

Spring/Summer 2023

# ENGAGE

A Journal for Church of God Ministries

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- Debt Retirement/Note Burning
- Hawai'i Interns Pioneered Ministerial Internship Program
- Six Ways Not to Take an Offering
- Executive Council Action
- Forgotten





# ENGAGE

A Journal for Church of God Ministries

*Engage Journal* is published to provide resources, information, and inspiration to pastors, pastoral staffs, and lay leaders.

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**From the Editor** | Cameron Fisher

## The First Class of MIP

In this issue is a feature on the genesis of the Ministerial Internship Program (MIP), which began in the state of Hawai'i. I have a personal connection to MIP; not because I was a participant, but for my memories of the process and the seven interns who helped birth what would become one of the most effective training programs of the Church of God.

I was a young boy living in Hawai'i when I observed my father, Dr. Robert E. Fisher conceive and launch this experiment of training seven young people in their early 20s. It was 50 years ago this year—June 17, 1973, at the Hawai'i state camp meeting—when the seven were launched into their one-year assignments across the islands. The next year they would be set forth into full-time ministry.

Granted, due to my age and the passage of time, my recollection of the details of that period are sparse. But recently I came across a treasure trove of history when I retrieved three issues of the Hawai'i state paper, *Aloha State News*, from 1973–1974. Within their pages were details of the inaugural program, which are highlighted in the feature of this issue beginning on page 11.



MINISTERIAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

We can be sure the history is accurate as those issues of *Aloha State News* were edited by my father during his service as state overseer between 1967 and 1974.

Perhaps the most delightful aspect of this research came when I was able to reach three of the seven original interns via the magic of social media. I had a 45-minute conversation with Mark and Yvonne Knock who filled in some vital details of the period, while testifying of their life-changing experience. The same for Dennis Duguay. They have held true to their radical salvation experiences which took place during the Jesus Revolution.

Be on the lookout for more recollections and history of the Ministerial Internship Program throughout the next year as we celebrate a half century of MIP. ■

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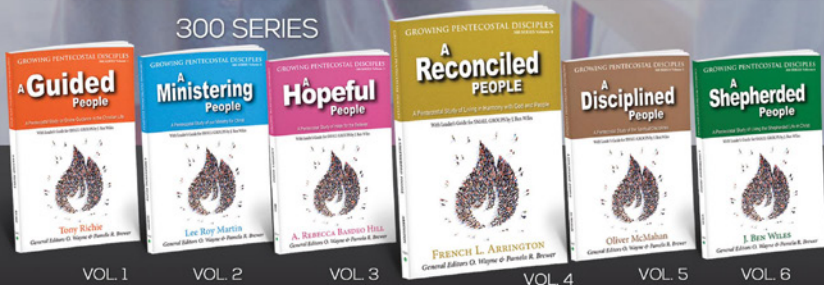
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*"When we started...we thought we would have six people but we are already up around twenty people."*

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# Church of God International Offices: Debt Retired on Campus Expansion

By Cameron Fisher



*Among those participating in the note burning were (l-r) J. David Stephens, Mark Williams, John Childers, M. Thomas Propes, Lamar Vest, Tim Hill, Raymond Culpepper, Wallace Sibley, Gary Lewis, David Griffiths, Tony Stewart, and David Ramirez.*

**T**he financial obligation of a \$10 million+ expansion of the Church of God International Offices / Headquarters campus was symbolically retired in a ceremony led by the Executive Committee on Tuesday, April 18, 2023.

Two weeks earlier, on April 5, 2023, Secretary General Gary Lewis confirmed the retirement of long-term debt with the announcement of the payoff of the buildings that was at \$1.8 million late last year. Action to pay off the indebtedness was accelerated at a Leadership Summit last September when state and

regional leaders committed to an aggressive campaign to retire the debt that remained.

The Executive Committee was joined by members of the International Executive Council, Advisory Council, and employees of the International Offices, for the ceremonial “note burning,” signifying the retirement of debt on the expansion, which realized the construction of the Leadership and Communications Center, Discipleship and Education building, and a renovation of the original four-story headquarters center.



Headquarters for the Church of God have been located in Cleveland, Tennessee for 119 years. In 1904, pioneer church leader A.J. Tomlinson arrived in Cleveland with his family and operated the business of the fledgling movement, consisting of a handful of churches in three states, from his home on Gaut Street. Growth of the church prompted the construction of



*Early headquarters facilities for the Church of God included (1) the Tomlinson Home, (2) Evangel Publishing Co., (3) Montgomery Ave., and (4) Keith and 25th Streets.*

a multi-purpose structure across the street, which was expanded several times before a more modern structure was built on Montgomery Ave. in the 1930s (current site of Pathway Press).

The journey to the current site of the International Offices at the corner

of Keith and 25th Streets began in the mid-1960s when the Church of God purchased approximately 20 acres on what was then remote real estate in the northern area of Cleveland. There was a need for a modern, new headquarters to serve a global membership of what was then around 500,000. Between 1966-1968, a four-story structure was built and dedicated on May 22, 1968, under the leadership of General Overseer Charles W. Conn.



The contemporary edifice served the Church of God efficiently until membership grew to more than 6 million in the late 1990s. The four-story, 60,000 square-foot headquarters had long become unable to accommodate



ministries that had evolved, and others that were birthed during the 30-year period of exponential growth. Buildings had been purchased or leased for ministry space in nearly a dozen locations around Cleveland. The need and desire to bring departments together on one campus was long overdue and would offer a more efficient way to conduct ministry.

In 2000, following an extensive needs study, a proposal was brought to the 68th General Assembly in St. Louis to expand the footprint of headquarters by doubling the existing ministry space, adding two new buildings to form an International Offices campus. An original request of \$6 million was raised to \$10 million by a vote of the General Council and confirmed at the General Assembly.

An official groundbreaking ceremony for the expansion took place on September 25, 2001, led by General Overseer R. Lamar Vest and attended by church, city, and state officials. Excavation of the site soon began, followed by more than two years of construction on the two new buildings, nearly identical in architecture. Once completed, crews moved immediately on an interior and exterior renovation of the original headquarters to mirror the new buildings. The entire project culminated in a formal dedication, ribbon-cutting and open house almost four years to the day on September 27, 2005.

At the note burning ceremony, First Assistant General Overseer Raymond Culpepper offered a welcome, followed by scripture and prayer from Second Assistant Tony Stewart. Third Assistant



*Groundbreaking for the expansion conducted on September 25, 2001*



*The Leadership and Communications Center (lower) and Discipleship and Education (upper) buildings under construction as the future World Evangelism Center awaits renovation.*

David Ramirez offered a prayer of dedication, while Secretary General Gary Lewis dismissed with a closing prayer. Raymond Hodge, director of business and records for the Church of God, offered remarks on the debt retirement process and Cleveland Mayor Kevin Brooks presented a certificate of commendation from the city of Cleveland declaring April 18, 2023, as “Church of God International Offices Note Burning Day.”

Participating in the actual note burning was the Executive Committee and the Advisory Council, former members of the Executive Committee who served since the expansion took place. Immediately prior, a formal resolution was read which had been adopted by the Executive Committee and

approved by the Executive Council, in session that week for their regular April gathering (read the full resolution in this feature).

According to General Overseer Timothy Hill, release from this financial obligation now frees up more than \$60,000 a month, providing resources for church planting, discipleship training, and other ministries of the Church of God around the globe.

“We give God the praise for this unprecedented campaign of partnership from visionaries, led by administrative bishops,” Hill stated. “The Executive Committee thanks everyone for their commitment in digging deep to help realize this victorious day.” ■





## **Resolution of Recognition and Honor for DEBT RETIREMENT of the CHURCH OF GOD EXPANSION**

**WHEREAS**, the Church of God was founded on August 19, 1886, at the Barney Creek Meeting House in Monroe County, Tennessee, with nine members; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1904, Rev. A.J. Tomlinson arrived in Cleveland, Tennessee, with his family, eventually establishing the first church headquarters in his home on Gaut Street; and

**WHEREAS** the Lord blessed the Church of God with growth, giving rise to the need for permanent ministry space, the first located across the street from the Tomlinson home, and in 1935 to a multi-purpose headquarters on Montgomery Avenue; and

**WHEREAS**, by 1968, global membership had surpassed 500,000 bringing about the dedication of a beautiful new four-story edifice from which to conduct the ministries of the Church; and

**WHEREAS** exponential growth in worldwide membership to more than 6 million by the 1990s prompted prayerful consideration of expansion of the Church of God headquarters, leading to a General Assembly provision of \$10 million to fund the expansion; and

**WHEREAS** the Lord blessed the Church with two new buildings and a renovated headquarters, dedicated in 2005, to produce an efficient and cohesive campus of ministries; and

**WHEREAS**, the expanded Church of God International Offices has served the global church through continued growth, with membership around the world now exceeding 8 million; and

**WHEREAS** construction indebtedness on the expansion stood at \$7.3 million in April 2014 and had been reduced to just under \$2 million by September 2022, with monthly obligations toward the debt of just under \$63,000, prompting an effort by Church leaders to eliminate this financial burden.

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that state and regional administrative bishops, pastors, ministries, and other church leaders answered the call and eradicated the debt; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the International Executive Committee offers great gratitude and thanks to all who participated toward creating a new avenue of blessing; and

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the thousands of dollars now released for future ministry be blessed and anointed toward reaching the Harvest in these last days. To God be the glory!

