

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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Is Bigger Always Better?

Dear Brethren,

This issue contains reports from around the world of the Feast of Tabernacles 2017. How inspiring it is to read of the dedication and zeal some scattered brethren exhibit in traveling to the Feast. We also have two articles that cover questions that arise periodically—voting and birthdays. You will also notice that there are quite a few Living Church News reports: births, deaths, weddings, and ordinations. Let us “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15).

There have been two major family weekends since the Feast, one in Charlotte and the other in Kansas City. These are wonderful opportunities for those able to attend, as they especially give our youth and singles the chance to spend time together with people of similar age and circumstances. Many members are scattered, and any opportunity for fellowship with others of like mind is important.

During our Charlotte Family Weekend, we had a theme of keeping our focus and not getting distracted. In the Worldwide Church of God, we always looked through the lens of “the best ever” and “bigger than last time,” whether at the Feast or some other activity. In this light, we must ask the question, “Is bigger always better?” There is a human tendency to think that it is.

There are advantages to larger events and institutions, but also disadvantages. Hospitals, airports, cities, and universities are constantly expanding. They are under construction continually. Large hospitals offer a wider range of services, which can mean the difference between life and death in some emergencies. There may be cost savings when smaller schools consolidate into larger ones, and the number

of jobs expand as cities expand, but do such examples mean that bigger is always better?

Some years ago, educators looked longingly back at the perceived benefits of the one-room schoolhouse that produced the great leaders of the past. So much so, that new schools were constructed in a circular pie-shaped pattern, with a common area circle in the middle. Classrooms were shaped like slices of the pie, but were missing the center wall so that a classroom next door or across the way could be overheard by all. The theory was that students could pick up lessons from other classes—a sort of one room school, but much larger. Such is the foolishness of education theorists!

Governments have a propensity to grow larger over time, offering more services, but at greater cost to taxpayers. God understood the dangers of “Big Government” when He warned Israel about those dangers in 1 Samuel 8, in response to their desire for a king like the nations around them.

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong understood that bigger is NOT always better. That is why his goal was to limit Ambassador



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College enrollment in Pasadena to 550 students. However, enrollment ticked upward over time—and so did the problems. One could easily argue, with a fair degree of truth, that size was not “the” problem. Becoming bigger created greater opportunities, but human nature allowed these greater opportunities to become greater distractions. It did not have to be that way, but it was.

The Worldwide Church of God also grew. Eventually, more than 150,000 attended the Feast of Tabernacles, and more than eight million *Plain Truth* magazines were distributed every month. At one point, there were three Ambassador College campuses, and how beautiful they were! But as the Church grew, so did the opportunities and so did the distractions. The Church lost its focus and became a comfortable social club to far too many. Large sports tournaments, exotic Festival sites, various clubs to “build self-esteem”—all took our focus off what God called us to do. We were ripe for the picking, and Satan, as a roaring lion, was all too eager to leap on the prey (1 Peter 5:8).

The Right Size?

The question remains: Is bigger better? Conversely: Is smaller better? Dr. Roderick C. Meredith frequently emphasized that the Bible is the mind of God, so how does it answer this question?

The opening verse of Genesis says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” To say that God thinks big is understatement to the extreme! Consider the vastness of the universe with its myriad galaxies and stars. The size and scope of God’s creation baffles the human mind (Psalm 8:3–4)! Jesus’ parables indicate the Kingdom of God, His family, begins as the smallest of seeds, but grows immensely (Matthew 13:31–32; see also the other parables of Matthew 13). Isaiah informs us, “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (9:7). God thinks BIG!

This is one side of the coin, but there is another. God limited Gideon’s army to 300 to go against an army far greater in size. Numbers are not important if God is with us. This is something He wants to embed in our minds. God also reveals that there were other dynamics at play. How the 300 drank

water indicated how alert they were and how they might react in battle. God demonstrated these same lessons elsewhere.

He instructed Israel not to be afraid when they were on the verge of going against a larger enemy, because He would be with them (Deuteronomy 20:1–4). He then commanded the officers to pare down the army to those most fit for the task. Any who had distractions or fear were to be dismissed (vv. 5–9). Distracted or fearful soldiers would damage the morale of others. It is evident here that quality trumps quantity.

So, what does all this mean for you and me?

