

FALL
2020



engage

A Journal for
Church of God
MINISTRIES

IN THIS ISSUE

Leading in Crisis

God Is Pruning Us in This
Pandemic

The Legacy of Paul Conn
at Lee University

Why You Really Need to Be
Praying for Your Pastor

FALL 2020
VOL. 16, NO. 2

engage



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BY NOW EVERYONE is used to life with Covid-19. Cancelled events. Masks. Empty stadiums. Hand sanitizer. Limited restaurant seating. Social distancing. Closed offices. The list goes on.

You don't need an issue of *Engage* to catch you up on what's happening in our world. This publication was affected with the cancellation of the Spring/Summer issue in May due to the offices being closed for several weeks, and a lack of events happening—or planned for the future—at that time.

No doubt you have heard from our general overseer about how the Church of God has weathered the pandemic with churches discovering new ways to conduct church and many reporting higher (virtual) attendance and even increased giving. You will read in our Church of God Highlights section that the business of the Church of God did not grind to a halt, but with His divine guidance soldiered on.

As our movement continues to deal with Covid-19 repercussions, may it be with gratitude that He has been with us thus far. ■

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

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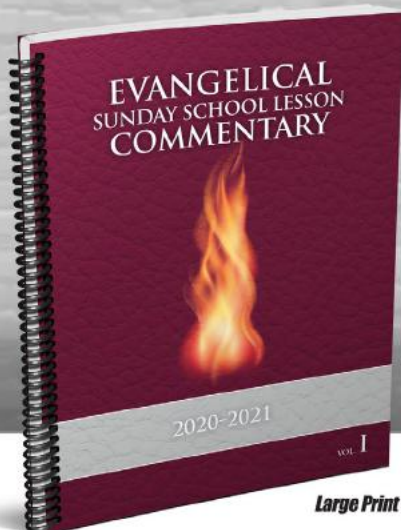
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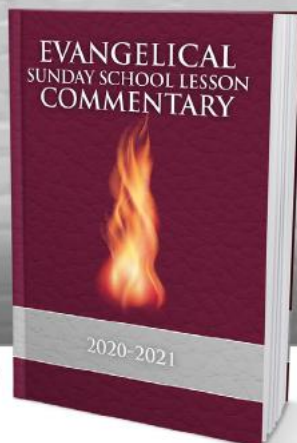


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LEADING IN CRISIS

■ by TIM HILL

(NOTE: *These thoughts and reflections are gathered from a [previous interview](#) Tim Hill took part in, which was hosted by Dr. Fred Garmon, founder and executive director of [LeaderLabs](#). It was originally published and can also be found, along with several other topics, at www.letstalkaboutitbytimhill.com).*

IN MY LIFETIME, there has probably been nothing that has challenged the church more than the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. While the year 2020 was perfectly set up to be a year of focus and many of our churches had developed themes around that idea, for

many of those same churches, the focus was quickly knocked off balance as the pandemic impacted our nation and world. For many ministries, instead of thriving, survival became the order of the day.

AGILITY AND HUMILITY

From a personal standpoint, agility and humility became watchwords for me as I faced the challenges of the pandemic.

First, let me explain what I mean by agility. Since the crisis was evolving so quickly—and with such drastic impact on the health of our nation, as well as the economic stability of the world—I realized as the leader of the

denomination I had to act quickly and decisively. There was little time to contemplate decisions and come up with grand plans. Instead, I had to rely on my experience to make expedient and informed decisions. When issues are coming at you quickly, there's not much time to sit back and hope they go away, or hope somebody comes up with a solution to solve all your problems. During this crisis, we had to act with speed and agility, and I hope our decisions reflected our concerns and hope for this great church that we call the Church of God.

Not only did I need to be agile, but also our decisions had to be made in humility. Just like in all leadership decisions, I realized that this was not going to be a one-man show. I did not have all the answers, and I had to understand that and have enough humility to admit it publicly.

In a crisis, you have to forget titles. It does not matter if your title is General Overseer or not. Nobody has all the answers in a situation like this. Humility says, "I need help." Humility says, "I need a resource base and a resource team. I need experts." I realized a long time ago that I am not an expert on too many topics—and I am certainly not an expert on COVID-19.

Realizing my lack of strength in dealing with a global health pandemic, I began to put together a team of medical physicians, legal counsel, and people who could speak to the economic impact of the virus. I assembled a variety of people who could speak into and about this crisis.

Humility played a large part in this process. I had to be willing to say, "I don't have all the answers, and I need help." This helps to accomplish a unified and dynamic purpose. Leaders have to lead, but as leaders, they must do their best to bring everyone along in the same direction. That does not mean all of us are going to agree all the time, but we can agree to disagree and still come together at the end of the day.

To that point, I want to commend the International Executive Committee—Raymond F. Culpepper, J. David Stephens, David E. Ramírez, and John D. Childers. I believe that history will record that in this situation, your Executive Committee worked as one. These men have worked in the best interest of the church, and all with agility and humility. The combined leadership experience of my brothers on the Executive Committee was invaluable. We did our best to model interdependence and hopefully make it easier for other leaders and pastors to say to their own teams, "I need you, I need your help, and I need your guidance." So, for me, adopting agility and humility were critically important in addressing the crisis that we faced.

TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION

In times of crisis, it is also critically important to have complete and transparent communication. My motto in all things, and especially during this crisis, is to communicate, communicate, and communicate. From the beginning, I stated that I may not

always say what you want to hear, but I am going to be honest and I am going to be transparent. If I know an answer or can offer a solution, I am going to get it to our Church of God family. I also promised to do it quickly, so that as much as possible, we could all be on the same page, having the same information.

I have found that transparent communication is greatly appreciated. There certainly have been times we could have communicated better. We could have said it more clearly, no doubt. But I think overall, there has been much appreciation that we at least tried to communicate through every forum, through every venue, and with every means possible. During the current pandemic, I have personally participated in some 200 different livestream/zoom/YouTube media calls where I have been able to talk with people. I think that it is critical that we have been able to communicate in this manner. Without doubt, communication has been key, along with transparency, and that was especially true when we had to announce the decision about postponing the International General Assembly.

In my ministry, I have never faced a more difficult decision than the one involving the postponement of the 2020 Assembly. I realize that the decision was not just my decision. There were many leaders speaking into that decision. However, I must tell you that I watched grown men cry over the decision, myself included. We knew it was going to be hard to tell a family that there was not

going to be a family reunion. Once the decision was made, I felt it was our responsibility to communicate the decision and then talk about all the nuances that were connected with the decision. Again, it was important to be transparent. And in a time of crisis, people must hear from their leader, and his or her communication must be upfront and direct.

Military leaders have said that when the bullets are firing and the grenades are exploding, basically you have a choice to go with the preplanned battle plan or you must go with the terrain. Because of the circumstances, many times you have to go with the terrain. Of course, there are those who will argue with that concept. And I'm sure the best of both worlds would be to blend the two together. Do not get me wrong. I know we have to plan, we have to strategize, and there are plans we have to have regardless of the circumstances. But sometimes, especially in the midst of a crisis, we have to run with the terrain on which we find ourselves traveling.

COUNTERING MISINFORMATION

During a crisis, leaders must also be quick to counter misinformation. I have always believed that putting out correct and transparent communication as soon as possible is absolutely the best counter to misinformation that so easily gets out there in a time of crisis, simply because, honestly, people are scared, afraid, and are just looking for the best information they can get.

Because of the nature of this pandemic, we have never passed this way before and

fear abounded. I understand that, and I do not condemn anyone for their fears. This is a deadly virus. And I certainly do not condemn anybody who has different opinions because there are so many ways to look at how to deal with this situation. But as general overseer, I have to tell the truth, put the right information out, and put it out frequently enough to counter misinformation.

While it is important to communicate what we know, we must also be honest to say what we do not know. To be a leader in crisis, you simply have to say what you know and what you do not know. Your followers will appreciate your honesty.

KEEP THINGS RUNNING

Probably the most important aspect during a crisis is, you have to keep things running. The work for the Kingdom must go on whether there is a crisis or not. When the International Offices had to close because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it would have been one thing if we could have said to everybody when we let them go home that day, “Take a two-and-a-half-month vacation; we’ll all get back together soon, and we will find everything as we left it.” But we could not do it that way, because we knew we had to keep things running. Missionaries still had to have their support. Business and Records still had to maintain operations. Local churches still had to produce ministry. And let me just say that I have never been prouder of our Church of God pastors.

Many had never thought about going digital with their services. Some had never thought about preaching in any other way besides behind the pulpit on Sunday morning. But they were forced to look at new ways of “doing church.” Those pastors knew that if they were to have a ministry when this is over, they had to find new ways to do ministry during the pandemic. The bottom line is that we did not have the luxury of putting everything on hold. We just had to find new ways to do ministry. And our pastors and leaders have done just that.

We all had to keep things running. Pastors had to keep ministering to the people in their congregation during the pandemic. Talk about a challenge. How do we do that when members are in the hospital? How do we do ministry when we cannot even get close to people? The idea of laying hands on the sick has suddenly taken on a whole new meaning.

So, as we saw the impact of the virus lessen, some churches opened back up, with social distancing and required masking—again, just trying to keep things running. As I noted earlier, we were out of the office, but we were not out of work—we had to keep things moving.

ENGAGE

We also must be engaged during times of crisis. We have to stay engaged with one another. Those who will lose when this thing is in the history books are those who refused to engage—with their community;

with one another; and with things that were going on besides COVID-19.

Let me give you an example. Although Paula and I had taken a few days to get away, I spent one entire morning on the phone with pastors and leaders of African American churches, and with our African American state overseers, because in the midst of the pandemic, there has been other tragic situations that have inflamed the spirit of racism in our nation. I only bring that up to say that I chose to be engaged with these leaders to assure them that I was praying for them, that I was with them in the midst of this struggle, and that we are in this battle together. I put out several social media posts about racial strife, taking a strong position that may not be appreciated by everybody. I bring this up to simply point out that there are other things going on besides COVID-19. We cannot be so focused on one issue that we allow other matters not to be addressed. We must be engaged in all matters impacting those we serve.

There are family issues and there are other church issues that were going on before this started and will be going on when this is over. So, a leader must stay engaged on all fronts, not just the current crisis, but everything that is going on.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE BIG PICTURE

Regardless of what is happening and the circumstances or crisis we find ourselves in, we have to keep the big picture in mind. So,



what comes next? What does the church look like when the COVID-19 pandemic is over? There is much talk about going back to normal. Personally, I am not interested in going back to normal. I want to go to better—wherever and whatever better is. I want to see us become the New Testament Book of Acts church that we never became. That is where I hope we go. During the crisis, our churches “left the building,” and even though we may get to use our buildings again, I want to see the church outside the four walls of our structures. Yes, it will be different, but I want the “different” to be better than what we had previously.

When I say keep the big picture in mind, I am asking, are we planning? Do we have a strategy in place at our local churches, in our businesses, in our International Offices, World Missions, or wherever? Is there a strategy for going forward? And if there is not,

I promise you, we can wait no longer. We must get our strategy ready immediately to move our churches and organizations forward.