*Proclaimed this eighteenth day of April, Twenty Twenty-three.*

**Timothy M. Hill**  
*General Overseer*

**Raymond F. Culpepper**  
*First Assistant General Overseer*

**Tony D. Stewart**  
*Second Assistant General Overseer*

**David E. Ramirez**  
*Third Assistant General Overseer*

**Gary J. Lewis**  
*Secretary General*





# May Missions Month

**This month Church of God World Missions would like to celebrate and support our missionaries around the world who are sharing the love of Christ to the Last, the Least, and the Lost. If you are interested in partnering with us, visit [www.cogwm.org](http://www.cogwm.org).**





# Church of God in Hawai'i Pioneered Ministerial Internship Program

In 1973, the Lord opened the door to ministry and training for seven young people in the Aloha State.

*By Cameron Fisher*



*Robert Fisher (seated on table) instructs trainers with the Hawai'i interns program.*

**F**ifty years ago, three couples and a single man participated in a pilot program of intense training designed to culminate in a launching into formal ministry. The seven included Dennis Duguay, Mark and Yvonne Knock, Carl and Terry Oliver, and Wilfred and Jaye Tabian. The Tabians were native Hawaiians with church backgrounds, and they demonstrated their total commitment to Christ through their participation. The others were relatively new Christians and had only recently been delivered from drug use and other addictions. One young man was a

schoolteacher and another a Naval officer. The Knocks and Olivers had similar backgrounds, having dropped out of the establishment way of life to join the “Hippie” movement. Unmarried, they hitchhiked around the country, ending up in Hawai'i where the Lord miraculously redeemed both couples.

“This was the period of the Jesus Revolution,” Mark Knock, an atheist at the time, stated. “In almost every car we entered while hitchhiking, we were witnessed to about the love of Christ. After we got saved, we were



*Mark and Yvonne Knock with their daughter, Monica, born while they were participating in the program.*

camping in a tent on Kauai and the Lord convicted us that we needed to get married. (Church of God) Pastor Jack Powell married and discipled us, and we were eventually introduced to this new program for young believers eager to launch into ministry.”



*The Knocks have been married for more than 50 years and live in Georgia.*

Dennis Duguay was also saved under Jack Powell’s ministry.

“Living off the land on Kauai at the time, he (Powell) picked up me and a friend hitchhiking,” Dennis related. “He invited us to a Bible study in a cave, which I thought

was so cool.” Duguay and the Knocks got acquainted and together they joined the internship program.

The fledgling initiative consisted of a preparation period of approximately six months which involved reading 25 books (including a systematic reading of the entire Bible), attendance to study classes on a variety of topics, and participating in field assignments. On Sunday, June 17, 1973, during the Church of God Hawai’i Camp Meeting, the interns were commissioned into their one-year assignments with the laying-on-of-hands. The group was labeled, “a vanguard of a mighty army that God is raising up to evangelize these islands and all of the South Pacific.”

Leading the interns was the Church of God state overseer of Hawai’i at the time, Robert E. Fisher. The young 42-year-old church leader mentored and discipled the seven, continuing to develop the program until completion of their assignments in 1974. By then, “Dr.” Fisher had completed his dissertation and been awarded a Ph.D. from the University of Hawai’i.

Dr. Fisher based the new ministry training program on a depiction from Acts 6:6 where the disciples chose “seven men of good report and appointed them as assistants . . . and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased, and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.” The purpose of the program—now being referred to as the Christian Internship Program—was fourfold: (1) to provide Christian laborers, (2) to give specialized training, (3) to stir personal commitment, and (4) to require scriptural submission.



*Dennis Duguay carries witnessing materials in downtown Honolulu in 1973.*

Dr. Fisher credited much of the success of the Hawai'i Internship Program to the financial assistance of the Mount Paran Church of God in Atlanta and then-pastor, Dr. Paul L. Walker.



*Dennis met his wife, Cheryl, at West Coast Bible College and they now live in Arkansas.*

“Dr. Walker ministered in Hawai'i recently and saw the need and the potential of the work here,” Dr. Fisher stated at the time. “His response and that of Mount Paran resulted in the sponsorship of this pioneer effort.”

An update on the Christian Internship Program was detailed in the February 1974 edition of the Church of God state publication, *Aloha State News*. The article reported,

“After six months of intensive academic, physical, and spiritual training, the interns were commissioned and given assignments in various areas of church work. From the beginning, a spirit of great anointing rested upon the participants, and upon their ministries.” The article went on to report that the Knocks were serving at a downtown Honolulu center where Mark was director of outreach programs and Yvonne was a children's Bible teacher. Dennis Duguay was assigned to the Waialua Church of God as Christian education director. The Tabians were at a new church plant in Waipahu serving in various roles. And the Olivers were pastoring the Kalaheo Church of God on the island of Kauai. Statistics of the internship program were reported in that same issue and included 65 persons saved, 638 visits made, 2,501 pieces of literature distributed, and 4,079 witnessing visits made.

In perhaps a prophetic statement, the article concluded by saying, “This initial attempt at an internship program in the Church of God has been highly successful.

It is hoped that it will lead to an even greater emphasis on training of young people in the Pacific area and eventually to a general denominational internship program for ministerial candidates.”

From that trial run in Hawai'i, Church of God leaders recognized the Kingdom potential for such a program and used the Hawai'i model to launch the Ministerial Internship Program (MIP) in 1978-79. During the last 50 years, the lives of thousands of young ministers have been transformed by a program envisioned by the late Dr. Robert Fisher.



“These are crucial days that demand an unusual commitment and consecration,” Dr. Fisher said in explaining the program. “The Lord again challenges His people, ‘Whom shall I send? . . . Who will go for us? . . . Who will answer—Here am I, Lord, send me!’” ■



*Mark, left, and Dennis strumming ukuleles at a park the day before Dennis left Hawai'i to attend West Coast Bible College.*



*Pastor Jack Powell, top, conducts Bible study in Dry Cave on Kauai.*

***Cameron Fisher** is the son of Dr. Robert Fisher and observed the Hawai'i internship program as a young boy. Today, he serves as Communications Coordinator for the Church of God.*



*A Tradition Continued – Launching of interns through the laying-on-of-hands by their leaders has been a tradition since Hawai'i. The latest class of interns were prayed into ministry at the annual MIP Commissioning Service on May 20, 2023, in Cleveland, Tenn.*

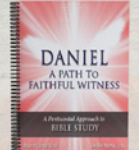
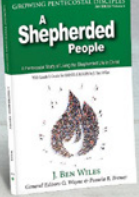
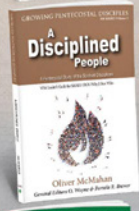
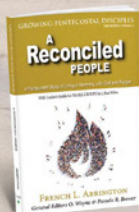
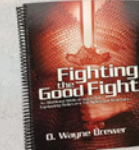
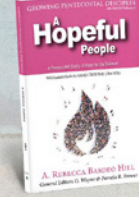
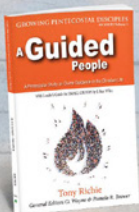
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<u>May</u>	<u>June</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>August</u>
<b>4 Weeks</b>	<b>5 Weeks</b>	<b>4 Weeks</b>	<b>5 Weeks</b>
“Understanding & Destroying Strongholds” (Chapter 8-9 from “Fighting The Good Fight”)	“Galatians - Path To Freedom” (12 wks) . . . or “Daniel - Faithful Witness Bible Study” (10 wks) . . . or “Romans Vol. 1 - Path To Transformation” (10 wks) . . . AND 1 or 2 Weeks, “Surviving Spiritual Abortion” (Chapter 10 from “Fighting the Good Fight”)		
<u>September</u>	<u>October</u>	<u>November</u>	<u>December</u>
<b>4 Weeks</b>	<b>4 Weeks</b>	<b>4 Weeks</b>	<b>First 3 Weeks</b>
“A Reconciled People” (Living in Harmony God/People) GROWING PENTECOSTALS 300 SERIES VOL 4	“A Disciplined People” (Understanding Spiritual Disciplines) GROWING PENTECOSTALS 300 SERIES VOL 5	“A Shepherded People” (Following Jesus as Shepherd) GROWING PENTECOSTALS 300 SERIES VOL 6	“Getting The Upper Hand In Spiritual Warfare” (Chapter 4 from “Fighting The Good Fight”)

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# Six Ways Not to Take an Offering

By J. Lee Grady

I've seen it all when it comes to church offerings. Once when I attended an outdoor service in Nigeria, deacons used wheelbarrows and pickup trucks to collect money because more than 500,000 people were in the audience. Yet I know a pastor in Malawi who collects the equivalent of 80 cents in his offering plate each Sunday because his members are so poor. With that money, he has planted several churches.

Giving is a huge part of the Christian life. Jesus encouraged generosity; the first disciples collected offerings; and the apostle Paul said, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7b NKJV). Paul taught us that collecting money to support the church's mission should be done with integrity and that believers should respond with generous hearts.

But even in those days, some Christians resisted the idea of giving to God's work. Others used strong-arm tactics to get their hands in people's pockets. We are still dealing with this problem 2,000 years later. Here are six of the most reckless tactics used today to raise funds in church:

**1. The endless appeal:** Some preachers drone on and on for 45 minutes to collect an offering—and then they take another 15 minutes to pass the buckets. This is rude and insensitive—and it reveals a lack of faith on the part of leaders. You don't have to talk people out of their money or hold them hostage until they give out of frustration. Trust God to supply the need rather than begging.



**2. The salesman's extortion:** Certain slick preachers in our movement are known for their uncanny ability to open people's wallets. But these fundraising "skills" are more akin to those of a used car salesman than a minister of the gospel. They promise magical benefits to those who give large amounts. They also set deadlines. I once heard a preacher suggest that if people gave "right now," their unsaved children would find salvation!

