important indication that

the United States Supreme Court may not be inclined to require schools and public entities to open bathrooms to transgender persons based on their gender identity or expression. Keep in mind that presently



**THE FEDERAL
GOVERNMENTAL
DIRECTIVES REGARDING
TRANSGENDER RIGHTS
DO NOT DIRECTLY
APPLY TO CHURCHES.**

there are only eight justices on the high Court, so the future appointment of a ninth justice is a crucial issue.

In the meantime, one thing that we can be certain of is that there will be more debate and litigation over this subject. Over 20 states already have sued the Obama administration and government departments which have issued directives requiring recognition of transgender rights.

WHAT SHOULD CHURCHES DO?

Remember that the federal governmental directives regarding transgender rights do not directly apply to churches. Further, all churches should consider enacting or adopting facilities use policies which articulate and bolster the religious identity and use of church properties.

We will try to keep you updated on future developments regarding this issue! ■

Dennis W. Watkins is legal counsel for the Church of God. The writer is not engaged in rendering legal or other professional services herein. If legal advice or expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.



MONEY MATTERS Art Rhodes

Churches Are Not Exempt From New Overtime Regulations

MANY CHURCH LEADERS think that the “wage and hour” laws, and particularly overtime pay rules, do not apply to churches. That could not be further from the truth. Churches and church employees are NOT exempt from the “wage and hour” laws—and failure to obey such could result in substantial penalties to the church.

To get around these laws, many churches have “exempted” their employees from the law. However, on May 18, 2016, the U.S. Department of Labor issued new regulations concerning who is eligible to be exempted from the overtime provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). These new regulations could have a substantial impact on churches and other nonprofit entities.

Before reviewing the new regulations, it is important to understand the foundation of the Fair Labor Standards Act. The FLSA requires that workers be paid the federal minimum wage (or a higher wage if the local jurisdiction or state has mandated such) for the first 40 hours worked in a regular work week. Further, for any hours worked passed 40 hours in a regular work week, the FLSA requires that most employees be compensated at time and a half of their regular hourly wage.

To be exempt from this “time and a half” overtime pay rule, the employee has to be classified as an executive, administrative, or professional employee—often called the “white collar” exemptions. Each category of exempt employees is defined specifically under the FLSA. However, not only do you have to meet the definition for an executive, administrative, or professional employee, but previously you had to be paid a salary of at least \$455 a week (\$23,660 for a full-year worker). Under the new regulation, the minimum-salary threshold to be an exempt worker, more than doubles to \$913 a week (\$47,476 for a full-year worker).

For example, assume that a church has an employee that they have designated as being exempt under the Fair Labor Standards Act as an “executive” because the person supervises more than two people, her position is primarily managerial, and she has genuine input into the job status (hiring, firing, promotion, etc.) of the employees she supervises. This person has been making \$40,000 a year and averages working 50 hours a week at the church. Since the new regulations do not go into effect until December 1, 2016, the church is currently in full compliance with the law. However, after December 1, this person, even though she

remains an “executive” and can be paid a salary, must be paid “time and a half” for any hours worked over 40 hours in a regular work week, simply because her annual base salary does not meet the new minimum annual salary of \$47,476.

With the new rules, it is important to remember the following:

- An employee, whether classified by the church as exempt or not, can be paid a salary and still be subject to the new overtime rules.
- Even a worker that meets the criteria of being designated an executive, administrative, or professional employee must be paid overtime (time and a half) if they are compensated at less than \$913 a week after December 1, 2016.
- Overtime for this purpose is considered to be any hours worked in excess of 40 hours in a regular work week.

While the new regulations are extensive and literally go on for hundreds of pages, the Department of Labor put out a summary of the impact of these rules on nonprofits. In a more succinct three-page Fact Sheet on the new regulations, it is noted that nonprofits have several ways to comply with the rules after December 1:

- Simply raise salaries above the overtime threshold of \$47,476 per year.
- Pay overtime to those below the new threshold for hours worked in excess of 40 hours during the week.
- Evaluate and realign employees’ work-load to eliminate overtime, or
- Adjust employees’ base pay downward and pay overtime.