Our focus must always be on the commissions given to us. We must learn “to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1–3). It is through working together as a family, having educational programs, summer camps, family weekends, Spokesman Clubs, and more that we learn servant leadership, right government, humility, and putting up with one another’s imperfections. These activities provide opportunities to learn how to get along with those different from ourselves. We learn teamwork and come to appreciate qualities others have that we lack. We learn perseverance and patience. All of this helps prepare us to rule in the Kingdom of God. But even with this, these qualities must not be ends in themselves. We must not allow them to distract us from focusing on other commissions.

In all that we do we must adhere to Paul’s admonition, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:3–5). These words must be more than platitudes. They must be a part of us, internalized by the Holy Spirit of Christ in us (Galatians 2:20).

Dear brethren, how large we will grow remains to be seen, but history indicates bigger is not always better. “Better”—

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A Teaching Moment

Film producer Harvey Weinstein’s reprehensible behavior hardly came as a surprise to many of us who have heard for decades about the infamous “casting couch.” As the resulting #MeToo movement on social media began exposing story after shameful story, the collection of scandals and damaged reputations grew far beyond the borders of Hollywood. Celebrities and public personalities of all stripes have been put to shame. Powerful and influential journalists have fallen from grace. Senate and congressional careers have collapsed in ruins.

Sex scandals are not new and not confined to one country. Britain has seen its share over the decades. One of the most famous was the Profumo affair, which involved Britain’s Secretary of State for War and 19-year-old would-be model Christine Keeler. It was a scandal heard around the world and is still remembered today. The affair is believed to be the reason for Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s resignation and the defeat of the Conservative Party in the 1964 general election.

Other famous sex scandals involved former President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, and former Congressman Anthony Weiner, who should have known to keep his clothes on and stay off social media. Even King David was guilty of adultery, and compounded the problem with murder in a vain attempt to cover his sin. These are human tragedies, and each individual involved paid a



heavy price. Some wrongly believe David got away with it, but not according to the Bible (2 Samuel 12:10–14).

The purpose of this editorial is not to pass judgment, but to take advantage of a golden *teaching moment*. There are calls for the United States Congress to receive *sensitivity training*—classes in how men and women are to conduct themselves. Others claim this is unnecessary, as this should be common knowledge. Those who are guilty knew better! Perhaps there is a bit of truth to both sides of the argument.

You have no doubt heard the expression, “If you sleep with dogs, you’ll have fleas.” We could dispute whether this statement is true in every case, but I think we get the point. The lesson is that we are in a world filled with flea-infested dogs, and it affects us far more than we care to admit.

Sensitivity training for Congress would no doubt include such behaviors as the following: What is inappropriate to say to someone of the opposite sex? What is inappropriate touching? When, if ever, is it appropriate to hug someone, and is there a proper way to hug? And what about kissing?

Some of this was addressed at past Living Youth Camps. We should never assume that young people KNOW what is appropriate and what is not. After all, if our leaders have forgotten how and when to speak, touch, hug or kiss, then perhaps we should not feel guilty about addressing these things in the Church of God! Should we assume everyone knows how to behave? Is it not right and good to teach how to show respect for one another?

Our world has changed dramatically over the last several decades. We also have a blending of cultures, and sometimes we fail to discern what different customs mean. Do you remember President George W. Bush walking hand in hand with Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah? That was a strange sight that most Western men would find very uncomfortable! However, it is quite normal in that part of the world.

The Bible speaks of a *holy kiss* (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20). What does that mean and do we violate a command if we fail to greet one another with a kiss? This was a subject of discussion in the Church of God when I started attending services in 1964. Those promoting the idea were, not surprisingly, almost exclusively single men! They argued that the Church should

keep this command literally, not realizing (not wanting to realize) that this was a cultural practice in the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean world of the first century. But if the New Testament were written today in parts of the Western world, it might read, “Greet one another with a firm handshake.”

Kissing on the cheek is practiced in many cultures around the world, such as Quebec, Canada, where men and women give “air kisses” to one another. They touch cheeks and kiss on one side, then the other side, and sometimes go back to the first side again. I never figured out whether to start on the right or left, and why some were two kisses while others were three!

Further, I never found anyone who could explain the latter question! One thing I did learn. You do not really kiss the cheek, because if both parties tried to do this at the same time they would twist their heads off chasing one another—thus the “air kiss”! Then again, sometimes there is a kiss on the cheek, each taking turns. This is often practiced among Caribbean islanders.