Never give in response to manipulation. Paul taught us that when we sow, we will reap. But in the same passage, he also said if we sow to the flesh we will "reap corruption" (Gal. 6:8). If you give in response to a prompting of the Holy Spirit, you will be blessed. But if you give because the preacher twisted your arm or used pressure tactics, your gift will not be blessed. Paul told us to give "not grudgingly or out of necessity" (2 Corinthians 9:7).





**3. The give-to-get tradeoff:** There is no question that God blesses generous people. If you keep your hands open to God by giving, He will open a channel of blessing for you. But God is not a slot machine, and His goodness is not for sale. Never believe a preacher who says you can buy the Holy Spirit's anointing. And never follow a preacher who guarantees you will get a new house or a new car if you put a certain amount in the offering plate.

**4. The Holy Ghost auction:** Numerous times I've heard a preacher announce that he needs a certain number of people to give \$1,000—and he will wait for hands to go in the air. Next, he needs \$500 gifts, \$250 and so on. Within a few minutes, the church has become a cattle auction. Sometimes the donors are asked to stand—suggesting that God blesses rich people, but not the widow on a fixed income who doesn't have means to give a big amount.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they liked to blow trumpets in public to announce they were giving to the poor. He told them: "When you do your charitable deeds, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deeds may be in secret" (Matthew 6:3-4). Can you imagine Jesus asking rich people to stand and give their large checks while everyone in the audience applauds them? He actually pointed out a poor widow and raved about her tiny gift.

**5. The railing judgment:** I cringe when I hear pastors tell people they will be under a curse if they don't tithe. I don't

tithe to appease God's anger; I give more than a tithe because I love to share God's goodness. We should never put a guilt trip on people while collecting money. The church is no place for threats. Zacchaeus was a greedy tax collector, but Jesus did not attack him for his thievery; He extended mercy—and this melted Zacchaeus' heart and made him a lavish giver.

**6. The pathetic apology:** Sometimes we act timid about collecting offerings, maybe because the world thinks all Christians are fakes and that churches are "all about money." But we have nothing to apologize for! We are involved in the greatest mission on planet Earth, and God Himself supplies the funds needed to evangelize the world.

When we collect offerings, we are engaging in a holy process. God is just as much involved in the offering as He is in worship, the preaching of the Word, or the demonstration of spiritual gifts. God allows us to be His vessels to give, and then He rewards us abundantly so we can give more. The church has been sustained for 2,000 years by supernatural giving. He is in our midst. While we seek to become more generous, let's learn to be more faithful in the way we steward God's money. ■

*J. Lee Grady is a former editor of Charisma magazine. This article and others like it can be found on his website, [leegrady.com](http://leegrady.com). (This article was first published in 2017)*



## Lee Online BOGO Summer Promotion

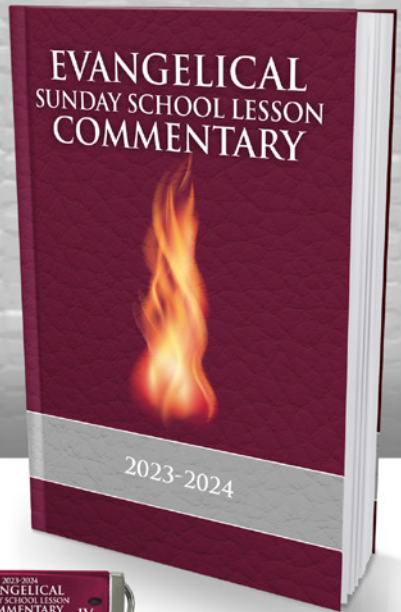
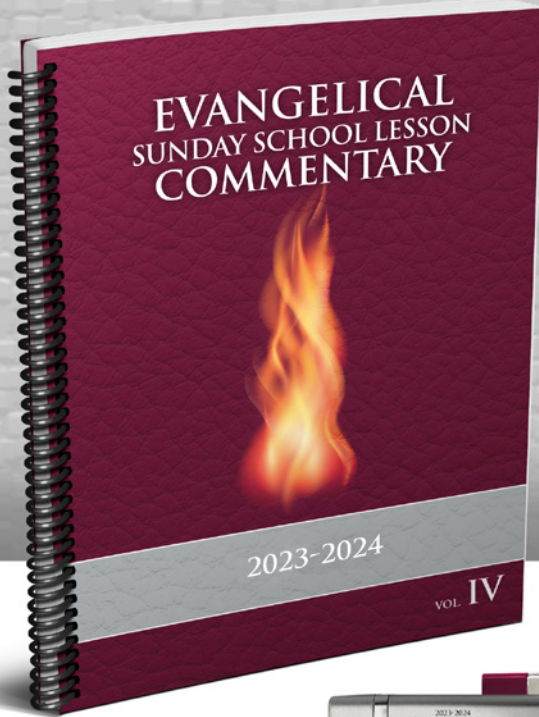
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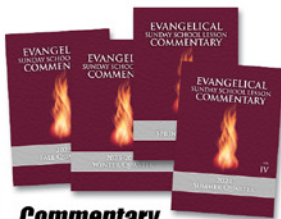
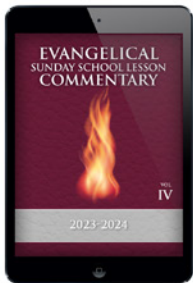


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# International Executive Council Action

The following announcement emerged from the regularly scheduled meeting of the International Executive Council, held April 18-19, 2023 in Cleveland, Tennessee:

## Advancement of Elected Officials With Tenure Remaining

In its most recent meeting, the Church of God International Executive Council convened a special order to discuss the potential for advancement of those currently serving in elected positions who will have tenure remaining in their current position at the 2024 General Assembly.

After a careful review of the Church of God *Minutes*, *Robert's Rules of Order*, multiple parliamentary guidebooks and resources, and a report from the Special Task Force made up of former Executive Committee members, current Executive Council members, parliamentarians, and legal counsel, the International Executive Council unanimously determined that there is no provision, guideline, or precedent that would prohibit an elected official with tenure remaining in their current position from advancing by being nominated (and elected) to another office at the upcoming General Assembly.

Three Executive Committee members will have completed their tenure at the 2024 General Assembly and will be ineligible for nomination to the Executive Committee for the next Assembly term. Those members are: Timothy M. Hill, Raymond F. Culpepper, and David E. Ramírez.

---

## Submission Deadline 2024 General Council Agenda Items

To: All Ministers/Laity

In anticipation of the 79th International General Assembly on July 8-12, 2024, this notification serves to communicate the process for the submission of items for consideration and possible placement on the International General Council Agenda.

Potential Agenda items are to be sent to the International Executive Council in order to be considered for the International General Council Agenda. The International Executive Council is charged by the Bylaws of the Church of God with the responsibility of setting the Agenda for the International General Council.

The notifications below are made in light of the requirements of the Bylaws of the Church of God, as well as the International General Assembly *Minutes*:

- Deadline Submission of Agenda items **relating to the Bylaws of the Church of God** need to be sent to the International Executive Council by **January 3, 2024**. This will allow the International Executive Council time to consider these items by its January 2024 meeting. There is a 90-day notification deadline to the International General Council required by the Bylaws of the Church of God concerning amendment of the Bylaws (2022 *International General Assembly Minutes*, pp. 64-65).

(Continued)



- Deadline Submission of **regular potential Agenda items** for the International General Council need to be sent to the International Executive Council by **March 1, 2024**. This will allow the International Executive Council time to consider these items by its April 2024 meeting. There is a 30-day notification deadline to the International General Council required by the Bylaws of the Church of God concerning regular International General Council items (*2022 International General Assembly Minutes*, pp. 67).
- Deadline Submission of **agenda items regarding doctrine** as prescribed by the Declaration of Faith are to be submitted in writing to the International Executive Council 12 months prior to the meeting of the International General Council (*2022 International General Assembly Minutes*, pp. 69-70). The deadline for submission of these items for the 2026 International General Assembly is **April 3, 2025**.

Submissions should be sent to:  
Church of God International Offices  
Attention: General Council Agenda Committee  
c/o H. W. Dusty Wilson  
P. O. Box 2430  
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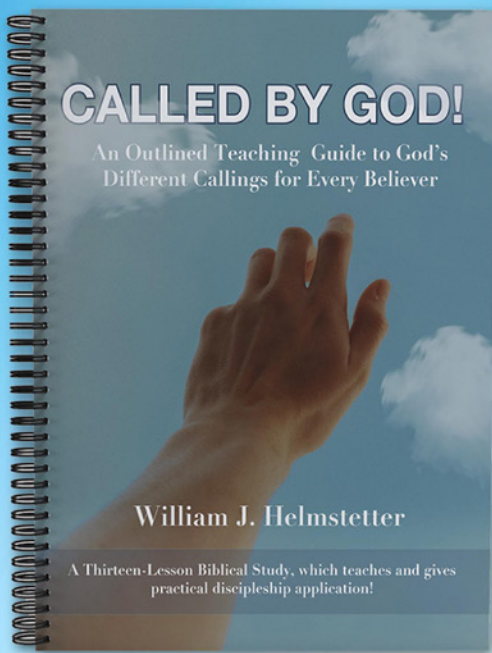
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# FORGOTTEN?

By Jerry Rogers



**T**he pain and sadness I heard in her voice, the tears I saw gently falling from her eyes, and the firm grasp of her hands on mine told me a story that needed no words to be understood. A forgotten soul, but not really. Nonetheless, she is certainly a sister in Christ headed toward becoming a stranger in her own church after being an active member and lay minister in her congregation for many years.