Recently, I walked through Terminal D of the Atlanta airport—that is the terminal where most Chattanooga flights depart. It was empty. It was like a ghost town, at least at that time. Later that same day, I was in the Dallas-Fort Worth airport. DFW was almost empty as well. I use that example to just simply say that it is going to be different. It may eventually get better, but it will still be different. Different does not necessarily mean it is going to be bad; it just means that it is not going to be the same.

We have to have a big picture mentality. We cannot get tunnel vision; we have to see the big picture. When I talk about the big picture, of course, I mean the Great Commission. What does it mean for us as a church to FINISH the Great Commission? We have not set that challenge aside. We did not put that command on an off-ramp. We must keep following the commandment of our Lord and Savior, and yet COVID-19 has become part of how we carry out that commandment.

For example, earlier this year the Church of God participated in the GO FINISH 2020 Day. It was a day set aside by different faith groups to emphasize soulwinning. From that concentrated weekend of soulwinning, I have received reports of thousands who came to know Jesus. How do you do that when you cannot knock on somebody's

door and say, "Do you know Jesus"? We found ways, and as a result, thousands came to know the Lord.

OCCASIONALLY, HIT THE 'PAUSE' BUTTON

Finally, to not only survive but also thrive during a crisis, leaders must learn to hit the pause button. Hear my heart—there is absolutely nothing wrong with hitting the pause button. This has been a grueling crisis. It has been a grueling time for our pastors, our laity, parents, children, and everyone else. At some point in time, you have to hit pause. If it is only an hour, or just a day, you must take a little bit of time and just sit back, breath deeply, get some sleep if you can, work on a home hobby or project or whatever you enjoy, and just allow your mind to rest. It is important to pause, rest, and reflect, because when this is all over, we still have ministry to do.

The COVID-19 experience has reminded us of what Jesus did—get alone, pause, and rest.

Whether it is a Sabbath or a sabbatical, pastors need rest. That does not necessarily mean you have to take three months off at a time, but if you can, that is great. Sometimes, it may only be an hour, a day, or maybe even a week. There is a reason God rested on the seventh day. He is our example and our model.

Not one of us is able to select what we will be known for in the pages of history. I have recently told others that I really was

not looking for COVID-19 to be tied to Tim Hill's work in the history of the Church of God. I was hoping that my history would be connected to more exciting things. But be that as it may, when history books are written for me, for you, and for all of us, I hope that it is said of us that we were found faithful, and that we followed the leading of the Lord.

One of my favorite things to preach about is the man who carried the cross for Jesus, Simon of Cyrene. When I preach about him, I title my sermon, "Lesson From the Unexpected Cross." There are some lessons we can learn from that story:

Lesson #1: Jesus carried the cross first.

First Corinthians 10:13 tells us no temptation has overtaken us but such as is common to man, and that with every temptation, God will provide a way of escape (paraphrase). That verse reminds me that He is always there to carry our load. He understands the burdens that we carry because Jesus carried the cross before Simon did.

Lesson #2: Jesus and Simon carried the cross together.

They worked in tandem. They practiced teamwork, at least for a while, as Jesus and Simon carried the cross together.

Lesson #3: Simon, whether he knew it or not, had been geographically, genetically, and spiritually prepared to carry the cross.

Why Simon? He was in the crowd, but why didn't they pick somebody else? At a glance, they looked at him and knew this man had the muscular strength to handle this kind of problem. Whether Simon realized it or not, his whole life had prepared him for this moment. And our lifetime has prepared us for the ministry opportunities that we will experience during this pandemic.

Lesson #4: People followed him.

Simon's sons were there. From Bible history, we learn that his sons were Alexander and Rufus, both who showed up later in church history. These young men were impacted by the behavior of their father. Simon did not crash and burn during a crisis. He just picked up the cross and modeled behavior that impacted his sons' lives in the future. People are watching me, and they are watching you. I want to model good behavior in a crisis.

Lesson #5: As sure as there was a place of picking up the cross, there was a place of laying it down.

Simon picked up the cross when Jesus could not carry it any longer. He not only carried it along the Via Dolorosa, but he also carried it all the way to Golgotha. Not one foot past it, nor one foot short of the destiny of the cross. There was a designated place to lay this burden down. And so, as sure as COVID-19 started, it will end, and the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ will flourish, and we as leaders will end this journey victoriously. ■

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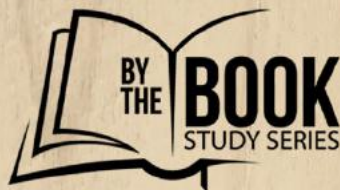
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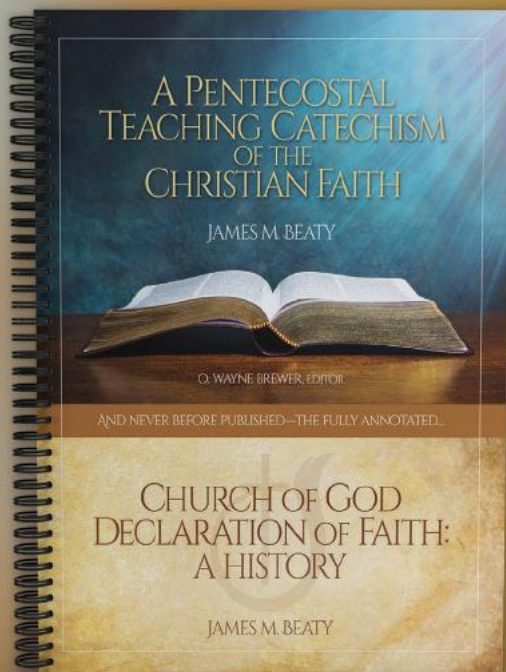
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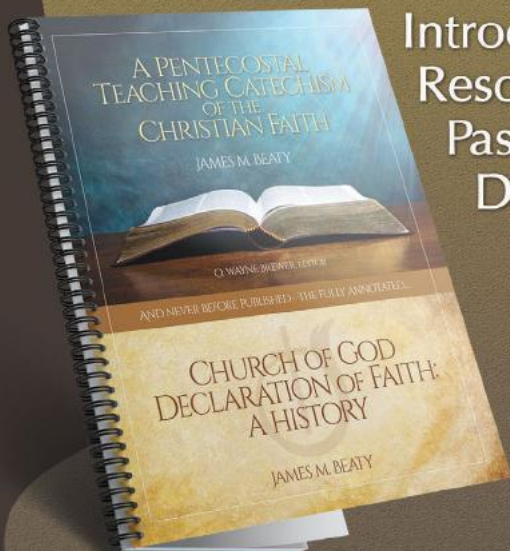
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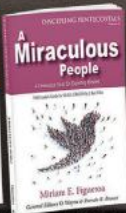
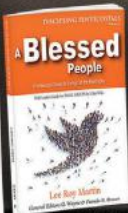
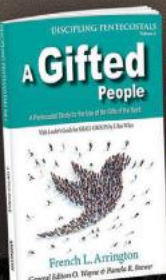
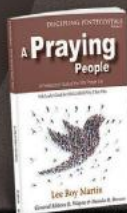
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■ by J. LEE GRADY

GOD IS PRUNING US IN THIS PANDEMIC

HAVE YOU EVER Imagined the year 2020 was just a bad dream? I've had that fantasy many times since the coronavirus pandemic started six months ago. But I always wake up and realize this nightmare is real.

Life hasn't been easy. Some of us got infected with COVID-19, or we know people who were sick or even died. People with loved ones in nursing homes haven't been able to visit in months. Many of us lost jobs or experienced a serious drop in

income. Families have had to deal with closed schools and shuttered businesses. Meanwhile the U.S. economy shrank 32.9 percent in the second quarter of 2020—the sharpest economic contraction in modern American history.

The impact the pandemic has had on churches has been devastating. After weeks of virtual meetings, churches that now are meeting in person have learned that many of their members are too afraid to be around people or they've grown too accustomed to

watching church in their pajamas at home. Church budgets have been slashed, staff positions have been eliminated, and pastors are wondering if having even 50 percent of their previous members is the new normal.

We've been challenged. We've been hit with overwhelming discouragement. We've been stretched to a breaking point.

Yet those of us who love Jesus know we can't despair. The pandemic didn't take Him by surprise. He not only has promised to be with us during our worst trials, but also, He promises to use this crisis for our good.

When my ministry travel schedule was canceled in mid-March, and I had no idea where I would get my income, the Lord took me to John 15, and I underscored these words from verse 2: "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (NKJV).

Jesus was sharing an uncomfortable truth in this verse. If we want to grow spiritually, and if we want more spiritual fruit, we must submit to the Father's plan, not ours. He has to cut things away so new growth will appear. He might even need to prune things we cling to. We can't just skate along in comfort, always getting what we want. If we desire the fruit of a mature Christian life, we must welcome adversity.

British preacher Charles Spurgeon, when preaching about John 15, said: "All fruit-bearing saints must feel the knife."

I don't like the knife! Pruning is an ugly, painful, and embarrassing experience. If you've ever seen a row of pruned trees, you know what I mean. Grapevines that have been pruned are cut back so drastically they look dead. Are you willing to live the pruned life?

Pruning cuts off what is ineffective. This pandemic has been painful, but when we look back in a year, we'll realize that God used it to eliminate things in our lives that weren't working. Some churches, for example, are realizing they were pouring tons of financial resources into programs or buildings that had no spiritual impact. Pruning has revealed what is essential for us to make a powerful, Book of Acts-style impact on our communities.

Pruning brings new life and more fruit. A tree that has never been pruned looks good. But unless the dead wood is cut away along with the showy leaves, we will never see new blooms. We need the knife. The church will not look the same in 2021. Right now, we are an ugly sight, stripped of our big audiences, our celebrity preachers, and our cool worship bands. We have been reduced to basics. But with the cutting comes something fresh and powerful, something that is so much better than church as we knew it prior to the pandemic.

Pruning draws us closer to Jesus. More than anything, the knife brings us into a deeper connection with Jesus, the "true

vine" (John 15:1). He promises that those who submit to His pruning process will abide closely with Him. Isn't this what we want? We cannot abide in Him if a thousand other things are distracting us. Life prior to this pandemic was too busy and too cluttered. Jesus wants our focus to be on Him. The process of pruning cuts away everything else so we can love Him and trust Him fully.

If you are willing to embrace God's knife of pruning, pray with me: "Lord, I choose to rejoice in the midst of this difficult season. I know You can cause all things to work together for my good. Forgive me for complaining. I welcome Your pruning process

in my life. Cut away my unfruitful branches so I can bear much fruit for You. And purify Your church in 2020 so we can welcome a fresh movement of Your Holy Spirit in this new season." ■

J. Lee Grady was editor of *Charisma* for 11 years before he launched into full-time ministry in 2010. Today, he directs The Mordecai Project, a Christian charitable organization that is taking the healing of Jesus to women and girls who suffer abuse and cultural oppression. You can follow him on Twitter at [@LeeGrady](https://twitter.com/leeGrady) or go to his website, themordecaiproject.org.

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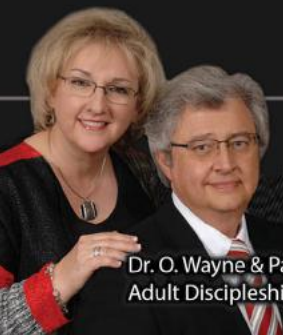
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The LEGACY of PAUL CONN at LEE UNIVERSITY

■ by CAMERON FISHER



(Editor's Note: On Saturday, August 1, 2020, Dr. Paul Conn completed 34 years as president of Lee University. In the last week of his presidency, Faith News presented a four-part series on the legacy of his leadership at the Church of God's premier institution of higher learning. The series is being reprinted in this issue of Engage).