There are cultures where children kiss their mothers and fathers each morning and before they go to bed at night, even into adulthood. We might see benefit in this custom, but it is not something that should be imposed in every family. Teens and preteens, especially boys, may find that difficult to handle if not practiced from an early age. Different cultures and different families have to work those things out for themselves.

The custom of hugging was not in vogue in England or the United States where I spent my formative years. An exception was among relatives and more generally among some ethnic groups, but if boys and girls hugged, it meant there was a romantic component. Hugging was not done casually, as when going back to class after lunch, or when you met in the hallway between classes. Hugging was reserved for those who were “a number.” That has changed, and guidance appears necessary. Routine hugging on almost every opportunity takes away a certain shyness that once postponed further intimacies. It reminds one of the refrain in the Song of Solomon that some understand to be counsel against stirring up emotions prematurely (2:7; 3:5; 8:4).

Dancing is another sensitive subject. My father-in-law was Russian (or Ukrainian, or Polish—that part of the world was often in flux), and it was common for everyone to dance with everyone. Aunts would dance with aunts, men would dance with all the women, whether married or single, and no one had a problem with any of this. Carol’s father danced with anyone who could keep up with him. Even in his 90s, his biggest complaint was that the music was not lively enough. He did not like it slow—he wanted fast dances!

Carol and I personally prefer not to slow dance with others. There are exceptions, such as relatives, the bride or groom at some weddings, or a teen that my wife wants to encourage to get out onto the dance floor. Square dancing is obviously an exception as well, but when it comes to slow ballroom dancing, we prefer dancing with each other. Dance styles may be different in the Millennium when old men and young will dance together (Jeremiah 31:13).

Very early in our marriage, several of us received an invitation to a member’s home for dinner. After dinner, the man put on some music and began a private dance party for the several

couples who were there. This man danced with all the ladies in a style that made my wife uncomfortable. He held the ladies too close and dipped them backward from time to time. We decided that evening on our way home that in the future we would only dance with each other, with a few

exceptions mentioned above. There is safety in this rule for both of us. We don’t impose it on others because of cultural differences. My parents attended dances several times a week for exercise. They were both quite comfortable dancing with others. At my father’s funeral, a number of dance and bridge partners commented on what a true gentleman he was and how he treated ladies with respect.

Some members want the Church to make rules for everything, but we must take into account some cultural differences. God clearly created variety in the human race. However, in the Living Church of God one culture must overrule all others. God’s values must prevail over those of the god of this world, and we must never forget who is currently directing the course of modern culture.

God instructs women to dress modestly. My wife and I were in the tropical Philippines where we spent the Day of Atonement, and one memory from that day is most instructive. As a whole, the women of the Philippines, both in the Church and out of the Church, tend to dress modestly. They value stylish, modest dresses that are sufficiently long on the legs and high enough at the top to avoid flaunting cleavage. Israelite nations can learn a lot from them.

There are many ways to cozy up to sexual immorality, but God inspired the Apostle Paul to give the licentious Corinthians a warning. “Flee sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Let’s evaluate the act of “flirting” with this admonition in mind. According to *Psychology Today’s* webpage, “Flirting is a time-honored way of signaling interest and attraction, to say nothing of mutual awareness. It is a kind of silent language spoken by men and women around the world”

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God’s values must prevail over those of the god of this world, and we must never forget who is currently directing the course of modern culture.

A TEACHING MOMENT continues on page 31

Voting— Yes or No?



By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

“**B**are knuckle brawl... knock-out punch... a torrent of attacks...” Are these descriptions of a heavyweight boxing match? No, they are just media descriptions of one of the political debates for the 2016 U.S. presidential *primaries!* And the actual election campaigns proved to be even rougher. Election Day in the United States is the climax of a long and hard-fought political campaign. The 2016 campaign was bitterly fought, with candidates hurling insults and spending hundreds of millions of dollars on smear campaigns alone—and the havoc has not diminished since the election.

Two centuries ago, the Prussian general, Carl von Clausewitz, wrote that “war is politics by other means.” But considering the *carnage* of the U.S. presidential campaigns, it might be more accurate to say that “*politics is war by other means.*” The U.S. presidential elections determine the man or woman whom many will consider the most powerful person in the world for a term of four years. Many have lusted their whole lives for such a position, and great wars have been fought for less gain.