This story is not new. But it is playing out more often as we “Baby-Boomers” continue to age, changing not only society in general, but the church specifically. As this group of approximately 77 million people continues to age, with about 10,000 reaching age 65 each day, and each day for the next 19 years, the demographics of our society and

churches can do nothing but change. If you are a minister or lay leader within the church and do not see what is occurring within your own congregation, I challenge you to stop and take an inventory of people that you have not seen or heard much about during the past year or two, and then begin a follow-up to find them. I believe you may find that as sad as it may be, many people who are *missing* have become a victim of falling through the cracks. Oddly, the very people who are now finding themselves in need of support from the church are the very people who used to be in positions in the church as lay leaders or ministers who would have given that support. However, they have quietly faded from view and not thought of at a level that causes someone concern. There is a saying I have heard all



my life that goes, “out of sight, out of mind”, but unfortunately for many former dedicated laity and ministers, they now find themselves, “out of sight and out of mind,” within their own church.

### So How Is This Happening?

Maybe it is because of the assumption that the person would *always be there*, since they were usually working behind the scenes, out of the *limelight*, where NOT being seen is *normal*. Maybe it is that ageism has played a role in becoming forgotten. Maybe the person has become less in the forefront of the congregation because of becoming older, and not being as active in many roles as when they were younger, and they have simply *blended into the surroundings*. I can only begin to surmise the varied and valid reasons that could cause a person to become one of the *forgotten*. However it is happening, the real concern is what does the body of Christ, and more specifically, local congregations, do to catch these who are falling through the cracks? How do we rescue those who have already fallen through?

### Here Are Some Thoughts and Suggestions:

- (1) Review with the current staff the names of people whom they have not seen for a while.
- (2) Look back at various outreaches, ministries, or classes that used to be a regular part of your congregation but are no longer being done or taught, and find out if it is because the person or persons doing them are no longer regulars, or have they left due to the little and infrequently talked about—ministry burnout?
- (3) If it is ministry burnout, realize that the person admitting that they have simply had enough for a while is difficult, and that actually telling others could make the person feel as if others will find them weak in their faith, and maybe unable to even do as they have taught others to do—making them feel like a hypocrite. Consider offering pastoral counseling or professional counseling from any professional counselors or social workers that may be part of the local congregational staff to help bring restoration of purpose, and if need be—the soul.
- (4) Don't depend on the visitation team of the local congregation to be aware of the *missing*. The visitation teams in most congregations have enough work to do visiting the sick and shut-ins, as well as the newcomers to the congregation, to take on the added responsibility of keeping track of the various lay ministries and their workers.
- (5) Realize that many of the *missing* probably have not contacted anyone in the local congregation for help because of embarrassment. To someone who is used to giving of themselves and their calling or ministry, admitting to having needs, even needs that fellow congregants would or could meet, is not an easy thing to do. The person who has been so used to giving, receiving is not an easy thing to do, and can literally become humiliating to the level of





the person choosing to walk away from the congregation and go elsewhere, before asking for help from those they have served.

- (6) Don't rely on looking at tithe or church records alone to find the *missing*. Those who have been dedicated to the church and its service for many years are probably still very supportive in tithe and offerings to the local church, thereby making their name active in the minds of many, but in actuality, they have not been at a service for months or maybe years.
- (7) Have regular staff meetings where all who are involved in any ministry of the local church can meet with the pastor and other leaders, both paid and laity, where ideas, dreams, goals, and problems can be discussed and help gotten, if needed, by those who may be struggling in their place of service to the church.

- (8) If you become aware of someone who is *missing*, reach out to them, as well as notify the appropriate staff of your church and let them know.

There is usually not one simple fix for the problem of dedicated people suddenly disappearing from a congregation where they have served for a long time. The suggestions I have made are only intended to help us as the body of Christ to begin the process of identifying those who are no longer among us, and bring restoration and support to them. Who knows, maybe even taking up the torch they carried that brought light to our path, so that the path can remain lit for others who will be following behind us on their walk with Christ. ■

*Jerry Rogers holds a Ph.D. in Clinical Christian Psychology, is a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor/Supervisor, and serves Stratford Heights Church of God in Middletown Ohio as a minister of Pastoral Care and Counseling.*

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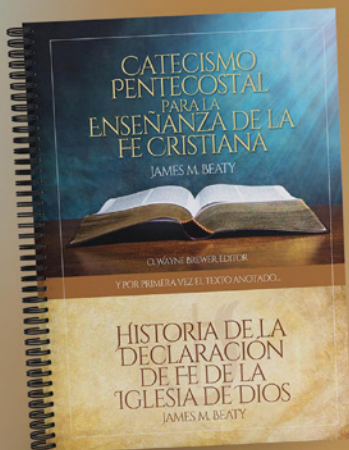
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## LEGAL NOTES

DENNIS WATKINS

# Insurance Issues for Churches II: Some Overlooked Topics



## Introduction

In previous articles, I have discussed various aspects of insurance for churches. I cannot emphasize the importance of this subject enough. On a daily basis, I see instances where churches did not obtain insurance or adequate insurance. In this article, I would like to discuss some miscellaneous insurance issues that crop up from time to time.

## Flood Insurance

Flood losses for churches are very unfortunate instances and can engender large monetary losses. The main thing to remember about flood loss is that it generally is not covered by a typical church insurance policy. That is, flood insurance must be purchased separately from other types of insurance. It is not included in typical liability or other types of insurance policies and is a separate policy.

Another aspect of flood insurance is that flood insurance rarely covers property below the first floor of a building, and usually excludes a basement. And if your church property is near a creek, stream, or other body of water, always remember that floods can happen suddenly. The “500-year flood” can happen to you!

## Workers’ Compensation Coverage

Workers’ compensation is a type of insurance that is often overlooked by churches, and incorrectly doing so can be costly. Workers’ compensation is a statutory benefit that is governed by the laws of each state. The purpose of workers’ compensation is to provide workers who are injured on the job with medical benefits and with a means for living expenses. Whether a church is required to obtain workers’ compensation insurance varies, depending



on the laws of each state, and depending on the number of employees. In some states, having only one employee will bring about the requirement of obtaining workers' compensation insurance. In other states the number may vary. It is vital that you know what the rules of your state are, even if you as the pastor of a church are the only employee.

It should be noted that the definition of "employee" for purposes of workers' compensation insurance is generally very broad and may cover even only part-time employees.

It further should be noted that in most states, failure to have workers' compensation insurance coverage when it is applicable can bring about not only *civil penalties*, but also *criminal penalties* in some states. This is not a situation that you want to be in.

Another aspect of workers' compensation insurance is that while the statutory income benefits might not be extensive, the medical coverage for a workers' compensation loss usually will cover all medical costs. This is another reason why workers' compensation coverage can be so important for you as a pastor. Generally, any type of significant injury at all while on the job can bring about astronomical medical costs. The concept of workers' compensation is to be able to cover these costs for an employee.

I have seen numerous churches with large numbers of employees have a significant loss by a worker on the job, only to have no workers' compensation coverage! This has led to some disastrous consequences and could have been avoidable. While insurance costs can be high, if you have a large number of employees,

you simply must have workers' compensation coverage to prevent significant losses under these circumstances. I recommend that every church, pastor, or administrator contact your church insurance agent and make sure that you have properly taken care of the workers' compensation coverage issue.

## Employee Dishonesty Coverage

This type of coverage protects the church in the unfortunate event that someone in the church or the management of the church wrongfully misappropriates church money.

These are always very sad cases to witness, but the main need for a church at such a time is to recoup money that it has lost. Generally, there will be a deductible that the church must also pay to enforce the policy and that amount is typically at least \$5,000. Another aspect of this type of coverage is that insurance companies typically will not honor these policies unless criminal charges are filed against the person stealing money from the church.

## Conclusion

I sincerely hope you never have to deal with the issues of a fire loss claim in your church, but if so, I hope you can revisit this article and properly approach these salient issues. ■

*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. Special thanks to Grace Tinsley and Kayla Foley for their assistance in writing this article.*



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## MONEY MATTERS

ART RHODES

# Are We Facing Another Financial Crisis?

In the past few weeks, the United States has seen the collapse of three large financial institutions, along with a bailout of another institution that seemed doomed to fail. In addition, one of the largest global banks experienced financial difficulty, needed an infusion of more than \$50 billion to keep from going under, and ultimately was forced into a merger with its bitter rival. With this level of financial unrest in the banking industry, we all are left to question whether or not these are just individual situations that have no connection, or whether these failures are a systemic problem that is reflective of the entire banking industry.

When the Silvergate Bank collapsed, it was quickly followed by the failure of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), and then the collapse of Signature Bank. In an effort to avert a fourth US bank failure, eleven larger banks contributed more than \$30 billion of capital to shore up the deposits at First Republic Bank, another bank facing insolvency.

On the global front, Credit Suisse, one of the two largest banks in Switzerland, needed a lifeline of over \$54 billion to weather the financial storm they encountered. But even with that infusion of cash provided by the Switzerland banking system, Credit Suisse was forced into



a merger with Switzerland's other mega-bank, UBS, to remain open and operational.

To determine whether each of these failures was connected to one systemic problem, or the individual collapses were caused by separate and distinct issues, one must look closely at what brought about the troubles for each banking institution. In the cases of Silvergate and Signature, it seems as though their crisis was caused by an over-exposure to the cryptocurrency markets. As cryptocurrency has moved drastically over the last few months, the value of the reserves and assets held by those banks fluctuated greatly, causing depositors to be wary about the long-term stability of both banks. When those depositors started withdrawing large amounts of funds from the banks, the regulators were forced to shut them down to keep a true "run on the bank" from occurring.