AT AGE 38, Charles Paul Conn had been a professor at Lee College for 13 years. He had earned the highest academic degree in his field, led the establishment of a psychology major at Lee, and was a husband and father of three. He was also a best-selling author, having collaborated on life stories with Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Terry Bradshaw, country music legend Johnny Cash, and Amway founder Richard DeVos. On weekends, he delivered motivational speeches to thousands. His success as an author had allowed him to build a beautiful home in Cleveland and a vacation getaway at a new development called Big Canoe in the nearby mountains.

One might wonder why this highly successful young man kept a day job teaching at a small religious college. He could have moved his family to Boston—where he had already completed two postdoctoral fellowships at Harvard University—and concentrate on writing more bestsellers, adding to his success and notoriety.

Paul Conn's lifelong passion for Lee University can be traced back to his unique set of circumstances that divinely steered him to the Church's premier institution of

higher learning. Born in Cleveland as one of 12 children to Charles and Edna Conn, he grew up on the edge of the Lee College campus, attending local schools and the North Cleveland Church of God. His father was a noted church leader, serving in multiple capacities, including general overseer from 1966 to 1970 and then president of Lee College from 1970 to 1982. Paul Conn received a bachelor's degree from Lee in 1967, moved to Atlanta to pursue graduate studies, and served with Dr. Paul Walker on staff at the Mt. Paran Church of God. Conn was hired to teach at Lee in 1971.

In 1984, the Church of God Executive Committee appointed Rev. Lamar Vest the new president of Lee College. Arriving on campus in the fall of that year, it did not take him long to realize the passion, drive, and skills of Paul Conn were elements of leadership he wanted in his administration. Vest recognized Conn's potential to help take Lee to the next level and hired him as his vice president.

Conn became Vice President for Institutional Advancement (IA) on January 3, 1985. His primary areas of focus were to be alumni relations, development, public relations, and enrollment. He inherited a small staff and hired a couple more, including me, a fresh Lee graduate and newlywed, who had yet to gain experience in his chosen profession of communications.

An early eye-opening encounter with President Conn's vision and leadership style for me came in a casual exchange with his staff. During a weekend retreat at Big Canoe,

a few of us were on the deck preparing the barbecue grill. As we observed the coals get progressively hotter, Conn lofted a question: "How much would it take for you to sacrifice an arm or a leg in the fire? \$20 million? \$30 million?" After some awkward responses from all of us, he returned with some "sound" reasoning: "Think of what you could do with \$30 million! You could keep \$20 million, hire someone to assist you for the rest of your life, and then donate \$10 million to Lee. We could build a couple of dormitories or a new student union!"

The message of his tongue-in-cheek illustration resonated as it became clear that weekend there would be no shortage of passion to move Lee College forward and the "IA Team" would be on the front lines. Working closely with President Vest, over the next 19 months, Conn led a number of initiatives, such as a "one-a-month" new endowed scholarship program; creating new events designed to attract high-caliber leaders and bring outstanding young ministers to campus; using his personal connections and influence to rebuild community partnerships; and engaging alumni, many of whom had never heard from their alma mater. An annual alumni fund was established and a magazine resurrected. Student enrollment, which had been on a four-year decline, bottoming out at 985 students in the spring of 1984, saw a reversal with more than 1,200 students in two years.

When the Church of God gathered in Atlanta for its General Assembly in late July 1986, President Vest was unexpectedly

elected to the Executive Committee of the Church of God, no doubt in part due to the turnaround of the fortunes at Lee College. Vest's elevation to the Committee as assistant general overseer created the immediate need for a new president for Lee. Following an impromptu meeting of the Lee Board of Directors, Paul Conn was unanimously chosen as the 18th president of Lee on August 1, 1986. It set in motion an era of phenomenal growth and change that no one could have seen coming . . . except perhaps, Paul Conn.

THE FIRST TWO YEARS

Three months after being named president of Lee College, Dr. Paul Conn stood on the stage at his inauguration. The 40-year-old Conn was the fourth president of Lee in the span of four years following Charles W. Conn (1970–1982), Ray H. Hughes (1982–1984) and Lamar Vest (1984–1986). The Church of God, Lee alumni, and the Lee family were ready for long-term leadership and a return to the steady growth years of the '60s and '70s when enrollment climbed from approximately 300 prior to 1960 to a record 1,342 in 1979. The period also saw a few new buildings and the addition of long-term student traditions that still exist today.

Paul Conn's inaugural speech was a masterful delivery of projections, promises, and pomp. Dr. Carolyn Dirksen captured the essence of the speech as an articulation of Conn's vision of "this place called Lee College," where he shared his certainty that enrollment could increase, that facilities could be built, and the campus and the town

could interact positively. But he also shared his pride in Lee's deep roots, and his conviction that it could soar beyond the limits of imagination.

His vision of Lee's future grew out of his belief that Lee College matters, that it is important in the grand scheme of things—vital and valuable and worthy of the best efforts. In his eyes, those associated with Lee were a community ordained by God and striving toward the lofty goal of creating a campus where “Christ is not merely studied or discussed, or acknowledged, but where He is Lord and Master in the lives of individual students and faculty.” He fired up faculty, staff, and students when he stated that, “building a truly Christian campus is such a compelling idea that it unlocks within us vast surges of energy and sacrifice.” Under his presidency the campus family witnessed and experienced those surges in unprecedented ways.

Conn wasted no time, diving into his first capital campaign, “Carry the Torch” with a \$1 million goal. The funding project included two critical campus needs that would set the tone for future development: renovation of the old library into a classroom building and construction of a pedestrian mall.

The “ped mall” required closure of a portion of a historic city street and would be the first test of the new president's lifelong connection with the city of Cleveland. Going before the Cleveland City Council, Conn presented the case for the closure characterizing the street as “cutting through the heart

of the campus,” where for decades students had dodged cars to get from their dorm rooms to their classrooms. By the end of the presentation, the Council voted 4-3 to close the four blocks of Church Street with the stipulation to Conn to, “deliver on his promise” of transforming the strip of asphalt into a showplace worthy of the potential political sacrifice the Council members had made.

Conn made sure those Council members had front row seats when less than two years later both *Carry the Torch* projects were dedicated during the first of what was to be called “Celebration” events in years to come. “Seventy and Soaring” took the occasion of Lee's 70th birthday in 1988 to unveil the newly transformed old library into the Lamar Vest Building for Bible and Christian Ministries and the Sharp Pedestrian Mall, featuring three terraces, new entrances to existing buildings, and an amphitheater, funded through the Annual Alumni Fund Conn reinvigorated as vice president. Capturing the momentum, *Seventy and Soaring* became the theme for both Homecoming and the annual alumni fund.

Completed near the same time, but not part of *Carry the Torch*, a gleaming new six-court tennis center was unveiled. Primary donors to the complex, founder of the Amway Corporation Richard DeVos and his wife, Helen, visited the campus the following spring to cut the ribbon. It would be the first of many donations from the DeVos Foundation throughout Conn's presidency. The DeVoses and Conns had become friends when Paul Conn authored *The Winner's*

Circle and *The Possible Dream*, two best-sellers about the Amway Corporation. Over the next 30 years, the DeVos family would become the largest single donors in Lee University history.

Another significant milestone took place in the fall of 1988 at the completion of Conn's second year: setting a new student enrollment record. Working with President Vest, Conn helped to reverse a four-year trend of enrollment decreases. Conn's first two years as president saw back-to-back increases, up to 1,332 in the fall of 1987; ten students shy of the all-time record. Next year there was a 15 percent increase, with a total student population of 1,534, shattering the previous record and setting a new one. The trend would continue every year for the next 24 years until enrollment reached just under 5,000 in 2012.

With two years under his belt as president, Paul Conn was just getting started. Perhaps unwittingly, he had set his own bar of accomplishments and dedications on a two-year cycle for the foreseeable future. In the 32 years yet to come, his leadership would reflect the momentum of those first two years, but with bigger and better results.

'BUILDING' A PATTERN OF SUCCESS

By the fall of 1988, Dr. Paul Conn had fully hit his stride of presidential leadership. At the center of his success was recognition that if Lee were to excel, increased student enrollment was the key. Attracting more students who fit comfortably within the traditional Lee experience became the goal

and finding ways to recruit these students was the focus of numerous programs, events, and recruitment materials. An early idea, somewhat cutting-edge in the mid-1980s, was a recruitment video on VHS tape, produced in-house, which was mailed to prospective students to watch in their homes and included a mailer with a postage-paid label to return it when viewed.

The recruitment formula Conn developed and honed with his staff through the years produced record enrollments every year between 1988 and 2012. This extremely rare accomplishment among colleges and universities brought Lee to the forefront of both secular and Christian schools across the nation, as well as other organizations, like the annual *U.S. News and World Report* College Rankings. This recognition, attracting the attention of potential donors, along with the financial stability that came with student growth every year, allowed President Conn to dream all the more.

Because of the explosive growth, the first "from the ground up" building constructed on campus under Conn's leadership was a new 120-bed dormitory which opened in the fall of 1989, the first new student housing in 20 years. Continued growth saw the capacity of the new dorm double in the following year, and in 1990, the first "Celebration" event was held to thank God for the blessings of the previous period. Like "Seventy and Soaring" in 1988, the two-day Celebration '90 brought in alumni representatives, special seminar speakers, and honored guests who were treated to a commencement-like



ceremony and an “I Have a Dream” speech from President Conn. Guests returned home with a new or renewed sense of dedication to the Lee College mission. Celebration ‘90 was the first in another Conn pattern: raise awareness, raise funds, raze old structures, raise a building, and then raise the roof in celebration.

As enrollment continued to grow and favor among donors increased, Lee was blessed with Celebration events almost every two years . . . because there was something to celebrate.

Between 1990 and 2018, Conn led multiple capital campaigns with such inspirational names as *Higher Ground*, *Open Door*, *Find Us Faithful*, and *Press Toward the Mark*. Those campaigns raised between \$1 million and \$34 million. After the Vest

Building, academic buildings were mostly all-new construction, such as the following:

- Curtsinger Music (1995)
- Helen DeVos College of Education (1998)
- DeVos Center for Humanities (2004)
- School of Religion (2008)
- Science and Math Complex (2009)
- Communication Arts Building (2014)
- School of Nursing (2016)

Specialty buildings through the years included:

- Dixon Center for Performing Arts (1992)
- DeVos Recreation Center (1993)
- Deacon Jones Dining Hall (1996)
- Paul Conn Student Union (2000)
- Leonard Center (2007)
- The Chapel (2011)

Interspersed between these projects were more than a dozen student residence projects, which, through the years, reflected changing trends in on-campus housing. Early on, traditional dormitories met the need (Sharp, Davis, Atkins-Ellis), but later builds were primarily apartment-style, with four students sharing a living area and small kitchen. Most of the new housing projects were funded through significant gifts from and named for donors (Livingston, Keeble, Storms, Hicks), while others honored storied faculty members (Bowdle, O'Bannon, Dirksen) and past presidents (Brinsfield, and Hughes).