But on November 8, 2016, the members of the Living Church of God *did not go to the polling places and did not vote.* Why was that? Do we not have a civic duty to participate in such an important public event that affects our lives and the lives of millions of other citizens? Prior to elections, people are often told that if they do not vote, they will be shirking an important duty as a citizen and are ungrateful for the privilege for which many have died in the nation’s wars. In the Middle East and all over the world, people who were once under tyrannies are finally getting the chance to vote and are gratefully doing so—some for the first time. News photos show people proudly presenting the purple ink on their fingers that proves that they voted. A great deal has been said about the importance of voting.

If democracy is so important to our national welfare, why NOT let our voices be heard—as a civic duty? The Living Church of God has good reasons for not voting in elections, and this is a good time to think about those reasons.

An Ancient Choice of Government

Winston Churchill said, “Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried

from time to time.” The date of that statement was November 11, 1947, and he had led his country to victory in World War II, but lost reelection. Mankind still struggles to find a form of government that solves all of society’s problems, and political factions constantly contend with each other for the privilege of *failing at that task* over and over.

In Genesis 3, the Bible describes a contest of another sort. Adam and Eve were being tempted by an Adversary, who told them that if they took the knowledge of good and evil to themselves—that is, if they rejected God’s government and decided what is right and wrong on their own—then their eyes would be opened, and they would be *just like God* (Genesis 3:4–5). They rebelled against God’s divine government—His divine law. That ancient error is still standard operating procedure for human cultures everywhere, and God is allowing it to continue for now. The results are manifest throughout human history. Over the last nearly 6,000 years, mankind has formed many kinds of governments: tribalism, feudalism, monarchy, oligarchy, communism, socialism, Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, autocracy, democracy, and others. Mankind continues to look to its own ideas and righteousness, always rejecting God’s way of life and *His government*. Human suffering has been the inevitable result.

All of God’s people around the world LOVE and RESPECT their countries, even though the human governments that rule them may have many problems.

Another Citizenship

But we look towards a new country, as Abraham did. The book of Hebrews describes how many of the characters in the Bible

understood that Christ will come to establish His Kingdom on earth.

For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.... These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them (Hebrews 11:10, 13–16).

There is a good reason for this—we have a spiritual citizenship registered in heaven that the world does not have: “For *our citizenship is in heaven*, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20). Our citizenship will see its fullest expression with the return of Jesus Christ to this earth as King of kings.

Ambassadors

The Apostle Paul explained to the Church in Corinth—and to us—one way that Christians can be in the world but not of it, when he wrote, “Now then, we are *ambassadors* for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). Ambassadors are not active in the governments of the countries



in which they live as guests. For instance, if you were the British ambassador to France, you would live in Paris, but you could not run for the French parliament or support an individual candidate for office in that country. Ambassadors represent their government to another government, but they are not active in the host government's national politics. Similarly, we do not take part in political activity attempting to effect changes in this society's governments. We do not run for political office or campaign for particular candidates. *Our avoidance of these things is a demonstration of our spiritual citizenship.*

But while ambassadors are not active in the politics of the nations to which they travel, they still must obey the laws of those nations and respect duly constituted authority. It is similar for God's Church. God is not raising rebellious children. Satan was the original rebel, and God wants us to stay as far away as possible from Satan's rebellious attitude. God detests rebellion, and we should also. "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Samuel 15:23). Satan broadcasts feelings of rebellion, anger and resentment. It is his constant state of mind. God wants us to learn to work *under* authority, so we can learn to

exercise it rightly ourselves in His Kingdom, in an attitude of love and service. How can we do this if we are disrespectful of **any** authority? We cannot have an attitude of rebellion in one place and not in another, because the capacity for rebellion becomes a feature of our character. *What you do changes you!*

The Apostle Paul gave instruction to the Church concerning our relationship with governmental authorities. "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men" (Titus 3:1-2). This even applies to financial matters. Christ Himself said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). Therefore, we obey the laws of the land, including the payment of taxes.

Although we know all human governments are flawed, God's word tells us to respect them. Paul instructed the Church in Rome, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.... For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor" (Romans 13:1, 6-7). God's people are loyal citizens of their countries, love their countries deeply, and obey the laws. The exception is when men are in conflict with God's word. "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men'" (Acts 5:29). It is

very clear in God's word that we are to be subject to the civil authorities of our respective countries.

Being subject to authorities includes being *respectful* of them as well. We may encounter people expressing strong opinions about particular political leaders, sometimes including contemptuous, disrespectful comments. *It should not be so with God's people!* "Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. *They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries*, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord" (2 Peter 2:9-11).