On the other hand, Silicon Valley Bank's troubles did not originate with cryptocurrency, but instead was caused by their primary business model which was catering to very risky investment/venture capital funds. The bank was focused on businesses, like startups and tech companies, which generally have a lot of cash and therefore a lot of uninsured deposits—amounts over the FDIC's insurance limit of



\$250,000. Some estimates suggest that more than 90% of SVB's deposits were uninsured. That simply means that when a depositor removed their money, they were taking huge sums of cash out of the bank.

SVB had an additional problem because they had placed most of their reserves and assets in US treasury bonds. With an increase in interest rates, those treasury bonds and notes lose value if they are sold prior to maturity. When SVB began to have large withdrawal requests, they had to liquidate some of their treasury holdings to fund those withdrawals. By doing so, they lost billions of dollars by selling the bonds prior to maturity. When other depositors realized that the bank was losing money at a substantial rate, it created a "run on the bank."

The Credit Suisse and the First Republic Bank situation offer an additional twist. Both banks have had management issues over the last few months, and have recently reported "material weaknesses" in their financial statements. That information scared depositors and led to their own "run on the bank."

Based upon these bank failures that have occurred over the last few weeks, as pointed out above, there are varying factors that have brought our financial markets to this place. However, there are still some things that we can learn from these situations, whether this is the end of the crisis or just the beginning.

First, it is important that you know where you are placing your money and have at least a basic idea about how that financial institution operates. While investing in a bank that deals in cryptocurrency sounds cutting-edge, it may also create undue risks. On the other hand, investing and making deposits in a bank that

uses US treasuries as an investment vehicle may sound safe and secure, but in a rising interest rate environment, such may cause cash flow difficulties. Simply put, just because the financial institution has a nice branch office, located on a convenient corner, does not make them a sound banking institution. You need to go further in evaluating their business model.

Second, if you or your church have deposits that exceed the FDIC limits—generally more than \$250,000, you may want to investigate the idea of dividing those funds up among multiple banks to receive the full coverage offered by FDIC, use the CDARS program through your bank (<https://americandeposits.com/what-is-cdars/>), or keep your funds at a bank that is part of the supplemental Depositors Insurance Fund (<https://www.difxs.com/DIF/Home.aspx>). To learn more about the FDIC limit, and whether or not your accounts are covered, you should visit <https://www.fdic.gov/resources/deposit-insurance/>. All your questions concerning FDIC coverage can be answered at this website.

Last, this is not a time to be fearful, but rather diligent in your financial dealings. There are always going to be challenges, and we are facing some of those now. However, a little research and investigation will hopefully set your mind at ease that your bank deposits are safe and sound. ■

**Art Rhodes**

*President and CEO  
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The screenshot shows the website's navigation and search interface. At the top, there's a header with the logo and a background image of various Pentecostal publications. Below the header is a navigation bar with links for Home, About, Search, Serials, Books, Denomination, Browse by, Help, Register, and Log in. The main content area is divided into three columns. The left column has a search bar and a 'BROWSE THE COLLECTION BY:' section with icons for Serials, Books, Dates, Country, Language, and Denomination. The middle column has an 'ABOUT CPA' section with a welcome message, organizational details, and a list of contributing archives with page counts. The right column has a 'DONATE TO THE CPA' section with a 'Donate to CPA' button and a 'TOP TEXT CORRECTORS' list.

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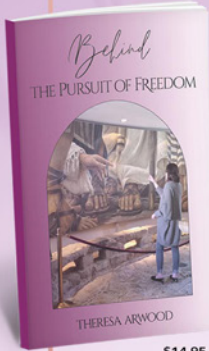
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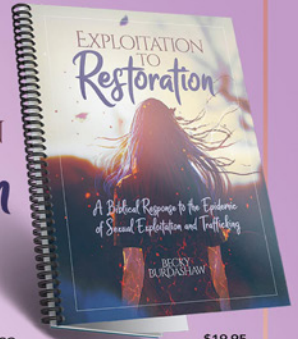
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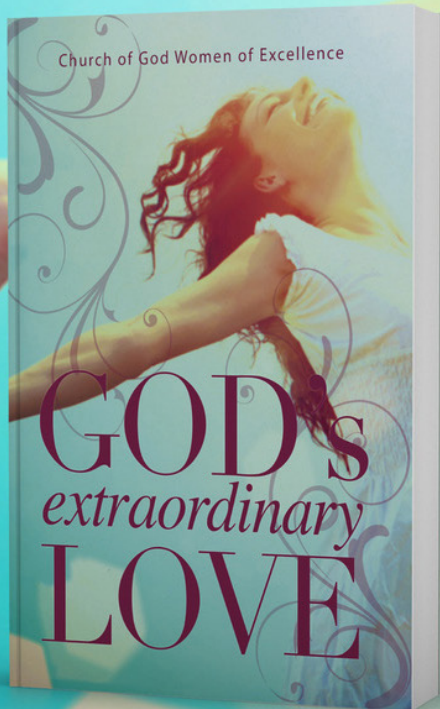
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**DOCTRINE AND POLITY**  
JERALD DAFFE

# Progressive Christianity

*Progressive Christianity*—this term sounds so positive. The word, *progressive*, suggests new creative methods or a “cutting-edge approach” to ministry. It may be seen as “out-of-the-box” thinking.

What a misnomer!

Instead of being positive to be adopted, progressive Christianity is in complete opposition to the beliefs of orthodox Christianity. It stands as an alternative to the truth (biblical or theological) upon which the Church has been built throughout the centuries. From the earliest centuries of Christianity, persecution has not been able to destroy the Church. However, *heresy*, or false doctrine, has been successful in weakening the character and mission of the Church to the point of losing its identity.

Heretical doctrines frequently arise from misinterpretation of Scriptures, putting personal experiences above Biblical truth, an overemphasis on a topic, an extreme opposite position to a particular problem, or attempting to make Christianity palatable to the views of current culture. Of special interest is how many of them are simply a variable repeat of what can be seen in previous decades and centuries. All of the above can be found in progressive Christianity.

## BACKGROUND

The views held within progressive Christianity have been drawn from a variety of historical sources (individuals) and have continued even into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The emphasis on the social gospel can be traced back to Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918). His views were “predicated on the idea that the Church must realize the kingdom of God on earth rather than to talk about a future millennial kingdom.”<sup>1</sup> He is considered the foremost American apostle of the social gospel.

Frederick D. E. Schleiermacher (1768–1834) “made feelings or emotions the element out of which religious experience develops.” He believed that religion wasn’t a set of beliefs and obligations based on the authority of the Church, but was the result of man’s feelings of absolute dependence in a majestic universe. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Not to be overlooked is Charles Darwin’s (1809–1882) theory of evolution. When applied to religion, “God and the Bible were looked upon as the evolutionary products of man’s religious conscience. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

The decline of church attendance and the youth exodus from local churches stimulated Jim Adams, rector of St. Mark’s Church

<sup>1</sup> Earle E. Cains, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 438, 439.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 419.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 423.



on Capitol Hill, D.C., to found the Center for Progressive Christianity (1994). Later it became known as *progressivechristianity.org*. Several years later, in the same decade, a gathering of youth pastors (2.0) saw the dismal statistics of losing youth from the church. Their concern and efforts became known as the “emerging church.” It had two separate divisions—*emerging* and *emergent*. The latter was “open to rethinking theology and scripture to the point of abandoning absolutes of historic Christianity.”<sup>4</sup>

## COMMON BELIEFS OF PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

In her book, *Another Gospel*, Alisa Childers relates a short conversation which took place during the journey finding her way through the teachings of a progressive pastor. “Once during choir rehearsal, for a night of worship, one of my fellow classmates stood next to me on the riser and giggled: ‘It’s funny that we’re singing all these songs and none of us have any idea what we believe.’”<sup>5</sup>

We begin this section with the eight points of beliefs and affirmations presented by the Center for Progressive Christianity. There have been several revisions to this core. What follows is the latest, dated January 17, 2020. These affirmations state that they:

1. Believe that following the path and teachings of Jesus can lead to healing and wholeness, a mystical connection to “God,” as well as an awareness and experience of not only the Sacred, but the Oneness and Unity of all life.
2. Affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of many ways to experience the Sacredness and the Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom, including Earth, in our spiritual journey.
3. Seek and create community that is inclusive of ALL people, including, but not limited to:
  - Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics
  - Believers and agnostics
  - Women and men
  - Those of all races, cultures, and nationalities
  - Those of all sexual orientations and gender identities
  - Those of all classes and abilities
  - All creatures and plant life
4. Know that the way we behave toward one another and Earth is the fullest expression of what we believe; therefore, we vow to walk as Jesus might have walked in this world with racial compassion, inclusion, and bravery to confront and positively change the injustices we experience, as well as those we see others experiencing.
5. Find grace in the search for understanding and believe there is more value in questioning with an open mind and open heart, than in absolutes or absolutes.

<sup>4</sup> Jerald Daffe, *Crosses, Coffee, Couches, & Community* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2013), 43.

<sup>5</sup> Alisa Childers, *Another Gospel* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020), 28.



6. Work toward peace and restore justice among all people and all life on Earth.
7. Protect and restore the integrity of our Earth and all Creation.
8. Commit to a path of lifelong learning, compassion, and selfless love on this journey toward a personally authentic and meaningful faith.<sup>6</sup>

These eight statements reflect the mission of *ProgressiveChristianity.org*, which is “to be an authentic voice for progressive Christianity by positively transforming the world through informed theology, spirituality, social justice, and environmental stewardship.”<sup>7</sup> From this mission statement, one can see that although they have adopted many positive ethical principles, there is no organized doctrinal position such as seen in the creeds of historical Christianity (Apostles, Nicene, and our own Church of God Declaration of Faith). Everything is open to be deconstructed and put within the arenas of subjective interpretation based on personal feelings and reason. Progressive members are to adhere and to follow the views of their own conscience. Creating your own god in the Old Testament is seen as idolatry.