With the Sharp Pedestrian Mall setting the precedent in 1988, infrastructure

was woven into the exponential campus growth over the decades of Conn's presidency. Arteries of wide, decorative walkways replaced cracked sidewalks, alleyways, gravel lots, and worn grass paths. As Lee's growth enveloped surrounding properties, portions of nearly a dozen city streets have been deeded to Lee in the last 34 years, including Magnolia Ave. and 13th Street just this past Monday, July 27, through action of the City Council.

Perhaps the boldest acquisition for Lee took place in 2010 when the entire 6.5-acres of property of the historic First Baptist Church to the south of campus became available. Barely connected to the campus at the time, with the blessing of the Lee



Paul Conn takes a moment to reflect in the Lee University Chapel

Board, Conn negotiated the \$5 million purchase, which came with a large sanctuary, educational wing, adjacent outbuildings, including a former bank, and acres of parking. The transformation of the former FBC campus over the next eight years included refurbishing the sanctuary into the 700-seat Pangle Performance Hall, razing an entire block of former retail space to create room for the Communication Arts Building, and a complete gutting of the educational wing and rebuild of the exterior into a new home for the School of Business. Strategic acquisition of small properties and closing of two streets eventually created a seamless connection of the two campuses. A central green space is used as an athletic field and outdoor commencement site, and it is flanked to the east by the \$15 million School of Nursing and six-story Forum Bell Tower to the north. The entire development was on display in time for Lee's centennial year celebration in 2018.

Today's 120-acre campus that houses all these improvements has evolved from just 22 acres Conn inherited 34 years ago. The acreage added has come from the aforementioned closed streets and a few larger parcels, but the bulk of campus growth was realized through the purchase of a small rental house here and a vacant lot there. With the campus transformation has come the razing of over 130 of those houses and a few campus buildings, such as the old auditorium, music building, and science building. Incorporating a neighboring church campus

and a former elementary school, partnering with the local school system on athletic facilities, and improving public streets on the campus into parkways have all combined in creating the world-class campus that is Lee University today.

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

Dr. Paul Conn will be best remembered for transforming a small quiet liberal arts college with a few buildings within four blocks into a sprawling 120-acre campus with more than \$200 million in improvements. He will also be credited for quadrupling the enrollment, taking it from 1,214 students in 1986 to 5,386 in 2018. But in between, Conn led the intangible events, challenges, cultural shifts, and programs that arose or were initiated. The following are but a few of those intangibles that will also define the 34-year presidency of Paul Conn, the longest serving president in Lee University history.

Academic Growth and Excellence.

While fully accredited and respected among academic colleagues, Lee College in 1986 offered just 22 programs of study. With rapidly changing trends and the rise of similar Christian colleges, Conn led a wide set of academic improvements throughout his presidency. Among them was expanding the scope of faculty recruitment, developing scholarships to attract students with the highest test scores, pursuing the best accreditation for every discipline, launching masters' and doctoral programs, encouraging faculty to earn their terminal degrees, and building the best facilities. The difference 34

years later is 159 total undergraduate programs of study and 57 majors.

College to University. As Lee College grew and increased its academic offerings to include its first masters' degrees, the school came to be defined as a "small comprehensive university." In the mid-1990s, Conn initiated a year-long study to determine if taking the major leap of changing from Lee College to Lee University was not just "the logical next step," but indeed the right thing to do in further advancing the school. In 1997, at the spring commencement ceremony in May, Conn was joined by his friend and mentor, Church of God General Overseer Dr. Paul Walker, who proclaimed Lee College was now officially Lee University.

Ellis Hall Fire. Seven years into his presidency, Conn's leadership would be tested in a way no leader wants as a massive fire ravaged a boys dormitory. At 2:00 a.m. on November 4, 1993, Ellis Hall was filled with 74 residents when a fire started on the first floor of the wooden structure. Witnesses described boys "diving out of second-story windows headfirst" as the fire engulfed the building within six minutes. By sunrise, the dormitory was completely destroyed and 17 young men had been hospitalized, four in critical condition.

Over the next year, President Conn led the campus through stages of recovery, starting with a chapel service three days later where he publicly thanked God that "no one on our campus is dead tonight . . . we had a fire, that if not for the miraculous

grace of God, would have left us with body bags all the way out to the street." The chapel service began the healing process through difficult days ahead, including assessing the students' losses, temporary housing, litigation, and dealing with the outcome of a federal investigation that revealed the fire was set by a group of locals not associated with Lee. Less than a year later, "Celebration '94" was a triumphal dedication service, which featured the Ellis Hall residents as honored heroes, and a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a brand new 120-bed dormitory.

Athletics Expansion. Conn recognized early in his presidency that to attract the best and brightest student athletes, the sports in which they excelled had to actually exist at Lee. In 1986, there were only three sports offered at the scholarship level. Conn's commitment to ramp up this critical aspect of collegiate life has lasted throughout his presidency with the addition of more than a dozen new sports, for both men and women, including baseball, tennis, soccer, softball, golf, volleyball, and lacrosse. He has insisted on providing the best in facilities, relentlessly seeking the funding for a complete rebuild of Walker Arena, construction of the McKenzie Athletic Training Center, and a soccer complex. He cultivated partnerships with the local school system where Lee would improve existing facilities in exchange for a long-term lease. Last year, the lease was renewed on Olympic Field, with an additional \$4 million investment in the baseball stadium. The latest project—the last under Conn's leadership—is a new



*Dr. Conn and his wife,
Darlia, march during
commencement*

complex under construction dedicated to track and field that will include a multi-purpose field to accommodate lacrosse and intramurals. A years-long and tedious process to gain placement in the prestigious NCAA, was rewarded five years ago with full membership in Division II and has ramped up the athletic program to national recognition.

Global Perspectives. A year after he became president, Conn launched “Semester in Europe,” which offered a small group of students the opportunity to spend three months of their spring semester studying in Cambridge, England. SIE became the signature program of a ground-breaking initiative that is now a requirement for graduation. The Office of Global Perspectives works with students in planning their excursions,

most of which are overseas trips during fall or spring break, or at the end of a semester.

Service Learning. Another requirement designed to broaden every Lee student’s worldview is the aspect of service learning, a program of activities, events, and assignments students weave into their college experience. Starting with “Deke Day,” incoming freshman embark upon a day of service before their first semester begins, with visits to local nursing homes, distribution of commodities at a local food bank, and other activities designed to emphasize that we are placed upon this Earth to serve our fellowman.

Endowment Up 10X. Building on the momentum he began when he was vice president, Conn has continually focused on increasing the university’s endowment

to provide scholarships for needy students and strengthen the school's bottom line. Starting with \$2 million in 1986, the fund has increased tenfold to more than \$20 million.

Spiritual Integrity in a New Era.

No one could foretell in 1986 the cultural changes and trends to come. What Conn could promise was a commitment—to the best of his ability—to keep Lee College/University in the palm of God's hand. In his inaugural speech on October 31, 1986, he pledged, “. . . we will maintain our Christian commitment. I'm not just talking about a name on the door, but about a college where Christ is Lord, Master, and King.” Over 34 years, he has kept the sacred traditions of Sunday night chapel, chapel during the week, and convocation every semester. Faculty open their classes with prayer. Dormitories have chaplains. Students are

involved in discipleship. And an array of new clubs, music groups, and organizations reach around the globe in discipleship every year.

* * * * *

Dr. Paul Conn's legacy can be summed up in his own words, once again, delivered during his inaugural speech, when he turned to the Board of Directors, former presidents, and Church of God officials seated on the stage of Conn Center and said, “I pledge that you are passing the torch to a generation that believes in the magic of this place. I pledge to you, that by God's grace, we will not squander our inheritance.” ■

Cameron Fisher is coordinator of Communications for the Church of God. He worked with Paul Conn during the first 10 years of his presidency and served as editor of the Lee alumni magazine, Torch, between 1987 and 2017.



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■ by TIM CHALLIES

WHY YOU REALLY NEED TO BE PRAYING FOR YOUR PASTOR

YOU MIGHT BE tired of hearing it, but that does not make it any less true—these have been difficult days for pastors. And I think you need to hear as well, there are more difficult days ahead. That being the case, for the sake of your pastor and the sake of your church, he needs you to be praying for him right now and in the weeks and months to come.

Pastors, like everyone else, had their lives and routines disrupted by the lockdowns, and they, like everyone else, had to make some significant adjustments. Even the biggest opponents of recorded or streamed

services quickly found themselves preaching sermons into the cold and unblinking eye of a camera. Even the biggest Luddites found themselves spending countless hours on Zoom whether for counselling sessions or prayer meetings or elder visits. Even the most extroverted and most committed to pastoral visitation found themselves physically separated and relationally distanced from the people God had given them to care for.

Then, as restrictions have eased, it has fallen to pastors to take the lead in determining whether to meet, where to meet, and how to meet. It has been up to pastors

to understand and implement the overlapping and often contradictory public health measures. It has been pastors who have risked having their names and faces in the papers if their churches become the site of an outbreak. It has been pastors who have felt the pressure from some members to move so much slower and from other members to move so much faster, from some to accept every health recommendation and from others to reject them all. It has been pastors who have had to lead their members through issues that fall into a hazy area somewhere between matters of personal conscience and matters of public health. When a prominent Christian leader called for civil disobedience while another called for churches to remain shut for the rest of the year, it was pastors whose phones began to buzz with questions about why their churches were not following suit.

All of this made the second and third quarters of 2020 an exceptionally challenging time for pastors as they have been called to lead the people they love through a situation for which none of them were adequately prepared. That is not to say they need or want you to feel sorry for them. But I am convinced they would benefit from having you especially pray for them. And there is some urgency here; because, frankly, I think their task may get harder before it gets easier.

While the majority of churches have resumed their Sunday morning worship, few have yet returned to their full docket of ministries, programs, and meetings. There

are services, but no nurseries; small group meetings, but no choir practices. And while the services may have resumed, most still have restrictions and measures in place, whether it is masking or family bubbling or new and unique methods for safely celebrating Communion. Many pastors are feeling internal or external pressure to set those special measures aside, to start up all the programs and ministries once again, and to return to normalcy as quickly as possible. This is greatly complicated by the fact that in many congregations half the church considers this a public health emergency in which the enemy is a dangerous virus while the other half considers it a spiritual health emergency in which the enemy is an overreaching government—two very different kinds of emergency that obviously call for two very different responses.

What if all the strong opinions and divisions related to masks are really just warming us up for the vaccines?

And then there is the matter of the impending vaccines—if Christians are being torn apart by putting cloth over their faces, what is going to happen when it comes time to putting vaccines in our bodies? What if all the strong opinions and divisions related to masks are really just warming us up for the vaccines? You hardly need to be a committed anti-vaxxer to feel some hesitation when it comes to vaccines manufactured under a partnership named “Operation Warp Speed” (as opposed to, say . . . “Operation Thoroughly Tested”). You know it’s going to be a struggle when

less than half of Canadians, with our reputation for complacency, are willing to be among the first in line for that shot. It is too early to know exactly how vaccinations are going to play out in the church, but I do not think you have to be an inveterate skeptic to imagine it is more likely to bring division than unity. There will be some people who consider accepting the vaccination little better than accepting the mark of the beast and other people who believe the unvaccinated should not be permitted to pass through the doors of the church. Some people will refuse to associate with the obstinate unvaccinated and others will refuse to associate with the compromised vaccinated. Pastors will need to plead for unity and serve as peacemakers.