The major item not addressed in all these comments by the Department of Labor is the applicability of the new regulations to ministers. In other words, if a minister works

more than 40 hours in a week and does not make more than \$47,476 in taxable income in a year, will a church have to pay the minister time and a half?

Currently, there is no clear answer. While ministers are not statutorily exempt from FLSA requirements, several courts over the years have found that clergy are exempt under the “ministerial exemption”—in other words, ministers performing religious functions are excluded from the definition of employees under the FLSA. Further, the Department of Labor in a 2005 opinion letter seemed to recognize this exemption. Even in light of the historical “ministerial exemption” found in the court decisions and in previous Department of Labor opinions, the Fact Sheet for nonprofits on the new regulations clearly says that “neither the FLSA nor the Department’s regulations provide an exemption from overtime requirements for nonprofit organizations.” Therefore, while we anticipate that ministers will not be covered by these new regulations, there is currently no definitive guidance regarding ministers.

Although there is a question about ministers being covered under the new regulations, there seems to be no question about other employees of a church being covered under the new overtime rules. However, should you have questions about the applicability of these rules to your employees, it is recommended that you check with a qualified employment attorney and seek professional advice regarding your particular situation immediately. ■

Art Rhodes is president and CEO of the Church of God Benefits Board, Inc. The Board of Trustees and the staff of the Benefits Board are not engaged in rendering financial advice, legal advice, or other financial planning services.



FAMILY FOCUS

Drs. H. Lynn and Mary Ruth Stone

Marriage Requires Leaving Home

WHEN EVE WAS initially presented to Adam in the Garden of Eden, he said: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother*, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:23-24 KJV).

From the very beginning of the institution of marriage by the Creator, the concept of *leaving the family of origin* was extremely important. Jesus confirmed this importance in His definition of a biblical marriage (Matthew 19:4-6).

The significance of the concept of "leaving" has been greatly underestimated today—even by many well-intentioned Christians. Parents need to instill the importance of this concept in children when they are young. Otherwise, when those children have grown into young adulthood they will struggle—often along with their parents—with the entire concept of "leaving home." This inevitably leads to serious problems in the marriage relationship.

In much of Western society, the most widely accepted time for "leaving home" is the marriage ceremony itself. This presents a serious problem. The importance of the ritual of "leaving" is often simply swallowed up and lost in the next two important steps of the marriage relationship—the cleaving and becoming one flesh.

The newlyweds usually are caught up in the normal rituals of the wedding plans, the ceremony, the honeymoon, the new house, the new in-laws, and so forth. They simply do not have either the time or the energy to devote to the concept of "leaving" home—especially when "leaving" has been downplayed or not considered important in the families of origin.

Understanding the importance of "leaving" is difficult for two opposite reasons. On the one hand, the loving parents very naturally desire to cling to children all the days of their lives. This makes it difficult for parents to even acknowledge that it is good for children to "leave."

On the other hand, since the proper leaving from the family of origin involves

the entire person—physically, mentally, and emotionally—much effort and time need to be given to this task by both the parents and the son or daughter. This issue cannot be addressed adequately after the young man and woman have already discovered, as he or she says, the “dream of my life” and fallen “deeply in love.” At such a time, it is impossible to give the necessary energy to such a “vague problem,” especially if the problem is more with the parents than the child.

The problem of leaving the family of origin is usually an emotional problem. This is one of the reasons it is so difficult to address. It is a “problem of love.” The parents love the child. The child loves the parents. It has been this way throughout the entire life of the child.

Then, often suddenly, another love “intrudes.” Usually it begins as a competitive love. But it often grows into a jealous love. In their hearts, many parents just cannot bear the thoughts of “losing” the love of their child.