To further develop a picture of progressive Christianity, consider their approach to the foundations of historic, orthodox Christianity.

## Deconstruction

Prior to reviewing specific aspects of doctrine and belief, it is imperative to understand

the concept of *deconstruction* and its impact on the interpretation of Scripture.

One definition for *deconstruction* is, “a mode of literary analysis in which the unspoken assumptions underlying a text are revealed and even disassembled.”<sup>8</sup>

This definition and the views of some postmodern thinkers set the stage for there being no absolute truth.<sup>9</sup> Everything becomes dependent on what the perceiver considers to be truth. The historical and grammatical perception of how the authors of scriptures would write in relationship to the current time and circumstances. Lost is the concept of divine inspiration and inerrancy of scripture.

This allows a person to develop their own set of truths or principles of interpretation—“I think;” “I believe;” “I disagree;” “I feel.” All of these provide a platform to disregard historic Christianity and produce a new Christianity. This pattern rejects a systematic belief structure and replaces it with an application of personal opinion and current cultural situations.

## View of Scripture (Bible)

Progressives generally see the Bible as “a human book which is an archaic travel journal that documents what ancient Jews and Christians believed about God.” In their view, the Bible is our spiritual ancestors’ best attempt to understand God in their own culture using whatever knowledge, they had at the time.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <https://progressivechristianity.org/mission/>. (Accessed Jan.21, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> <https://progressivechristianity.org/mission/>. (Accessed Oct. 25, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Tony Jones, *The New Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 40.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Liederbach and Alvin L. Reid, *The Convergent Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 52, 55. Jacques Derride (1930-2004), founder of the deconstruction movement denied the idea of language having a fixed reality. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) argued for meaning based on context.

<sup>10</sup> Alisa Childers, *Another Gospel* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020) 82.



This low view of Scripture results in personal belief superseding any biblical directive or mandate. It may contain the Word of God, but it is left to us to make judgments on its authenticity, based on our experience, opinions, and feelings. We humans become the final authority for our personal beliefs and practice.

In Fred Plumer's<sup>11</sup> short video on the progressive view of the Bible, he makes the following assertions (paraphrased).

1. The Bible is not the Word of God, not inspired, and not authoritative.
2. We can't understand what would make the people of thousands of years ago to put such terrible things in the Bible (other sources point to war, violence, murder, and rape).
3. The Bible isn't a workbook to be human. It guides us to the right questions to ask in community, but not the answers. It is not a manual to live by.

If the Bible is not inspired, not inerrant, and the product of human ideas, then the concept of deconstruction can easily be applied to historic doctrines. God, virgin conception, virgin birth, Christ's advent, Christ's passion, and the bodily resurrection can be completely redefined and reinterpreted to the point of almost eliminating them. This can be seen in the following sections.

## View of God

Initially the progressive view of God may appear rather confusing due to the use of the

word, *oneness*, which sees God in everything. This sounds much like *pantheism*. Further, some progressives add to the dilemma by describing God in terms of being hostile, abusive, petty, abhorrent, and even bloodthirsty.<sup>12</sup>

Fred Plumer's video explaining the progressive view of God provides some insight. He summarizes it with the following concepts.<sup>13</sup>

1. There is no theistic God who is thinking and interceding for us.
2. God is a mystery beyond understanding—an infinite mystery.
3. It is silly for us to believe we can give human characteristics to a God of mystery. We choose to call it a sense of oneness.
4. We are trying to have an experience with “something” who is in all things.
5. We should let go of dualistic ideas of God and reality; all reality is one connected being.

This view of God has implications in how Jesus is perceived.

## View of Jesus

Here it really becomes confusing. There are views about Jesus which are on extreme ends of belief. There are several different forms, and no congregation is told which one is to be their choice or required belief. An example of this is the belief of Nadia Bolg-Weber, founding pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints. She said, “even though she believes in the Trinity, the Incarnation, and

<sup>11</sup> Fred Plumer served as the president for The Center for Progressive Christianity, now known as [progressivechristianity.org](http://progressivechristianity.org).

<sup>12</sup> Childers, *Another Gospel*, 212.

<sup>13</sup> Plumer, Video on God, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppmDw9iGjNA>)



the miracles, she is not interested in whether every single bit of it is fact or not.”<sup>14</sup>

In his video on belief about Jesus, Plumer states Jesus was a fully human man, born in Galilee, and had fully divine experiences. How he arrives at this conclusion is the question. Plumer further believes Jesus to have been a serious religious teacher who began to share after his oneness experience. His intent was one of moving others to divine oneness so they could see this divinity in themselves.<sup>15</sup> This sounds very much like a Buddhist concept.

Utilizing this position automatically eliminates Jesus from being the sacrificial Lamb of Calvary whose death on the cross provided redemption for sinful humanity. Most progressives do not accept His atonement for sin—he did not pay the penalty. Instead, they see it as martyrdom initiated by humans. If perchance God willed his son to die, then it was “cosmic child abuse.” This view can also be found in the extreme emergents who are part of the emerging church.<sup>16</sup>

## Other Views

1. Sin in the human race is not a matter of Adam and Eve’s failure in the Garden of Eden. We are good, having been made in the image of God. Thus, there is no need for a meaningful salvation experience to reconcile us to Him. Our task is to love people rather than dialog about sin.
2. Being able to question seems to be more important than finding answers. This correlates with number three under assertions concerning the Bible.

3. Prayer may be exercises of awe, wonderment, and gratitude. As goodness flows within one’s heart, it allows us to channel energy to other people through touch and out into the world. Instead of praying for healing or direction, a person lays hands on the individual and prays for the energy to flow into the other person and assist them in their need.

## Phoenix Affirmations

This document “penned by a group of clergy and laity (2006) in Phoenix, Arizona, stands today as the clearest, most articulate presentation of Progressive Christianity.”<sup>17</sup> These affirmations are not to be understood as a creed which progressives will follow. Instead, they are principles which can be amended or modified as new awareness becomes evident. The current document is numbered 3.8.

These twelve affirmations are divided into three equal divisions of four segments, using Christian love of God, Christian love of neighbors, and Christian love of self as the major categories for reforming Christianity. John Shelby Spong summarized the initial affirmations as follows:

The Phoenix Affirmations call for Christians to love God in all of God’s expressions, to love our neighbors, including our neighbors who call God by a different name, and even our neighbors who use the literal texts of the Bible as a weapon with which to attack the objects of their prejudices, and finally to love ourselves just as we are, male, female, black, white, brown, gay, straight,

<sup>14</sup> Childers, *Another Gospel*, 41.

<sup>15</sup> Plumer, video on Jesus (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypHNvW5B5HI>).

<sup>16</sup> “Is Progressive Christianity Dangerous?” <https://christianschronicle.org/is-progressive-christianity-dangerous/secured>, 10/25/21.

<sup>17</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/phosneic\\_affirmations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/phosneic_affirmations). Accessed 2/15/22



transgender, bisexual, learned and unlearned, left-handed and right-handed, indeed in all of the rich and variety of the human family. We are to stand as one against any religious system that encourages self-hatred, that manipulates through guilt, or that presents God as a punishing parent who delights in our groveling before the throne of Grace.<sup>18</sup>

## SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

1. The attempt to draw people to Christ in a culturally sensitive approach has mounted an attack on the historic foundations of orthodox Christianity which has the potential to cripple evangelism if allowed to continue its invasion to denominations.
2. The emphasis on love for the down-trodden, marginalized, and otherwise neglected that contributes to social care for the body takes a precedent far above the redemption of the soul from sin.
3. The low view of Scripture further contributes to an emphasis on asking questions without seeking answers. It also has set the stage for human decisions becoming the basis for truth in spiritual matters.
4. The emphasis on individuals choosing what they want to believe or disbelieve can lead to *agnosticism*, *atheism*, or *atheism*.
  - Agnosticism—not sure if there is a God
  - Atheism—believe there is no God
  - a/theism—disbelieving what you believe.

5. Christianity must align with science and other advancements so it can be reconstructed in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century context.
6. Progressive Christianity provides a path of “cheap grace”—salvation without repentance, no prescriptions or lifestyle of holiness, and no personal God who is ready for daily interaction.

## FURTHER READING

Alisa Childers *Another Gospel* (Carol Stream: Tynedale House Publishers, 2020).

Jerald Daffe, *Crosses, Coffee, Couches, and Community* (Cleveland: Pathway Press, 2013).