The reality is that pastors will continue to face unique difficulties until this pandemic is ended (or fades away . . . or kills us all . . .

or is determined to not be serious or . . .). There are many decisions still to be made, each of which will demand weighing and assessing any number of factors and each of which will be contested by at least some of the members of the church. And all of this puts the call on you and me and all of us to pray for pastors. They are going to need divine assistance to lead well and to lead with wisdom. And while you pray for them, don't neglect to pray for you, that you would be exemplary in obeying this precious verse: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:17 ESV). ■

Tim Challies is a blogger, author, and book reviewer. Visit his website at www.challies.com.



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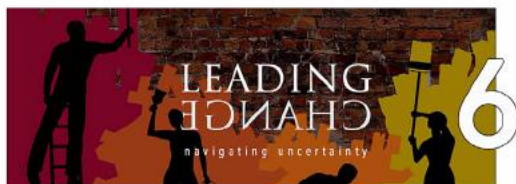


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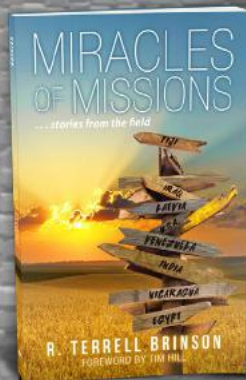
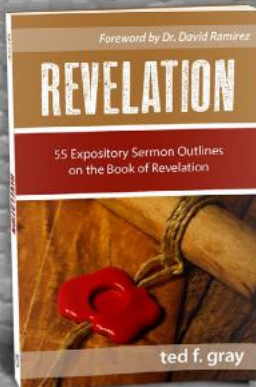
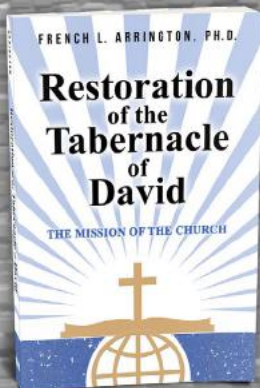
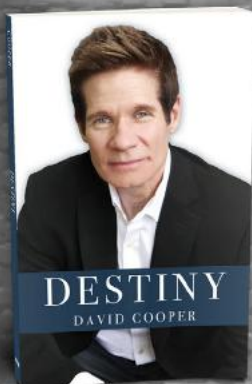
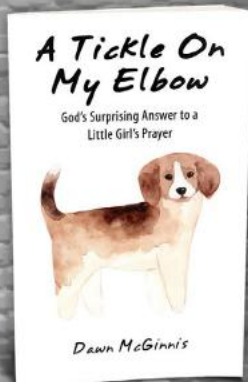
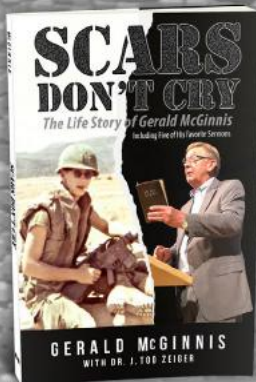
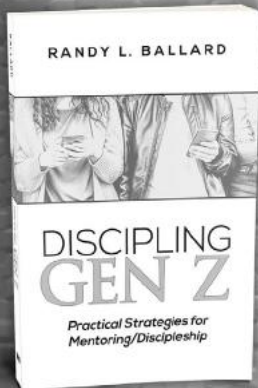
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LEGAL NOTES
Dennis W. Watkins

A Mask Perspective— The Current Hot Topic

AS WE ARE NOW entering the seventh month of COVID-19/coronavirus, the entire world is still trying to navigate the effects of this pandemic. The underlying question for churches during this time is, “How do we recover from, or rather adapt to, this pandemic?” President Trump issued a statement in the month of May declaring that all houses of worship are essential and that every governor should allow all churches to reopen effective immediately. However, the major issue at hand is, “How can we do this safely?”

WHO DO YOU ANSWER TO?

Due to the nature of this pandemic, there seems to be a plethora of opinions on how society should approach reopening. Particularly, businesses and organizations are overwhelmed with mandates from the CDC, state governments, and local/county authorities. Clearly, every organization wants to adhere to these guidelines as much as possible for the obvious reason of health and safety for individuals, but also for the

liability that an organization could encounter if proper precautions are not enforced. The guidelines the CDC released for faith-based organizations during this phase are essentially recommendations, not requirements. With that in mind, there is not a simple “one size fits all” solution for churches. Issues regarding COVID-19/coronavirus and churches are fluid and vary almost weekly. Each church must be informed on what its state and local officials mandate, and carefully follow and implement those specified regulations.

MASKS: RECOMMENDED OR REQUIRED?

At the time of this writing, one of the most pressing issues for churches is whether or not congregants should wear masks during church services. This has become a flashpoint issue and has also become politicized. The CDC has determined from numerous studies that a significant portion of persons carrying coronavirus are asymptomatic and even some demonstrate

delayed symptoms and are classified as pre-symptomatic. Therefore, the CDC released the following recommendation regarding the use of cloth face coverings for communities of faith:

“Encourage use of cloth face coverings among staff and congregants. Face coverings are essential when social distancing is difficult. Note: Cloth face coverings should not be placed on children younger than 2 years old, anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, and anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cloth covering without assistance. Cloth face coverings are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms.”¹

I have received numerous calls from local church staff around the country, and in some cases, local church members simply refuse to wear a mask at church; this places some church leaders in a dilemma on how to handle this situation. If possible, any mandate should be followed, but once again, some of your members simply will refuse to comply with this requirement. Purportedly, doctors and scientists have shown that when masks are worn by both parties to a conversation, then the risk of transmitting the virus from person to person decreases dramatically. Therefore, wearing masks in public settings with social distancing is a good practice your church should consider.

Your church's decision on whether to request masks to be worn on church property should be influenced by understanding that at this time this is a federal recommen-

dation, not a requirement. Unless your state and/or local authority requires masks to be worn in church or public settings, then the decision should be made at the discretion of your church leadership. If the federal government or CDC eventually requires the use of masks nationwide, then the game has changed and this discussion would be moot.

CONCLUSION

The decision on masks should stem from your church being informed, aware, and adaptable. **Informing** your leadership about federal, state, and local regulations is imperative. Further, your church needs to be **aware** of the risk involved of not implementing the mandatory and recommended guidelines by all pertinent officials. Lastly, throughout this ongoing pandemic, churches must recognize that tomorrow will be different from today; therefore, churches should readily **adapt** their operations as we all continue to learn new information daily. ■

Special thanks to Michaela Micco and Alexandria Smith for their assistance in writing this article.

Dennis 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.

¹ Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith. (2020, May 23). Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/faith-based.html



Church Finances in a Post-COVID World

WHILE READING Information in a discipleship publication recently, I was shocked to see the writer note that one of the biggest challenges facing “discipleship making” in the near future is a financial challenge. The magazine pointed out that during trying financial times, church leaders need to be making changes, but they seem frozen in place, especially during this crisis, simply because they do not know what the future holds from a financial standpoint. The article went on to state that “the current emphasis on full-time staff and mortgaged facilities will be challenged” in the future. Their prediction was that there would be a drastic and sustained downturn in church finances in a post-COVID world.

Before we jump to that conclusion, let us step back and try to understand where we are financially as a nation. From a pure stock-market standpoint, the economy seems to have recovered. However, as is often pointed out, the stock market and the economy are two completely different animals. Millions—with estimates in excess of 20 million—are still without work. It is feared that many of these jobs will not return since it is projected that close to 13 million jobs that were on the books in February 2020 do not exist today. In addition, some 66,000 businesses have folded

since March 1, not only impacting the owners of those businesses but also those who work for them.

Through the first 21 weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, 56.2 million workers applied for unemployment assistance. A good portion of those people are back to work, but the number unemployed, representing about 10 percent of the workforce, is still very high compared to what we have seen over the last decade.

The stock market has recovered. But unemployment is still more than 10 percent.

My 403(b) account in the Ministers’ Retirement Plan has a higher balance now than in February 2020. But 66,000 small businesses have closed in that time period.

What am I to make of this confusing information concerning the current financial condition of our world?

Remarkably, many churches saw giving increase during the pandemic. The question remains as to whether that increase in giving will hold once the pandemic subsides and a sense of normalcy returns. If you follow the prediction in the discipleship magazine mentioned above, there will be a huge downturn in giving, challenging churches to maintain staff and to pay for mortgages on their buildings. Again, with this conflicting information, what is a church to do?

PREPARE FOR THE WORST

We must follow the standard advice—prepare for the worst but hope for the best. Church budgets for 2021 should take into consideration the possibility of a downturn in giving not seen in the last several decades. How can your church operate with a 20 percent decrease or 25 percent decrease in regular giving? Those are the questions that the finance team and the leadership of the church should be addressing now.

If the church's budget is based upon 20 percent less revenue, just think of what can be accomplished if there is no decline in giving. Those additional funds can immediately be plowed into ministry and carrying out the work of the Kingdom.

In a time where fear has prevailed and regular church attenders are afraid to venture out to a Sunday morning worship service, a local church must be prepared, both spiritually and financially, to provide new ways of reaching those who consider that church to be their church home. We have heard many talk about a “new normal,” but we may be months, if not years, away from any semblance of a new way of doing things. It is during this transitional time that the church must maintain its strength and its outreach, both to the regular attender and to those who do not know the Lord as their Savior.

BE THE BEST

God has called the church to be a light-house to a troubled world. There is no time in our lives that we have experienced more trouble than we face today. Therefore, there is no doubt that now this world needs the church, and the spiritual insights that the church can bring.

Ministry costs money. So, if the church faces a downturn in giving, there will have

to be difficult decisions made about which ministries continue and which ministries are discontinued. No doubt, these discussions will be difficult. Every ministry in your church has supporters, as well as detractors. The supporters will want to keep the ministry going even though your measurement tools may show that the ministry has been ineffective at best.

The church should strive to do ministry with excellence. God demands no less out of us. Therefore, the church should focus its ministries on those in which it does ministry well. And, the financial resources of the church, even though they may be limited, should follow those ministries that are done well.

OUR HOPE IS THE LORD

Jeremiah 17:7 tells us that “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord” (NKJV).

Regardless of the political, social, or financial challenges that we may face, if we remember that our hope is in the Lord, we can do all things through Him who strengthens us.

Whether your church has prospered during the pandemic or struggled, we must rejoice because our hope is in Him. It is critical that we remain focused on Him, not on our circumstances. Those things that we see and that we are experiencing during this pandemic may not look so bright and cheery. However, if we maintain our focus on our Lord and Savior, we will have hope.

Stay encouraged. While the road ahead may be unknown and less traveled, we serve a Savior who has been this way before!! ■

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.



DOCTRINE and POLITY
Daniel Tomberlin, DMin.