From a rational standpoint, the parents do not lose the love of a child who falls in love and marries. In fact, they gain the love of a son- or daughter-in-law. Usually the love between parents and a married child actually increases. But, the emotional heart does not always follow the rational mind. The parents may say they want their child to get married. The child may say he/she

is ready to leave home. But often the emotional attachment is so strong that it stifles the growth of the newborn love in the lives of the young couple.

A well-differentiated family begins to prepare for the children to “leave home” many years before the actual day arrives for that momentous occasion. Much of this preparation is part of the natural and normal growth of children. Every major step in the child’s development should be viewed as part of the preparation for the child’s “leaving home.”

In a sense, this “leaving home” begins the first time the child is separated from the mother and father. It continues through such “leavings” as day care, church nurseries, kindergarten, grade school, high school, and college. Each family usually designs additional leavings. These might include summer camps, short-term missions trips, vacations with grandparents, and so forth.

If the family and child properly prepare for these childhood and teenage “leavings,” the son or daughter will be much better prepared for the final “leaving home” of adulthood—whether it is in marriage or simply assuming his/her own self-support. Such leaving of the family of origin should not be spoken of or viewed as being negative.

Children are born to leave. If either the parents or the son/daughter view the leaving as being negative, adjusting to marriage will be difficult. But if leaving home is seen as a natural result of normal growth, the

marriage can be celebrated with the full joy of its natural bliss.

In a well-differentiated home, the parents, as well as the son or daughter, will be prepared for “leaving home” in order to enter into the new love and joy of marriage. But, two types of problems often occur which make it difficult for a son or daughter to leave the family of origin.

First, many parents and children develop a relationship that leads to disengagement. For various reasons, some children begin to resent their home life. They may view it as too restrictive, or too authoritarian, or too religious, or too old-fashioned, or just boring. If this is not corrected, inevitably they will become like the prodigal son in the New Testament (Luke 15). They can’t wait to disengage from the present home in order to find a more exciting lifestyle.

Second, other parents and children develop a relationship that leads to enmeshment. Instead of desiring to disengage from the family, the children become overly dependent on the parents. Their lives are so enmeshed with one another the son or daughter has an inordinate fear of any type of an independent lifestyle. They become much like the elder son in the story of the prodigal.

In both disengaged families and enmeshed families, leaving will be extremely difficult. At the time of marriage, the grief of leaving can then take from, and even overshadow, the joy of the wedding.

After committing themselves to marriage, a couple cannot change the past

IN A WELL-DIFFERENTIATED HOME, THE PARENTS, AS WELL AS THE SON OR DAUGHTER, WILL BE PREPARED FOR “LEAVING HOME” IN ORDER TO ENTER INTO THE NEW LOVE AND JOY OF MARRIAGE.

histories of their families of origin. If either spouse left his/her family in an unhealthy manner of either enmeshment or disengagement, both should confront these dysfunctional family problems with a healthy sense of differentiation in their own new and exciting marriage and home.

Generational pathology does not have to be carried forth to their own marriage. But both should realize the importance of *leaving* in order to be able to enter into the joys of *cleaving* and being *joined together*.

Through redemption, Jesus has promised mankind a relationship between husband and wife that is based on the love, joy, pleasure, and purpose of the marriage of paradise. As the couple celebrates their newfound love, each one can be the *help* that will *meet* the need in the other’s life in a marital relationship of differentiated oneness. Such joy in the new family will go far in erasing any grief or pain that may have occurred because of leaving home. In Christ, leaving home for a new home is as real as God’s original plan for marriage in the Garden of Eden. ■

THANKSGIVING PSALMS: A Path to Praise

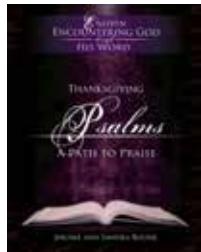
Thanksgiving Psalms: A Path to Praise is a twelve-week *Enliven: Encountering God Through His Word* Bible study by Church of God Adult Discipleship. Writing to enrich your spiritual life, the authors, Jerome and Sandra Boone, focus on the Thanksgiving psalms—one of the four major types of psalms found in the Book of Psalms.