Brian Maclaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

Videos by Fred Plumer:

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iNyE\\_IqA58](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iNyE_IqA58)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JbqO-uFZh4>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHFDepyAJgo>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypHNvW5B5HI>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppmDw9iGjNA>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7Tr-ooqkIo>

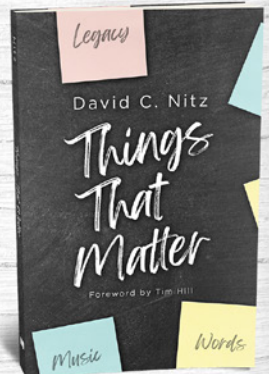
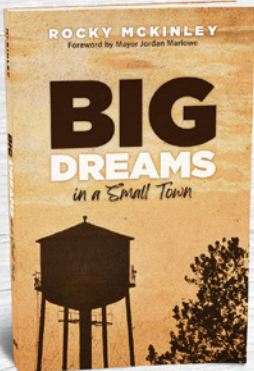
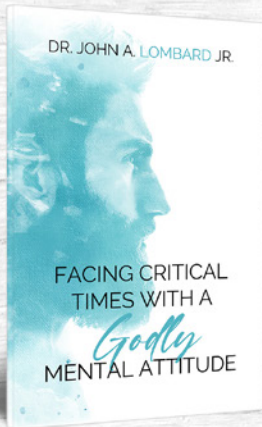
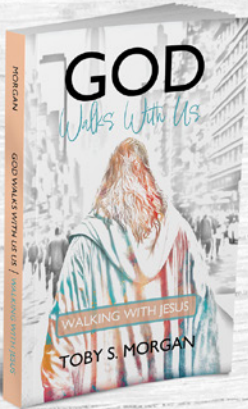
Submitted by,

**Jerald Daffe, D.Min.**

*Professor of Pastoral Studies (Retired)*  
*Lee University*

<sup>18</sup> John Mark Ministries, John Shelby Spong, and the Phoenix Affirmations. (<https://www.jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/18241.htm>)

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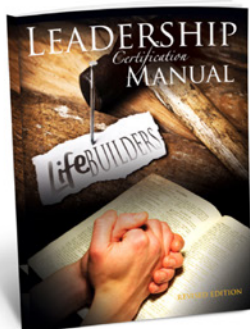
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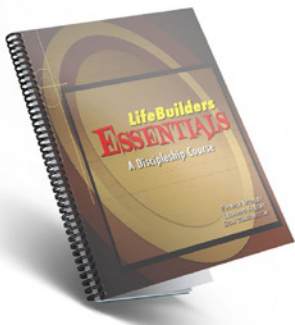


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## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

INSIGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS SHARED TO INSPIRE CONVERSATION

TIM HILL, GENERAL OVERSEER

# Humbly Ambitious: Keeping Ambition in Check

## An Ambitious World

Admittedly, we live in a very ambitious world, and in and of itself, ambition is not evil or bad. If you don't have ambition, then there's not much reason to get out of bed in the morning? It can be very useful if we are ambitious for the right things, but ambition can often get out of control. In all of us, the lines can blur and cause what I call a humility disruption. One day we're consumed with pleasing the Lord, and the next day we've become dominated by the idol of self-made success.

Keeping a check on ambition is not just recommended, it is necessary. When we're humbly ambitious, we'll be far more concerned with how our work reflects on God than how it reflects on us. We'll be far more driven to develop our skills for the sake of our neighbors rather than ourselves. We don't eliminate pride by smothering ambition, but by refining and properly directing it. The only way to fight our thirst for glory is to be consumed with bringing glory to God. Over twenty years ago, I listened as Pastor Ray Pritchard of Keep Believing Ministries said the following in a sermon, "There is a strong desire among most all of us to know who is the best and smartest. Who is the strongest and most wealthy. There is a reason why *Guinness World Records* is a yearly best seller. There is a reason why we watch the Super Bowl, the World

Series, and a thousand other events driven by competition. It is why we keep score."

## A Mother's Request

At least in part, ambition is why a mother came to Jesus one day with the request that when Jesus came into His Kingdom, He would have one of her sons seated on His right and the other seated on His left. She wanted her sons, James and John, to have places of high honor. She wanted to make sure they came out ahead even if that meant asking for a favor from the Lord. She had big dreams for her sons and they had even bigger ambitions (Matthew 20:20-21).

The timing of the request made by James and John's mother is more than interesting—it's crucial. The request comes near the end of Jesus' ministry, taking place about a week before the crucifixion as Jesus and His disciples are walking toward Jerusalem. Jesus was coming to grips with His death and His lead men were posturing for the best seats in the Kingdom. I get it. Everyone wants to be somebody. We all want to be as close to the center of power as we can be and if that is not possible, we want to be near someone who is.

Posturing and competition was a recurring controversy among the disciples all the way until the Lord's Supper in the Upper Room the



night before Jesus was crucified. It wasn't just an issue with James and John, the other disciples wanted those seats as well. These were very competitive men. They were keeping score in order to get ahead of each other. It's an age-old matter. We see it in our own children. We see it in the world of employment, and yes, we even see it in the church.

The real matter was that James and John underestimated the cost of following Christ while overestimating their own importance. They asked for a place of honor, and seniority was their main argument. With the exception of Peter, James and John had been around longer than the others—and “it was their time!”

When asked if they could have the seats of honor, Jesus responded with some extremely sobering words. Jesus said, “You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”

### **Can You Drink the Cup**

That's what it comes down to. Can you drink of the cup?

The idea of the “cup” in the Bible speaks of an intense personal experience. It's the same image Jesus used in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed that the cup of suffering He was about to drink might be taken from Him.

Let me be very transparent. In all of my experience of being in denominational leadership, I can promise you that there has been more “cup” than commemoration, and there has certainly been more cup than coronation. I can assure you that what is contained in that cup is not always sweet and satisfying. The cup swirls with every ingredient that can try

a person's calling, their confidence, and even their morale. Of course, there are some wonderful benefits and affirmations that come from that cup, but deep down, the dregs of the cup hold evidence of many trying and even crushing experiences.

When I set aside the selfish motives of the disciples, I have to admit that there is really nothing wrong with the question the mother of James and John asked that day. Likewise, it's not wrong to ask, “How can I get on the camp meeting preaching circuit?” “What do I have to do to be a state overseer?” “How do I get elected to the Executive Committee (or Executive Council)?” And yes, I've been asked all those questions at one time or another. For a church denomination that partly functions through an appointment and election process, those kinds of questions are frequently asked by those most interested in who moves where and who gets elected to what. However, those are not the important questions. The greater question is still, “Can you drink from the cup?”

Jesus told James and John, as well as their mother, that they didn't know what they were asking. However, with great certainty, they replied, “Yes, we most definitely can drink from the cup.”

Pastor Ray Pritchard noted that these men were indeed very confident. They were also brave and honest, but they were not very perceptive. Sometimes, our perspective causes us to forget our limitations. They didn't see that what they were asking for would stretch them, test them, and eventually cost them their life. Jesus didn't turn them down, nor did He reprimand them for their request.



However, He did raise the level of expectation by saying, “You want to sit next to me? Fine. Here’s what it will cost you.” James and John wanted to talk about the glory, but Jesus replied by telling them about the suffering.

## The Cost of Leadership

Do you really want a position in church leadership? Great! Pursue it and go hard after it, but know this—it comes with a cost. There is indeed a great price to pay in every possible consideration. Warren Wiersbe once said, “Be careful when you pray because you might just get what you ask for.”

In the preceding verses of Matthew 20:17-19, Jesus explained to His disciples that when He went to Jerusalem, He would be betrayed, arrested, falsely accused, mocked, beaten, spat upon, and ultimately crucified. When Jesus challenged James and John to join with Him in drinking the cup, He was calling them to suffer in His name. That is exactly what happened. James became the first apostle to die—put to death by Herod Agrippa I. John was the last apostle to die, ending up in exile on the Island of Patmos.

The other ten disciples became angry with James and John for going to Jesus; likely because they wished they had thought of it first. It’s all perfectly natural because as humans, we are born to compete, fight for the top spot, and look out for number one. It often seems that winning and losing is what life is all about. Whether we admit it or not, getting ahead of our friends is a major motivation in everything we do. We should not condemn the disciples without first looking in the mirror.

Ambition is often a dirty word in our time because, to many people, it implies an overwhelming desire for personal advancement regardless of the cost—and regardless of who is hurt in the process. It is true. There is too much of that kind of ambition in the world. In every company, office, school, college, and church, you can always find a few people who are willing to do just about anything to achieve their desires.

## A Leader Is a Servant

With four words, Jesus urged against giving our lives to ambitious cravings. He said, “Not so with you.” Jesus then offered a different perspective of ambition. “Do you want to be a leader? Then become a servant. Pick up a towel and wash someone’s feet. Think of yourself as a slave and not as a master.” In saying this, Jesus totally rejected the world’s way of doing business. Instead of using people, serve them. That’s what makes a good leader—the ambition to “serve” others. Otherwise, we are position seekers with self-serving agendas.

On my desk at home, sits an inspirational plaque that I look at every day before I leave for the office. One contains the words of Jesus in Mark 9:35: “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.” When I read those words, I ask myself, “Am I willing to be a servant to others as I walk with Christ?” Only if I answer yes, am I then qualified to lead.

May our greatest ambition be to follow Christ and build His kingdom while serving “the least of these.” ■

*Tim Hill*

*Sources: Amy DiMarcangelo, Ray Pritchard, Warren Wiersbe*

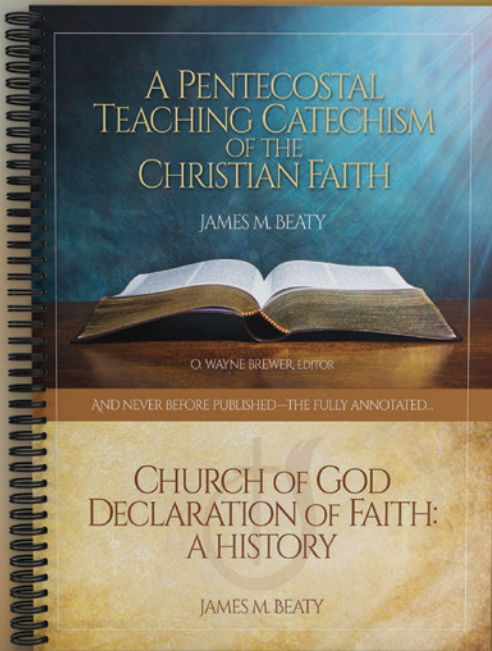
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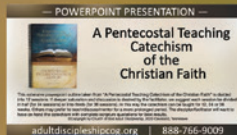
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# Church of God HIGHLIGHTS

*Abbreviated items from Faith News, the Church of God's official news source,  
between January 15 and May 15, 2023.*

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## Church of God Membership Surpasses 8 Million

January 24, 2023, Cleveland, TN— Timothy M. Hill, presiding bishop for the Church of God, has announced the Cleveland, Tennessee-based denomination has exceeded global membership of 8 million people for the first time at 8,177,439.