Church and Civil Government

THE RISE OF CHRISTENDOM

For its first three centuries, the Christian church existed as a barely tolerated, sometimes persecuted, and widely misunderstood minority religion within the Roman Empire. The Christian confession that “Jesus Christ is Lord” was deemed to be a political threat by the Roman authorities. The Roman Empire tolerated religious diversity as long as it did not conflict with the interests of the state and devotion to the Emperor.

The conversion of Constantine changed the status of the Christian faith in the Empire. The Edict of Milan (AD 313) legalized Christianity and Christian bishops became imperial advisors. Decades later, Emperor Theodosius I issued the Edict of Thessalonica which made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Both Constantine and Theodosius viewed religion as a socio-political bond that promoted unity within the Empire. With the fall of Rome, Christian bishops became the *de facto* administrators of city-states throughout early medieval Europe.

The religious and political imagination of medieval Europe was informed by Augustine’s

City of God (circa AD 425) which suggested that human society is comprised of the temporal cities of human history, epitomized by Rome, and the eternal City of God. The two cities are not separated, but integrated. Human cities will suffer inevitable decline. Only the City of God will ultimately prevail. As the nation-states of Europe began to rise from the collapse of the Roman Empire, the royal families of Europe ruled by divine right that was affirmed by the Christian Pope. The various Christian kingdoms became known as Christendom—a geopolitical marriage of the European nation-states and the Christian church.

THE RISE OF SECULARISM

The advent of Protestantism provoked a crisis in the political and religious establishments of Christendom. Europe became divided between Catholic and Protestant nations and religious conflict disintegrated into decades of warfare which ended with the Peace of Westphalia (1648). During this time European merchant ships were traveling the oceans developing worldwide trade, establishing colonies in Africa and the Americas, and often

transporting Christian missionaries. Many Europeans migrated to the American colonies in search of religious freedom. It is ironic that Europeans were fleeing Christendom so they could freely practice the Christian faith. Enlightenment thinkers of Europe began to imagine a society free of monarchical governments and the hierarchical church. This sentiment is expressed in words attributed to the French philosopher, Denis Diderot: "Man will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest" (circa 1770). This thinking inspired the American and French revolutions. During this period a new concept emerged—the separation of church and state. In this view, the religious and political domains are distinct and separate. In the newly formed American nation, the first amendment protected religious practice from the encroachment of the new federal government (*The Constitution of the United States*, 1789). In revolutionary France, religious freedoms were contingent upon the interest of the state (*Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, 1789). The concept of separation of church and state has led to the rise of secularism which envisions a political society free of the constraints of public religious expression. In the secular state, public policy is debated and established within the precepts of the sciences and religious considerations are minimized.

CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD TODAY

Presently, the people of God live and practice the Christian faith in diverse nation-states throughout the world. If we consider

just the ten countries with the largest Christian populations we discover that this includes the Americas (USA, Brazil, Mexico), Europe (Germany), Asia (Russia, Philippines, and China) and Africa (Nigeria, Congo, and Ethiopia).¹ If we expand our demographic search to include countries and regions with smaller populations of Christians, then we discover that there are significant numbers of Christians living in regions whose culture is formed by other religions. In Buddhist regions of east Asia (Japan, Vietnam, the Koreas, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar) there are an estimated 30,000,000 Christians. In the Muslim regions of the Middle East and Northern Africa there are an estimated 13,000,000 Christians. In southern Asia, where Hinduism (India) and Islam (Pakistan and Indonesia) are dominant there are an estimated 58 million Christians.²

The Church of God (Cleveland, TN) has a presence in 185 countries and territories of the world with almost 40,000 local congregations and 7.5 million members.³ Therefore, consideration of the interactions between the Christian church and the nation-states of the world must be global, and allow for regional contextualization. The relationship of Christian communities in intolerant nations will be profoundly different than the relationship of Christian communities in nations which tolerate religious freedom. Faithful Christians must always give priority of allegiance to the mission of the Kingdom of God in all political contexts.

The Christian church is the firstfruits of New Creation, a people born of the Holy Spirit

and saved from the corruption of this present age. The church represents a new humanity freed from the bondage of sin and death. The church in this present age is to model a new social structure, “a new and living way,” inaugurated by the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:20; cf. Galatians 3:26-28). The Christian church includes, transcends, and transforms all human cultural, racial, and ethnic paradigms. The body of Christ is comprised of “every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9; cf. Genesis 12:3; Acts 3:25; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 7:9).⁴ The Christian church has declared its sole allegiance to Jesus Christ as the King of kings and Lord of lords; therefore, it transcends the diverse political borders and economic ideologies of the kingdoms of humanity. Christian believers live in monarchies, democracies, and totalitarian regimes with capitalist, socialist, and communist economic systems. In some regions of the world the Christian faith is tolerated, and in other regions of the world believers are persecuted and martyred. Even as the Church exists in this present age, the hope of all believers is for New Creation. The challenge for Christians in this present age is to negotiate the tensions of being in the world, but not of the world. In other words, how might Christians be faithful to Jesus Christ while living in Babylon?

“MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD”

Pilate and Jesus stood before each other as representatives of two opposing kingdoms

—Pilate representing the Roman Empire, and Jesus representing the kingdom of God. Jesus was charged with crimes against the Roman state (John 19:12). As Pilate interrogated him, Jesus declared, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm” (John 19:36). Since the fall of humanity, all the kingdoms of this world derive authority from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, that is, knowledge without God and autonomy from God (Genesis 2:9; 3-17). The kingdoms of this world are perpetually tempted towards idolatry, with powerful humans as demi-gods who rule by virtue of power, violence, and wealth (Genesis 11:1-9). Throughout the world, battlefields are designated as sacred ground and warriors are memorialized. God has judged human civilization to be barbaric: “Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:15-18; cf. Isaiah 59:7-8).

The servants of Jesus cannot establish God’s kingdom with acts of coercion or violence (Matthew 26:52-53). Jesus is king by virtue of his eternal and divine Sonship (Psalm 2:6-7; Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 11:27; 26:64; 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-22; Philippians 2:9-10; Colossians 2:10; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 1:5). Jesus announced the coming of the Kingdom of God with a call to repentance and a proclamation of “release to

the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed" (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:18-19). Jesus' kingdom is characterized by "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). The kingdom of God is established by divine love expressed by the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Upon the cross, the divine-human Christ endured the totality of human violence against humanity, and against God. With his resurrection Jesus ensured the coming of "a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13; cf. Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1). With the Incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the kingdom of God has invaded the present world. The Lord's Prayer expresses the heart of God, that God's "kingdom come" and God's "will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). As the divine-human intercessor, Jesus prays for his disciples who are not of the world, but sent into the world (John 17:13-19). Christians are commissioned by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the priestly and prophetic people of God in this present age (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

LIVING IN BABYLON

Throughout the Biblical narrative Babylon represents the nations of this present age in opposition to the kingdom of God (Genesis 11:1-9; 1 Peter 5:13; Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh means that the Spirit is moving throughout all the cities, domains,

and cultures of the world (Isaiah 11:9; 40:5; 52:10; Joel 2:28; Habakkuk 2:14). The creative-redemptive work of the Spirit means that the Spirit gives birth to the kingdom of God within the domain of Babylon. The presence of the Christian church throughout the world is the pledge of New Creation. The Holy Spirit works to promote human flourishing among all peoples, including those who are unaware of God's grace at work among them. Just as God causes the sun and rain to nurture the righteous and wicked alike, so too the Spirit of God moves within the darkness of all the nations of the world to plant seeds of human flourishing and redemption (Matthew 5:45; John 1:1-5; 1 John 2:8).⁵

The first humans—Adam and Eve—were created in the image of God with the divine charge to "rule ... over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28; cf. Genesis 2:15). Human government is ordained of God and all human rulers are servants of God (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:2; Isaiah 45:1; Romans 13:1, 6; Colossians 1:16; 1 Peter 2:13). National borders are established and governments rise and fall at God's decree (Deuteronomy 12:38; Job 12:23; Jeremiah 27:5-7; Daniel 4:17, 25; Acts 17:26). The purpose of government is to establish a civil order that reflects the righteousness and justice of God; and promotes the peace and flourishing of humanity. However, because of the fallen state of humanity, no government in this present age can exemplify the Kingdom of God. Human governments resist the Holy Spirit, and human rulers refuse to acknowledge

Jesus Christ as “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5; cf. John 3:19; Acts 4:26; Revelation 17:14). Even the European nation-states of Christendom failed to rule according to the royal law of love (James 2:8). The nations of the world have fallen in temptation to the idolatry, immorality, and greed of the great Babylonian whore (Revelation 14:8; 17:2; 18:3, 9). Therefore, national patriotism and allegiance to political parties should always be tempered by the Christian’s faithfulness to God’s kingdom.

Christians are God’s chosen people who are scattered as aliens throughout the territories of Babylon (1 Peter 1:1; cf. 1 Peter 2:11; James 1:1). Christians live as exiles in a foreign land. Each Christian community is a dependent colony of New Creation with primary citizenship established in the New Jerusalem (Philippians 3:20). The nations of the world will never be a Christian’s homeland because all faithful believers yearn for the city “whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10; cf. Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 11:16; 12:22, 28; Revelation 3:12; 21:2, 10).

As strangers and aliens living in Babylon, Christians should “seek the welfare of the city” (Jeremiah 29:7). Jesus said that his servants should “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17; cf. Matthew 22:21; Luke 20:25; Romans 13:7). Jesus was not suggesting that the Emperor and God were to be given equal devotion; he was not giving divine sanction to Rome; nor was he acknowledging Caesar’s claims of divinity. Jesus was instructing his disciples how to live as an oppressed minority

in Babylon (cf. Matthew 5:38-48). As resident aliens, Christians should pay taxes, give due honor to government officials, pray for those in authority, and make every effort to live in peace with everyone (Romans 13:1-6; cf. 12:17-18; 1 Peter 2:11-17).

As people of New Creation, Christians are authorized to represent the Kingdom of God as “ambassadors of Christ” and “ministers of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). The message of the Kingdom of God may appear to be foolish and offensive, but Christians must eagerly, boldly, and faithfully proclaim the message of Jesus to the powers and authorities of this present world (Romans 1:14-16; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 1 Peter 2:8). Christians should also seek to serve national and local governments as long as such service does not compromise their renewed conscience (Acts 24:16; Romans 12:2). Naaman, the Syrian commander who suffered from leprosy, confessed allegiance to the God of Israel after being healed. As a servant of the Syrian king, he knew his presence would be required when the king worshipped in the Temple of Rimmon, the Syrian national god. Naaman suggested that his presence would be mere formality and asked for a pardon in the matter. The prophet Elisha reassured him with the words, “Go in peace” (2 Kings 5:18-19). Christians should offer respect for the religious customs of fellow humans without compromising fidelity to Christ. Daniel maintained faithfulness to God and served Babylonian and Persian kings with excellence and wisdom (Daniel 1:8, 20; 2:48). Some first-century believers served the household

of Caesar (Philippians 4:22). Christians who are privileged to serve in places of authority should seek to influence public policy so that the righteousness and justice of God's kingdom might prevail in this present age, that those who are oppressed and disenfranchised might be protected, and the equal dignity of all humans will be esteemed from conception to natural death (Genesis 18:19; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3; Micah 6:8; Matthew 25:31-40; Hebrews 13:1-6). Christians must at all times give priority of allegiance to the righteous kingdom of God (Matthew 6:24, 33).