As the authors point out,

Praising God is the highest priority for both the church and the Christian. It will continue to be the activity of God's people when His kingdom has fully come. Praise is the vital, eternal connection between God and His people, and the Book of Psalms plays a key role in this relationship. The people of Israel treasured Psalms as their worship hymnal. The early church embraced Psalms as a fitting expression of praise to the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For Christians today, the Book of Psalms is a path to praise.

This book, like the other books in the *Enliven: Encountering God Through His Word* series, uses the inductive Bible study method. The inductive study lessons each begin with

introductory information concerning the Bible passage being studied and then is broken down into four basic steps: (1) DISCOVER (observation); (2) DISCERN (interpretation); (3) DEVOTE (reflection and prayer); and (4) DISCIPLE (application).



The twelve lessons in the book are:

1. Psalms: The Book of Praise,
2. Praise as Thanksgiving
3. Praise Is the Rightful Response to God's Help (Psalm 30)
4. God's Strength Brings Joy and Praise (Psalm 21)
5. God's Forgiveness Is Joy Forevermore (Psalm 32)
6. Taste and See That the Lord Is Good (Psalm 34)
7. It Is Good to Give Thanks to the Lord (Psalm 92)
8. Praise God, His Mercy Endures Forever (Psalm 118)
9. Praise God With Your Whole Heart (Psalm 138)
10. Praise God, He Delivers From Distress (Psalm 107)
11. Praise God, Our Help in Times of Need (Psalm 124)
12. Praise God, He Delivers From Death (Jonah 2).

The book, which can be used for both individual study and class sessions, will help you to discover how praise is the rightful response to God's grace in your life, discern how God's grace is present in your life in both seen and unseen ways, devote yourself to praise in the midst of all life's circumstances, and disciple yourself and others in the practice of giving praise to God as both adoration and testimony.

Thanksgiving Psalms: A Path to Praise is available from Church of God Adult Discipleship, 2490 Keith Street NW, Cleveland, TN 37311, website: www.coglifebuilders.com, email: mensdiscipleship@churchofgod.org, toll free: 1-888-766-9009. The 338 page book sells for \$16.95.—Tom George



POINTS FROM THE PASTORAL STAFF

Justin Sharpe

Senior and Student: Relating Pastoral Roles in the Local Church

One of the greatest calls a student pastor has is working under the authority of a senior pastor whom one must support. I have worked as a student pastor at two different churches, and I will admit my view of the relationship toward my senior pastor has changed over the years. My current pastor has become a vital role in my life and my ministry—both are forever impacted because of our relationship. It is much more than a boss/employee situation. He has become a friend, encourager, confidant, and spiritual father in my life.

There is a difference in ministry from the senior pastor's responsibilities to that of a student pastor. The senior pastor has the responsibility of overseeing the church as a whole, while student pastors focus their main attention to a specific group, consisting of students and leaders. One thing made clear to me was that my job as a student pastor was to relieve some of the responsibility a pastor has and ensure that all students are ministered to individually. Knowing we have such a great responsibility to serve students and to serve under a senior pastor, we must ensure we are offering our students and our pastors the best we have to offer. Over time, I have developed

an acronym that I use to ensure I am offering my senior pastor my B.E.S.T.

BELIEVE

I think the first part to a healthy relationship between you and your pastor is to understand that you must believe in them. As student pastors, we have to understand that God has placed our pastor in authority over us. It is up to us to support whatever mission God has given our pastor for the local body. Student pastors don't have to agree with every idea or notion, but they must do their job as frontline supporters for whatever the pastor implements.