Hill made the official announcement of the milestone number during a Zoom conference with the Church of God International Executive Council on Tuesday, January 24.

In a previous Zoom conference with state and regional leaders, Hill shared that statistical reports received from around the world were being consolidated but indicated a preliminary number that exceeded 8 million.

“We are excited that the message of Christ is reaching more and more people every year,” Hill said. “As membership continues to grow, reaching this milestone demonstrates the hunger for the truth of God’s Word around the globe. We recognize the favor of God, as it is He who touches the hearts of persons everywhere to seek His face.”

Hill explained that the consolidated numbers don’t reflect the true

number of persons who attend a Church of God around the world on any given weekend. That number is closer to 15 million with numbers that are not regularly reported.

“Monthly reports that reach our offices come from pastors of congregations affiliated with the Church of God in the 187 countries where we have a presence,” Hill said. “They report many figures, including members, ministers, spiritual, and financial information. Several of those 187 countries place heavy restrictions upon worship and freedom of expression, so specific or timely reports may be limited from those locations.”

## Harvest '24 Vision Gaining Momentum



February 27, 2023--Since the unveiling of General Overseer Tim Hill’s Harvest '24 last fall, several of the stated initiatives have realized notable



progress. Harvest '24 is a roadmap for the Church of God to be an effective contributor toward FINISHing the Great Commission.

The primary tenets of Harvest '24 are seven mandates under three objectives: (1) ADVANCE the Coverage of the gospel; (2) ACTIVATE the Calling of a Generation; and (3) ACHIEVE the Continuity of Significant Growth. A 20-page document, "Harvest Commission 2024: Laborers Together for Great Commission Completion" was first released during a Leadership Summit last September and then updated and reprinted earlier this month. The most recent version is available online at [churchofgod.org](http://churchofgod.org).

"I can report that many of the goals and aspirations of Harvest '24 are already reaping results," Hill stated. Under the ADVANCE objective, which seeks to "enlarge the national and global footprint of the Church of God in cities, counties, and countries with 1,000 new churches throughout the world," the latest statistics reveal the goal is already a third of the way there, as reports have come in of over 300 new congregations planted between September and December around the world."

There has been significant growth of the Church of God through unexpected venues, including 400,000 previously unreported members in Romania. Coupled with a significant membership surge for the church in India and South Asia, the Church of

God announced on January 24, 2023, officially topping 8 million members around the globe at 8,177,439.

Under ACTIVATE, the credentialing of 5,000 young men and women by the 2024 General Assembly (GA24) seeks to mobilize an army of next-generation ministers.

At the heart of seeking to ACHIEVE the continuity of significant growth is the integrity of financial management and fiscal responsibility. Removing a 20+ year-old debt on the International Offices to free up funds for ministry was set as a priority.

"Christ has moved upon the hearts of believers and doors of opportunity have been presented that have enabled this progress in just over six months into Harvest '24," Hill concluded. "I am eagerly anticipating what God has in store between now and when we gather in Indianapolis for GA24!"

## Asian Seminary for Christian Ministries Dedicates Facility



*Leaders cut the ribbon at the ASCM dedication. L-R: John Childers, Debbie Childers, LaQuita Propes, M. Thomas Propes, Marilen Morris, Marc Morris, David Ramirez, Fernanda Ramirez.)*



March 7, 2023--Philippines—The Asian Seminary of Christian Ministries (ASCM) recently conducted a dedication ceremony of a new educational and administrative facility, celebrating 50 years of education ministry and training in the Philippines.

Founded in 1973, ASCM's four-story, 60,000 square-foot structure replaces the former facility, previously located in downtown Manila. Upon completion of the sale of the Manila location, which was a one-time YWEA project, a new site was found and a building erected which offers more space and less traffic congestion.

Dr. Marc Morris, regional superintendent for the Austral Asia region of the Church of God, leads the ASCM as president and supervised the transition. Morris addressed the event saying, "Personally, I believe this property was preserved and prepared for such a time as this...This new location, and new facility are only indications that this is a new beginning for brighter days ahead. And to that, I believe all of us can say, 'to God be the glory for great things He has done.'"

"Brothers and sisters, this is a day of rejoicing," Dr. M. Thomas Propes said in his remarks. "All glory be to you, Oh, Lord, now and forever, Amen!"

## Church Leader Larry Timmerman Passes



March 30, 2023—Rev. Larry Timmerman, a leader in several capacities with the Church of God, passed away Thursday, March 30, 2023, following a lengthy illness. He was 83.

Timmerman was a former administrative bishop in several states and regions, including Southern Ohio (1980–1984), Rocky Mountain (1992–1994), Florida-Tampa (1994–1998), and Alabama (2006–2008). In 1998, he was elected to the post of Assistant Director of Evangelism and Home Missions and served as director from 2002–2006. Two years later in 2008, he was elected to a second term as assistant director of Evangelism and Home Missions, serving until 2012. He also served as a member of the International Executive Council from 1994–1998 and again from 2006–2008.

"Larry Timmerman set the example of a humble and effective leader in the Church of God," stated General Overseer Tim Hill. "He will be remembered for his powerful evangelistic messages and the reach of his leadership across the many capacities he filled."



## Lee University Awards First Doctoral Degrees

May 11, 2023—Cleveland, TN—Six students from Lee’s Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Marriage and Family Therapy recently became the university’s first doctoral graduates in their respective programs.

Three Ed.D. and three Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) graduates successfully defended their dissertations this semester and received their degrees during the university’s spring commencement, which took place on May 6, 2023.

Lee’s first Ed.D. graduates include Dr. Allen Clark, Dr. Kristen Early, and Dr. Joseph Parker.

“As the inaugural Ed.D. program director, I am so proud of the accomplishments of our first terminal degree graduates in the Helen DeVos College of Education (HDCE),” said Dr. Roy Y. Chan, director of graduate studies in education and assistant professor of education. “The quality of the work they produced was outstanding and each graduate—all working full time and raising a family in Cleveland—has earned the right to be called a doctor.”

Lee’s first MFT graduates are Dr. Danielle Gray, Dr. Eboni Long, and Dr. Joel Lyon.

“We are thrilled about our first graduating class of MFT doctoral students and are proud of the academic

training and compassionate care they have exhibited throughout their time in our program,” said Dr. Brandon Rodgers, director of graduate studies in counseling. “We believe they are poised to make a significant impact in the world of marriage and family therapy and positively influence the lives of others.”

All six graduates were recognized during a special hooding service, which took place in Pangle Hall as part of the commencement ceremonies.

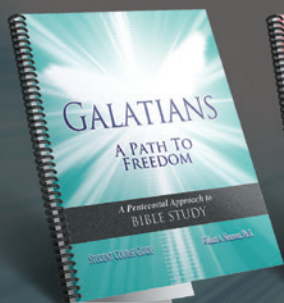
Launched in fall 2020, the Ed.D. Program in Professional Practice seeks to develop passionate and empathetic educational leaders through the practice of ethical action, redemptive service, and responsible citizenship in the church, community, and the world. The program was developed by faculty in the Lee University HDCE and Local Education Agency partners.

The mission of the Lee University Marriage and Family Therapy Doctoral Program is to prepare leaders in the marriage and family field that serve the underserved through Christian organizations and their surrounding communities. The core priorities of the program are to develop each student to become an innovative clinician, a proficient educator, a systemic supervisor, and a pragmatic researcher. ■

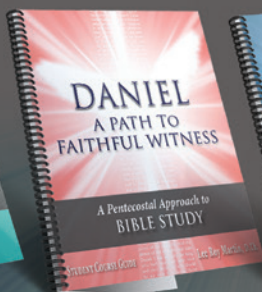
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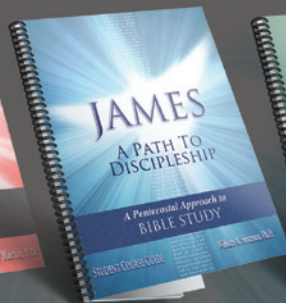
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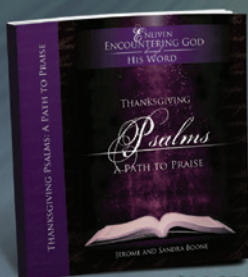
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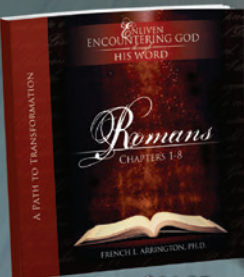
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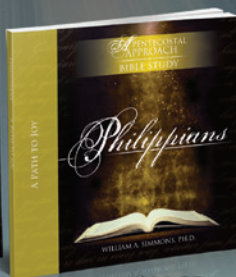
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# LATIN AMERICA YWEA 23

"THEREFORE GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM  
IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT."

MATTHEW 28:19



## CONEXIÓN "Connected to The Commission"

The YWEA 2023 project "CONEXIÓN- Connected to the Commission" is an incredible opportunity to connect with the Latin American culture and make a difference by focusing on the following strategic ministries:

- Haven of Hope Orphanage in Bolivia
- Semisud Pentecostal Seminary in Ecuador
- Prenatal Care Center in Mexico
- Ministry Training Centers in Guatemala & Brazil

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