“WE MUST OBEY GOD, RATHER THAN MEN.”

In this present age, human governments fall into idolatry and attempt to make religion a tool of the state. In secular governments, the well-being of the state is the highest good. The spirit of Babylon insists upon human autonomy from God, human achievement, and human deification (cf. Genesis 3:5; 11:1-9; Psalm 82:6; Isaiah 14:14; Ezekiel 28:2, 9; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:1-18). The self-deification of the state is exemplified in the story of Nebuchadnezzar's golden image which represented him as divine. All subjects of his empire were to worship the image. But three Hebrew men—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—refused to bow before the Babylonian idol. They served in King Nebuchadnezzar's royal administration, but refused to deify him (Daniel 3:1-18). Likewise, when King Darius the Mede required absolute allegiance, Daniel refused to comply (Daniel 5:1-13). No human ruler is worthy of absolute allegiance.

Earlier in the biblical narrative, when the Pharaoh of Egypt ordered the execution of all Hebrew male infants, “the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them” (Exodus 1:17). During the days of the primitive church, the apostles were forbidden to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. They declared, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). At Thessalonica, Christians were accused of acting “contrary to the decrees of Caesar” (Acts 17:7). Submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ compels believers to resist evil in the world (Romans 12:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 3 John 11).

The Kingdom of God is engaged in spiritual conflict with the powers and principalities of this present age (Ephesians 6:12). Even as Christians strive to be godly residents of the nations of the world, we are exhorted, “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world,” and “whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (1 John 2:15-17; cf. James 4:4). Jesus said, “because you are not of the world ... the world hates you” (John 15:19). The spirit of Babylon strives to “make war with the saints and to overcome them” (Revelation 13:7). Oppressive governments will persecute the disciples of Christ. Jesus declared, “the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force” (Matthew 11:12). In the face of persecution, Christians should be prepared to give a defense of the Gospel through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Mark 8:38; Luke 12:11-12; 21:12-19; Romans 1:16; 1 Peter 3:15).

Jesus has “disarmed the rulers and authorities” and “triumphed over them” by his death,

resurrection, and ascension (Colossians 2:15). All human authorities are subject to the rule of Christ and when He returns in power and glory all the rulers of the earth will be judged and bow before Christ as King and Lord (Psalm 2:9; 9:19; 67:4; 82:6-8; 96:10; 110:6; Isaiah 2:4; 45:23-24; 60:12; Jeremiah 25:31; Ezekiel 39:21; Daniel 2:44; 4:34; Micah 4:3; Zechariah 14:9; Haggai 2:6-7; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 12:25-28; Revelation 6:12-17; 11:18; 14:8; 17:14; 18:2).

SUMMARY

The purpose of government is to establish a civil order that reflects the righteousness and justice of God; and promotes the peace and flourishing of humanity. The Christian church includes, transcends, and transforms all human cultural, racial, and ethnic paradigms. Christian believers live in monarchies, democracies, and totalitarian regimes with capitalist, socialist, and communist economic systems. National patriotism and allegiance to political parties should always be tempered by the Christian's faithfulness to God's kingdom. ■

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

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Volf, Miroslav. *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Public Good*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011.



ENDNOTES

- ¹ *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*. Pew Research Center, 2015. Internet: https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/christians/pf_15-04-02_projectionstables63/
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- ³ Church of God World Missions. Internet: <https://cogwm.org/about/mission-stats/>
- ⁴ All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.
- ⁵ Steven M. Studebaker, *A Pentecostal Political Theology for American Renewal: Spirit of the Kingdoms, Citizens of the Cities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 5, 7, 141, 173, 203, 224.

CHANGING A GENERATION... Here's How...

Discipleship Classes

**Chosen Generation
Youth Services**

Monday Chapel

Summer Day Camp

**Alpha Educational
Learning Center &
Graduation**

**Independent Living
Program**

Weekly Staff Prayer

Therapeutic Program

**Forever Families
through Adoption
& Foster Homes**

Devotional Emphasis



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CHURCH OF GOD HIGHLIGHTS

(Editor's Note: Since there has not been an issue of Engage since January 15, 2020, this section will be lengthier than usual. Articles are in chronological order, edited for space, and reflect the date of publication. To read complete articles, please visit www.faithnews.cc):

Lee University Names New President

(January 31, 2020) Cleveland, TN—The Lee University Board of Directors has named Dr. Mark L. Walker its next president to succeed Dr. Paul Conn later this year.

Dr. Timothy M. Hill, General Overseer of the Church of God, released the following statement regarding the selection of Walker: "The Church of God Executive Committee is pleased with the selection of Dr. Mark L.



Walker and unanimously supports his appointment

as the president of Lee University. As a seasoned pastor and a highly qualified educator, Dr. Walker will continue the incredible leadership that Paul Conn has provided for more than 30 years. We look forward to working with Dr. Walker as he leads Lee University, our flagship institution providing training and educational opportunities for generations to come."

Walker will assume the presidency on August 1, 2020, exactly 34 years following Paul Conn's appointment in 1986. Conn will transition into the role of chancellor.

Former Assistant General Overseer Orville Hagan Passes Away

(March 17, 2020) Rev. Orville Hagan, former assistant general overseer for the Church of God, passed away on Tuesday, March 17, 2020.

Rev. Hagan served for six years on the International Executive Committee as third and second assistant general overseer between 2002 and 2008. He was also a former assistant director (1994–1998) and Director (1998–2002) of Evangelism and Home Missions, state overseer of Hawaii (1978–1982), Chicago-Metro (1982–1986), Tennessee (1986–1990), and Virginia (1992–1994). He was also state director of Youth and CE in Kentucky and Pennsylvania. He served on the International Executive Council from 1998–2000.

In the later years of his ministry, Rev. Hagan led "America Ablaze," a church planting network and American missionary strategy. He



served as a pastor in Rock Hill and Sumter, S.C., and in Columbus and Wabash, Indiana. He was a member of the boards of West Coast Bible College, Evangelism and Home Missions and

Youth and Christian Education. He was also a World Missions Field Representative from 1990–1992.

A native of Kentucky, Rev. Hagan began his ministry in 1956, a year after marrying his wife, Vicky. They are the parents of two children, Abbie and Greg.

The funeral will be held on Friday, March 20 at the North Cleveland Church of God. Visitation will take place from 11:00 am–2:00 pm, followed

by the funeral at 2:00 pm. Jim Rush Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Church of God Announces Event Cancellations

(March 19, 2020) Cleveland, TN—Amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, leaders at the Church of God International Offices have announced the cancellation of nearly a dozen previously scheduled denomination and department-wide events.

In the last few days, Church of God General Overseer Tim Hill has been communicating electronically with selected groups of leaders to keep them informed of the Church of God response to the crisis. He has met via Zoom Conferences with the Council of Eighteen and all state/regional overseers twice, and on Thursday morning with the Church of God International Offices Administrative Ministries Council (AMC), which consists of all department leaders. During these sessions, Hill gave the latest developments, and updates were given by Benefits Board President Art Rhodes and Church of God Legal Counsel Dennis Watkins.

Smoky Mountain Winterfest, perhaps the largest annual gathering within the Church of God, was cancelled last weekend following a decision by the University of Tennessee to close the primary venue, Thompson-Boling Arena. In less than a week since, conditions nationwide have progressed to a state of widespread closures and cancellations as medical and government officials seek to “flatten the curve” of the spread of the virus.

In consultation with church leaders and the Executive Committee, Hill announced

cancellation of the following events (in date order):

- Ozark Winterfest (March 27–29)
- Frontier Kidfest (April 3–5)
- Midwest Kidfest (April 17–19)
- Carolina Kidfest (April 24–28)
- Smoky Mountain Gathering (April 28–30)
- National Youth Leaders Association (NYLA; April 30–May 2)
- Smoky Mountain Kidfest (May 1–3)
- Ministerial Internship Program Commissioning (May 14–16)
- Eagles Youth Summit (July 1–4)
- Junior Talent

During the sessions, General Overseer Hill also announced other actions that are being enacted or pending relative to Church of God ministries. As the dynamic changes day by day, Hill and the Executive Committee, which has met every day this week, will consider further decisions as the situation evolves.

Hill urged overseers, department leaders, and member of the Council of Eighteen to seek ways to cope and encourage others in this unprecedented time. He encouraged state overseers to “stand by and support our pastors and the local church,” and provide a “responsible response” for assistance. First Assistant General Overseer Raymond Culpepper referenced the importance of checking on retired ministers and widows during this period.

Hill referred to Genesis 9:28 that speaks of Noah living 350 years after the Flood.

“There is life after every crisis and there will be life after (this) flood,” Hill stated. “This is an opportunity for all of us to draw closer to God and to each other. We (Executive Committee) will be with you every step of the way.”

For the latest information on the Church of God's response to Covid-19, please visit coronacog.com.

Lee University Announces New Ph.D. Program

(April 13, 2020) Cleveland, TN—Lee University has received approval to launch its first College of Arts and Sciences Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) program in the fall of 2020. The degree will be in marriage and family therapy in the graduate counseling division of behavioral and social sciences (BEHSC). The approval comes from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC) in time for fall enrollment to begin. The Helen DeVos College of Education is also adding a Doctor of Education (EdD) program this fall.

"This program comes at the right time," said Dr. Debbie Murray, provost and vice president for academic affairs. "We have many gifted public educators, counselors, and therapists in the region who could, through these programs, enhance their qualifications and skills, making it possible for them to have even greater impact on the children and families they serve."

The decision to expand Lee's doctoral programs came after a series of conversations that weighed which disciplines seemed the most logical choices. According to Murray, of the potential degrees reviewed, counseling stood out. Lee's graduate programs in counseling have offered degrees in the helping professions since 1998 and have enjoyed strong enrollments. The BEHSC department shifted from mental health counseling to marriage and family therapy (MFT) as its flagship

graduate program in 2011, and it became the first COAMFTE (Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education) accredited program in Tennessee in 2016. Over 100 students have graduated from the MFT program since its launch.

Lee is one of only two COAMFTE accredited MFT master's programs in Tennessee and will be the only doctoral program in marriage and family therapy in the state, with only two others in the region.

For more information about the new program, contact Dr. Trevor Milliron at tmilliron@leeuniversity.edu.

Operation Compassion Leader David Lorency Passes Away

(April 4, 2020) Cleveland, TN—David B. Lorency, president of Operation Compassion, passed away unexpectedly early this morning April 3, 2020. He was 75.

Throughout his ministry, Lorency served as a pastor, where at each location his leadership focused on the needs of that community and encouraging the church to respond. He was an Evangelism director for both Chicago Metro and California. Lorency was responsible for starting more than 100 ethnically diverse churches.

In 2000, David Lorency was selected to serve as executive director of Operation Compassion, a nonprofit international disaster relief organization. He has guided and directed the growth and development of Operation



Compassion from a small charity starting with a pick-up truck and \$200 to an organization handling more than 1,500 semis or more per year. Lorency has been instrumental in OC's financial growth as well. In 2006, he was named president.

Church of God General Overseer Tim Hill said, "Dave Lorency has left a legacy in the Church of God that will never be duplicated. His heart for outreach and leadership in disaster relief has made an impact that will live on for generations."