ENCOURAGE

One of the different challenges I have faced over my years in ministry is that I have felt that I was the one needing encouragement. Student pastors can feel overlooked or underappreciated. They must remember that as much as they crave encouragement, the senior pastors feel the same. I used to think there was an arrow pointed at my back for criticism. It seemed everyone had something negative to say. Then, I started to look at the amount of

criticism my pastor was receiving and became appalled. Our pastors are every bit as human as the next person, so we must give them as much encouragement, if not more, as we wish to receive.

SERVE

At my first church, I felt I was doing everything but ministering to students. I was the student pastor, why should I have to clean the toilets, or vacuum the sanctuary, etc.? Quickly, I realized that it's difficult to find consistent volunteers, especially at a smaller church. We didn't have a large staff—only the pastor, a worship leader, and me. Soon, I had to come to the realization that if it wasn't me, then who would do the jobs that no one wanted to do? No one ever said serving is fun. In fact, the Scripture speaks clearly about what attitude we should have when it comes to serving. Ephesians 6:7 tells us to "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people" (NIV).

I had the unique opportunity to write my own job description for the church where I'm currently serving. As I began to write my description, the first part of it was very deliberate. I spoke clearly as to what I felt my job should be. After laying out what I felt the ideal student pastor job description should look like, I paused, prayed, and ended it all with these words "Finally: Whatever the senior pastor sees fit for me to do, I will do. No matter what."

On December 31, 2015, my pastor lost the love of his life due to her fifteen-year battle with cancer. Throughout the course of the year, her condition continued to worsen, forcing my pastor to become her primary

caregiver. This put our staff, including me, into roles that we weren't prepared for; but no matter what, we were willing to do it. I never would have imagined that I would be asked to lead our congregation in service following her passing. When asked, I became completely willing to take on one of the hardest things I've ever had to face in ministry. Why? Because when we understand our role is to serve, we will do the things asked of us without hesitation or reserve.

THRIVE

Finally, student pastors must take on the challenge of doing what it takes to make their personal ministry thrive. If our student ministry is thriving, we have eliminated that stress off our pastors and allowed them to focus on the church. There is no better feeling than when your pastor comes to ask you about your ministry and you have nothing but positive things to say. We must remember that we are hired to be assistants to our pastors, not to bring or create more potential problems for them.

Having the opportunity to have a godly relationship with your pastor can be one of the greatest and most rewarding experiences we can have in ministry. I encourage you to do your best to develop and cultivate that relationship. Like all relationships, it takes time to develop and grow. Never forget to pray for your pastor and for the unique relationship you share. If you allow God to use that relationship, it can become one of the greatest enjoyments in ministry. ■

Justin Sharpe is student pastor at Sumiton, Alabama, Church of God.

CHURCH OF GOD HIGHLIGHTS

News Happening Between May 16 and September 15, 2016

Baker Named Chancellor of Education, President of Pentecostal Theological Seminary

At the 76th Church of God International General Assembly, a significant and comprehensive Contemporary Ministerial Development Committee Report was adopted. The report "focuses on the development of a culture of learning to prepare every minister for the challenges and opportunities of ministry by mobilizing every agency and all available resources to invest in perpetual ministerial training."

In keeping with the fulfillment of the adopted report, the newly elected Church of God International Executive Committee made the decision to bring the global educational efforts of the Church of God together by assimilating the ministry work of the Division of Education

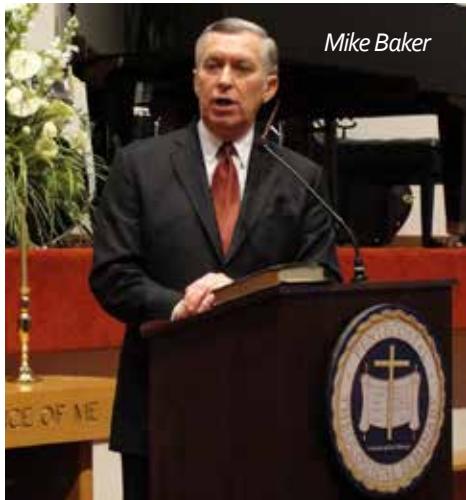
and the Pentecostal Theological Seminary, both located in Cleveland, Tenn.