Is respect for duly constituted authority part of "the treasure of your heart," or is contempt and disrespect barely concealed within? "For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush.

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil.

For out of the abundance

of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:44-45). Even if we do not have a good opinion of a particular authority, we should avoid speaking evil of dignitaries, and our moderation and respect will have a positive effect on others as well as on ourselves.

Two Mountains

The prophet Daniel recorded a vision that pictured the return of Jesus Christ at the end of this age and the establishment of His government on this earth. In that vision, Christ returns and miraculously destroys the existing worldly system that rejects God's government:

You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image *became a great mountain and filled the whole earth* (Daniel 2:31-35).

While ambassadors are not active in the politics of the nations to which they travel, **they still must obey the laws of those nations and respect duly constituted authority.**

The mountain that grows to “fill the whole earth” is the “holy mountain of God”—His government on earth. God said through the prophet, Isaiah, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My **holy mountain**, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). This is not only a reference to Christ’s headquarters in Jerusalem, but to a government that grows to “fill the whole earth.”

But for now, the earth is *full of hurt, misery and destruction* and has been for thousands of years. It is not Christ’s holy mountain that fills the earth now, but a mountain of a very different sort. The laws and practices of the world’s governments are rooted in *human* ideas of right and wrong. When Satan tempted Adam and Eve with the promise that they could “be like God, *knowing good and evil*,” a profane system began, as mankind created its own political approaches, education systems, and other human institutions that exist apart from God’s rule. But for now, Satan is the ruler of this world—to the extent that God allows—and the world is filled with the devil’s profane approaches to governance. If you are involved in the politics of this world, you are seeking to take part in the *wrong mountain!*

Set Apart

God’s children are a holy people and *set apart* in this age. The word “saints” means the “holy ones”—those called out to be sanctified and set apart. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who *called you out of darkness* into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Peter 2:9–10).

Anyone who reads a newspaper knows that we are not living in a world that is governed by God. We live in an evil age (Galatians 1:4), and while it continues, we can be grateful to all those who sacrificed to resist tyranny—or to improve the lives of others. And members of God’s Church strive to *do good* in this age as they can, because that is a reflection of God’s character. But the main *public role* of God’s Church is to point the world to the root of its evils—a root which is of a spiritual nature—and to preach the good news of the coming Kingdom of God. This world’s problems are primarily *spiritual in nature*, as evidenced by this world’s politics, and those problems require a *spiritual solution!* We cannot reform the world in this age through worldly means, and we do not try. We wait for the King of kings, who is far greater than we are and has had a plan “from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).

Jesus Christ said that another being currently rules this world but will not rule it forever. “Now is the judgment of this world; now the *ruler of this world* will be cast out” (John 12:31). *Christ is not coming to reform Satan’s mountain; He is coming to replace it.* Now, *that* is change you can believe in!

God’s set-apart people are *in* this world, but not of it.

What Can We Do for Today’s World?

At times, we can become disappointed in our leaders or governments, but remember that the Bible says that things will get a lot worse in this world before they get better. We are supposed to care about what happens in our societies and respect our leaders, and Scripture directs how we are to express our concern for our governmental leaders. How can we change our governments, and what are we to do? Paul gave instructions in his letter to Timothy and the churches he pastored. “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, **for kings and all who are in authority**, *that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence*” (1 Timothy 2:1–2). Instead of opposing our leaders politically, we are to *pray for them*.

We should always pray that God will continue to move our legislatures, courts and governments to grant His people the religious freedom in our respective societies to keep holy His weekly Sabbath and His annual Holy Days and to assemble on those days without persecution. We need to earnestly ask God to grant us the freedom of speech to preach His true Gospel of the Kingdom to the world—and to provide the resources to do so. God’s word indicates that these things will not be guaranteed forever. God warned through the prophet, Amos, “‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘That I will send a *famine* on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but *of hearing the words of the LORD*. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it’” (Amos 8:11–12). God’s Church has been given a Work to do in these days, but Jesus Himself said that “the night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). The *Tomorrow’s World* telecast and some of our Internet posts are already being censored in some countries.

Again, the world’s problems are primarily *spiritual* in nature, requiring a spiritual solution, and we preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world. We also preach *individual repentance*, as well as *national repentance* to the House of Israel and the world. We are commanded to do good where we can, because God is good, and we are to become like Him. But we are not here to reform the governments of this world or participate in its politics.