Kelvin Page Named Director of Operation Compassion

(April 24, 2020) Cleveland, TN—The board of directors for Operation Compassion, an inde-



pendent benevolent organization with roots in the Church of God, has unanimously named Kelvin Page as its new executive director.

The announcement came in a joint statement from Raymond Culpepper, first assistant general overseer, and liaison to the Division of Care for the Church of God, and Gerald McGinnis, chairman of the board for Operation Compassion and the Division of Care. The appointment is effective immediately as of April 23, 2020.

The naming of Page comes following the untimely death of OC's previous leader, David Lorency, on April 3. Lorency had spent 48 years in ministry with the Church of God, characterized by reaching the poor and underprivileged. Page, who has been a member of the board

for Operation Compassion, will lead Operation Compassion while continuing as pastor of the Westmore Church of God, where he has been senior pastor since 2000.

International Executive Council Meets in Historic Session

(April 21, 2020) Cleveland, TN—The International Executive Council of the Church of God met in their regularly scheduled spring session on Monday, April 20, 2020, where they made the historic decision to postpone the 78th International General Assembly until 2022.

In what would have been a session to finalize the agenda for the Assembly, members of the Church's governing body instead grappled with the fallout of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic that has impacted millions of lives and caused countless deaths around the globe.

From the beginning of the process, the Council adopted clear priorities in making their decisions:

- Decisions had to be pleasing and honoring to the Lord;
- The health and well-being of members and participants had to be first and foremost in the thought process – and to consider both national and international delegates;
- The financial and economic concerns (of the local church, pastors, and delegates);
- Decision had to be as least intrusive on the Church of God Minutes and Bylaws as possible.

Working from a proposal crafted by a specially appointed General Assembly Task Force, the Council adopted a resolution stating in part

that, “the 78th International General Assembly be postponed until the summer of 2022 (and) the International Executive Committee is authorized to continue its negotiations with the City of Indianapolis.”

The extensive resolution presented to the Council was the result of hours of discussion and debate by the Task Force, chaired by Executive Council member Dr. Mark Williams. A second item recommended by the Task Force and presented to the Council dealt with a continuity of governance within the Church of God in the intervening period of 2020–2022. The resolution stated that, “persons currently holding general elected positions continue in their positions

with full legal and ecclesiastical authority until such time as nominations or elections by the International General Council and elections by the International General Assembly can be properly conducted and successors chosen.”

Motion to Postpone the 78th General Assembly

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has impacted millions of lives and caused countless deaths around the globe and, at present, there is no known vaccine or a drug that serves as an antidote to this destructive and deadly virus, and projections are that it will take from 12 to 18 months to develop a vaccine to fight the coronavirus;



The International Executive Committee meets by Zoom Conference with the Executive Council on April 21, 2020

WHEREAS, the Centers for Disease Control contends that the virus and pandemic may continue for months and even spread further as we seek to open back up from the initial "stay-at-home," "shelter-in-place," quarantines, border closures, travel restrictions, and other containment orders;

WHEREAS, even the "open-back-up" plans in the United States and other nations of the world, are being done in a phased-in and gradual process in which large gatherings are either prohibited or greatly discouraged;

WHEREAS, the economic impact of the virus on most of our churches, ministers, and laity has been drastic even in the initial weeks of the pandemic, and unemployment and economic productivity are expected to decline further as the nations of the world seek to recover from the impact of the virus;

WHEREAS, Indianapolis has been named a current "hot spot" of the virus by the Centers for Disease Control, with rapid spread of the virus to the citizens in and around that beautiful city;

WHEREAS, as of this date, seeking to plan, secure a location for, and then finance the cost of a General Assembly in 2021 and then another General Assembly in 2022 seems cost prohibitive to both the international church, as well as the local church and laity;

WHEREAS, there are no clear indications when certain travel restrictions and outright travel bans will be lifted by the United States and other countries, and further there is no indication when air travel, both domestic and international, will allow for pure freedom of movement for delegates attending the General Assembly;

WHEREAS, contractual negotiations are currently underway for potential sites for the 2022 General Assembly, such occurring in the normal course of events in planning for future General Assemblies, and securing a sufficient site for a General Assembly prior to that date would be difficult considering the current status of the virus and no clear understanding when the pandemic will come to an end;

WHEREAS, the health and well-being of the membership of our church and every delegate to the General Assembly is of the utmost importance and no person's health should ever be potentially jeopardized by attending an event sponsored by the church; and

WHEREAS, the Bylaws and Minutes of the Church of God do not specifically address a crisis like which the church currently is experiencing, but do provide guidance specifically at S2. BYLAWS OF THE CHURCH OF GOD, ARTICLE VI, Governing Bodies, 3. INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, Authority, page 63, by stating that "This council shall consider and act upon any and all matters pertaining to the general interest and welfare of the Church of God." And further at S3. INTERNATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY, II. Procedures, 2., page 65, by providing that "Arrangements for the time and place of the International General Assembly shall be left to the International Executive Council."

THEREFORE, WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING: That the 78th International General Assembly be postponed until the summer of 2022. The International Executive Committee is authorized to continue its negotiations with the City of Indianapolis.

Administrative Bishops, Directors to Stay in Place Until 2022

(April 29, 2020) *Cleveland, TN*—Church of God General Overseer Tim Hill announced today that state and regional administrative bishops, as well as youth and discipleship directors, will remain in place at their respective assignments until the 78th International General Assembly in 2022.

Hill made the announcement in separate Zoom conferences today, first with administrative bishops, then followed by all Church of God ministers.

"When the announcement was made that the 2020 General Assembly was postponed, there was put in place a clause for continuance of governance," Hill shared. "However, this was not specifically addressed concerning leadership at the state and regional levels."

Hill explained the action citing the Covid-19 virus continuing to affect normal operations of the church both nationally and worldwide, including the unknown end date of social distancing requirements, continued mass gathering restrictions, and the extent of and the effects of the virus varying from state to state.

Hill read a portion of a resolution titled, "Resolution Regarding Tenure of State/Regional Overseers and State Directors," the last portion which stated, "Be It Therefore Resolved that the members of the International Executive Committee, believing that it is in the best interest of the Church of God, herein freezes the tenure of all state/regional administrative bishops and state youth directors until the 78th International General Assembly in

2022, at which time tenure resumes in accordance with the International General Assembly Minutes."

Mississippi Church of God Pastor Wins 'The Voice' Talent Search

(May 20, 2020) Todd Tilghman, pastor of Cornerstone Church in Meridian, Mississippi, was announced on live, nationwide television last night as the 2020 winner of "The Voice" competition.

Tilghman is a 42-year-old father of eight and an ordained bishop in the Church of God.

"The Voice" is a hugely popular NBC talent search competition where singers audition before a celebrity panel. Selected par-



ticipants then choose a “coach” from the panel and perform weekly during live competition. According to NBC, with the advent of the coronavirus, “The Voice” transitioned to remote live shows beginning with the Top 17, which allowed Tilghman to take viewers into his hometown, church, and life in the house with eight children. He performed from his local church, which quickly convinced America to vote him through to the Top 9. With his family by his side, Tilghman gave an emotional performance of “Love, Me” by Collin Raye that earned him a spot in the finale. As part of the Top 5 on Monday night, Tilghman took viewers back to the Meridian church one final time for a moving and inspiring performance of “I Can Only Imagine” by the contemporary Christian group MercyMe.

When asked about how the win might affect his ministry, Tilghman said, “Honestly, I think the possibilities are limitless. I’ve always been kind of a relational person as far as the Gospel is concerned. I prefer people experience love, and joy, etc. than for me to just teach them about it. So I think this will vastly expand my opportunities to show love. There are no immediate plans for any practical changes, but I also know that life is changed now, and for the better! I’ll take any platform I can to show people that, as flawed as we are, God is so very good!”

International Executive Committee Affirms Church of God Resolutions Regarding Racism

(June 3, 2020) Cleveland, TN—Over past decades, the Church of God General Assembly has addressed the issue of racism with numer-

ous resolutions. As a proactive move regarding recent developments, the International Executive Committee has made numerous statements strongly condemning recent acts of racism in America.

A resolution was adopted at the 2000 International General Assembly, which convened in St. Louis, MO. It clearly confirmed the significant commitment of the Church of God “towards the elimination of racism and bigotry, corporately identifying racism and bigotry as sinful hindrances which prevent us from truly realizing brotherhood and Christian love within and outside the body of the international church and the many peoples and races which it reaches and encompasses.”

To read this resolution in its entirety and all resolutions adopted by the Church of God General Assembly, visit www.churchofgod.org/resolutions

Walker Takes Up Gavel as Lee University President

(August 1, 2020) Cleveland, TN—On a sunny Saturday, Aug. 1, 2020, Dr. Mark L. Walker assumed the role of president at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee. It was a decision by the institution’s Board of Directors, made in January of this year, which set the course in motion, but on this quiet Saturday, all the planning and preparation became an official reality.

The board promoted Walker from within the administrative leadership of the university where he had been serving as a member of the president’s cabinet of eight vice presidents since 2017. During that time, in addition to his cabinet role, Walker had also been serving in

the Academic Affairs Division as chair of the Department of Christian Ministries and professor of Pastoral Studies. Before joining Lee's administration full-time, he served for seven years as a member of Lee's Board of Directors and was also a frequent speaker in the university's chapel services and other campus events.

Walker enters the role at a critical moment for Lee University and for higher education in general. The crisis of a global pandemic has created challenges for the normal operation of any large business, and the higher education community has its own special considerations, but Walker has had time to develop plans to launch fully into his work at Lee's helm.

Walker is married to his wife, Udella, since 1984, and together they have two children, Justin and Ashten, a daughter-in-law, Amanda, a son-in-law, Caleb, and three grandchildren, Kennedy, Judah, and Levi.

Global Celebration to Feature Music and Message

(September 11, 2020)—Church of God General Overseer Tim Hill will be the keynote messenger during a worldwide "Global Celebration" of the Church of God on Friday, September 18 at 7:30 p.m. EST.

Special musical guests will be Jason Crabb, as well as Danny Murray and the Voices of Lee. Other featured musical guests will include choirs from various parts of the globe, including Asia and Europe, and from the United States. General Overseer Hill

will be bringing a timely message centered on the theme, "The Church on Mission: Focused on The FINISH Commitment." "I have been uplifted by the testimonies of souls being saved as online church services are reaching more people than ever before," Hill stated. "Progress has continued in the midst of a global shutdown, and God is blessing and providing for his people."

The Celebration will follow a week of events for various groups of leaders in the Church of God. On Wednesday, September 16, the International Executive Council will convene via Zoom conference. In April of this year, the Council gathered for the first time in this fashion as the coronavirus pandemic was sweeping around the globe. Out of an abundance of caution, the Council's regularly scheduled September gathering will take place in like manner.

Earlier in the day on Friday, September 18, state/regional overseers, youth directors, and the Board of Church Ministries from the International Offices will convene virtually for a one-day Leadership Summit where they hear reports from various church leaders regarding resources and information, and receive inspiration and challenge through video appearances by notable leaders, including Mark Rutland, Jim Cymbala, Leonard Sweet, Ed Stetzer, and Kenneth Ulmer. The Summit will be presented in four sessions: Crucial Times, Critical Presence, Confident Leaders, and Committed Vision.