With this new direction, the International Executive Committee initially appointed Dr. Michael L. Baker as chancellor of Education and recommended the new structure to the Board of Trustees of the Pentecostal Theological Seminary. This concept has been considered for a number of years, and this new course of action provides the assimilation of educational assets for an integrated, comprehensive, and cooperative global educational system in the Church of God.

As a result, the Board of Trustees received the recommendation with enthusiasm and began the designated protocol to bring the paradigm to fruition. Dr. R. Lamar Vest, who recently served as president of PTS, has been a strong advocate for this approach and expressed his affirmation of the expanded ministerial development initiative as an idea long overdue.

Following the prescribed process as articulated by the PTS bylaws and appropriate accrediting agencies, the Board of Trustees unanimously elected Baker to serve as president of PTS and their decision was approved by the International Executive Committee. Martin Taylor, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, said, "On behalf of the Board, we believe in this visionary direction and that Dr. Baker is the right choice."

While Baker will carry two titles, there is one purpose—to network Church of God educational assets with cooperative connectivity throughout the church.



West Concourse of the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando



Seventy-seventh International General Assembly Set for Orlando

The Church of God International General Assembly will be returning to Florida and the city of Orlando for the biennial convention. The dates are set for July 31–August 3, 2018.

General Overseer Tim Hill announced the location during his inaugural address at the 76th International General Assembly held July 19–22 in Nashville, Tennessee.

The International General Assemblies of 2010, 2012, and 2014 were also staged in Orlando, each time at the Orange County Convention Center, South Concourse. The GA2018 Assembly will be held at the West Concourse of the OCCC. Although located across International Drive, it is still connected to adjacent hotels via a covered walkway.

"There are many factors that figure into the choice of a General Assembly site," stated Kevin Brooks, coordinator of Conference Management for the Church of God and

member of the International General Assembly cabinet. "Orlando has been a favorable site for several reasons, including the willingness of the convention center and hotels to be accommodating, both on prices and arrangements, not to mention the family-friendliness of the area."

Paul Conn: Thirty Years as President of Lee University

Lee University president, Dr. Paul Conn, completed a historic 30 years as its president on August 1, 2016. Conn was appointed by the Church of God Executive Committee on August 1, 1986, to serve as the school's eighteenth president. He has served more than any previous leader, the closest being his father, Charles W. Conn, who led the school from 1970–1982.

Conn first arrived on the campus of what was then Lee College as a student, graduat-



ing in 1963. After completing graduate work, he returned in 1971 as a psychology professor in the newly formed Behavioral Sciences Department. In 1985, Conn was appointed by his predecessor, Lamar Vest, to serve as vice president for Institutional Advancement and rose to the presidency the following year when Vest was elected assistant general overseer for the Church of God.

Under Conn's 30-year presidency, Lee has advanced on every front. Enrollment has grown from 1,200 to more than 5,000; academic major offerings have risen to 52 with 120 individual programs; new and far-reaching initiatives have been introduced, such as service learning and study abroad; and the athletic program has moved into the NCAA Division 2. Students come from 49 states and more than 50 countries.

Perhaps most compelling is the growth

of the physical campus. When Conn assumed leadership, Lee College consisted of a little more than 20 acres, situated several blocks from downtown. Over the past 30 years, a renaissance has taken place with the addition of six times the acreage (now more than 120 acres) and a building program that has seen the construction of nearly one major building every year.

Notable building projects have included 16 residence halls, a new dining hall, student union, College of Education, School of Religion, School of Music, Humanities Center, Math and Science Building, Communication Arts Building, and a new \$10 million School of Nursing. In addition to new construction, nearly every major building has been extensively renovated. In the last decade, Lee University has acquired a former elementary school and First Baptist Church campus and successfully



amalgamated the adjoining parcels into the university campus plan.

In the mid-1990s, Lee College began the process of changing from a college to a comprehensive university. In 1997, the name was changed and since then the flagship school of the Church of God has continued to garner recognition in academia, programs, and student retention. Lee is regularly listed in the Top Tier of schools in the *U.S. News and World Report* annual college rankings. Last year, the university received a glowing review from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accrediting agency, a process which takes place every ten years.

The millions of dollars needed to advance the Lee University experience over the years have been raised through multiple capital campaigns, spearheaded by Conn. The first campaign, "Carry the Torch" in 1986–1988, raised over \$2 million for campus improvements, including renovation of the former library into an academic building and the conversion of three blocks of a city street into a pedestrian mall. This fall, Lee University will close out its latest campaign, "Find Us Faithful," a multimillion dollar, multiyear effort that has included the Communication Arts Building, School of Nursing, Pangle Performance Hall, The Chapel, and acquisition and renovation of the former First Baptist Church campus. The September 30 event will be called "Celebration 2016."

Louisiana Churches Continue Recovery From Floods

Although natural disasters have affected Church of God congregations in other places, the August flooding in Louisiana may have

touched more church buildings and church members' homes than other calamities of recent memory.

Sources report that seven-trillion gallons of water rained on the Baton Rouge area of Louisiana—triple what Hurricane Katrina brought a decade ago. More than 68,000 homes in East Baton Rouge Parish were damaged, and countless buildings are a total loss.

As for the Church of God, five Anglo church buildings and six belonging to Hispanic congregations were damaged by the floods. It is not yet known the extent of destruction of church members' homes. Surveys by Administrative Bishops Melvin Shuler and Fidencio Burgueño indicate it will take many thousands of dollars to make the church properties usable again. In the weeks since the disaster occurred, dozens of teams from local churches have traveled to Louisiana to assist with cleanup and repair. Operation Compassion has furnished food, water, and supplies, and God's Pit Crew has provided help. Just this past week, Men and Women of Action had more than 100 workers on the ground; their headquarters and mobile housing unit is set up in Covington. Only 12 percent of the residents in the most heavily devastated parish had flood insurance, according to reports. The low degree of insured properties is partly due to the flooding having occurred in zones that are outside the 100-year floodplain. No one expected floods to happen in those areas.

In a recent report from Shuler, he stated that the Savannah Branch church was flooded in March of this year. The sanctuary, gym, and parsonage were in the process of rebuilding. Then, last month 24+ inches of water fell in 48 hours and flooded these buildings once again. Shuler

said estimates of the furnishings and repairs to the Savannah Branch church total more than \$75,000.

The Robert Church of God Children's Ministry Building, gym, and parsonage were all flooded last March as well, and the congregation was also in the process of rebuilding. The church was back up and having services when the floods of last month hit. The same buildings, as well as their sanctuary received flooding this time. A preliminary cost estimate for the Robert church is between \$125,000 and \$135,000.

On August 13, Life Church suffered the results of four feet of floodwaters in the entire building. These waters affected the stability of the walls and rafters of the church, as well as their youth building. Preliminary estimates here total right at \$130,000.

Bethel Worship Center in Albany is a small

congregation that had a very old facility that did not hold up to the flooding. The flooring has absorbed so much moisture that it is crumbling, as well as the walls. Shuler stated the estimate was between \$100,000 and \$110,000.

Shuler also reported on the New Beginnings Church of God in Baker, with Pastor Dale and Linder Richter. The estimate for their church is \$90,000-\$105,000.

"In an area so very hard hit by this disaster, without outside help, there is no help," Shuler concluded. "Being small congregations, they are not self-sufficient to handle the financial burdens this storm has created. The reality of all of these churches is that they are dependent on the body of Christ."

To give to the ongoing relief effort for Louisiana, please visit www.churchofgod.org and click on the Louisiana Flood graphic