When Christ’s Ambassadors Do “Vote”

Christ said that He will return to set up His perfect government on earth, and we await that miraculous event. We cannot cause it to come by our own efforts, and we do not know the exact time. But if “voting” is simply a matter of making a choice or expressing our personal preference, then in an important sense, we do “vote” every day—*every time we pray*. Like Abraham, we wait “for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). Our civic duty as ambassadors for Christ is to pray always, “**Thy Kingdom come!**” (LN)

Birthdays— A Celebration for Christians or Not?



By **Rod McNair**

It is a fact of life that everyone grows older, and for each of us there is one day each year when we are considered a year older than we were the day before: our birthday. There is nothing wrong with acknowledging the passage of time, as another year of life goes by. We know, for example, that Moses certainly knew how old he was. Scripture records that, toward the end of his life, he told the Israelites, “I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the LORD has said to me, ‘You shall not cross over this Jordan’” (Deuteronomy 31:2). Did “one hundred and twenty years old today” mean that Moses was making this statement on the exact anniversary of his birth? Perhaps, but what we do know is that there is no hint of a “birthday party” marking the anniversary of Moses’ birth, like those in the household of Pharaoh (cf. Genesis 40:20–22).

Moses simply acknowledged his age. By contrast, many in the world today have grown used to the idea that their day of birth is an occasion on which friends, family members and coworkers are expected to lavish them with attention, gifts and revelry.

What can we learn from Scripture and history about observing birthdays?

After all, we are to follow Jesus Christ’s example in all things, and Jesus did not mark the anniversary of His birth, nor did He make reference to it in any such fashion. Nor did any of the Apostles so much as even mention Christ’s birth date or their own. It is interesting to note the teaching and tradition of the Jews in general around the time of Christ. Jewish historian Shmuel Safrai notes, “As some laws were con-

cerned with a child’s exact age, it may be assumed that Jewish families usually remembered the date of birth, but birthdays were not celebrated. Josephus even informs us that the Torah forbids the practice of turning the occasion of one’s birth into an opportunity for celebration and drink. The gospels note the birthday celebrations of Herod Antipas, but tannaitic literature [from about the year 10 to approximately the year 220 CE] mentions the celebration of birthdays only as a Gentile practice” (*The Jewish People in the First Century*, Vol. 2, p. 767, 1987). Certainly, observance of birthdays as a celebration and party was not a part of Jewish tradition or teaching during the time of Christ or the New Testament Church.

The Bible mentions only two clear instances of birthday celebrations, both of which ended in tragedy (Genesis 40:20–22; Mark 6:21–28). One was a major festival for Pharaoh’s household, which could have included hundreds of revelers. The other was King Herod’s celebration, in Galilee, for all the nobles of his domain. On these occasions of carousing, which included massive consumption of food and alcohol, individuals were put to death for the celebrants’ amusement.

Does the book of Job indicate that Job’s sons observed their birthdays? Some point to this verse to support that idea: “And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day” (Job 1:4). Is “his appointed day” a vague reference to a birthday? Scripture does not say. However, we should also note that, if this *is* a “birthday” example, it is *not* entirely positive regarding the idea of birthday celebrations. We see that Job offered sacrifices afterward, on the assumption that his sons may have “sinned and cursed God in their hearts” while feasting (v. 5). We note, as well, that either Job was not invited or else chose not to attend.

Religious Roots

People are sometimes surprised to discover just how many traditions have non-Christian religious roots that are contrary to God's ways. Yet even some casual observers have noticed that the early Church taught against participation in the sort of birthday celebrations that are so common in our world today.

For example, writer Norm Schneider points out,

During the Christian era, the early followers of Christ didn't believe in celebrating birthdays, preferring—as was the case in earlier eras—of honoring one's death. Their belief was that only in death was there true deliverance worthy of honoring one's "death day" [a reference to Ecclesiastes 7:1, where Solomon asserts that the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth]. They also believed that Egyptian and Greek birthday celebrations were pagan festivals and should not be duplicated ("The Strange Origins of Our Modern Birthday Customs," August 13, 2008, *associatedcontent.com*).

Honoring a King

Concerning the world's "Christianity," Schneider goes on to observe that by "the fourth century, Christians—having generally agreed on the date of Christ's birth—began celebrating the event, ergo Christmas."

Indeed, the observance of Christmas and the celebration of birthdays went hand in hand as the vast majority of professing Christians fell into apostasy. Today, billions of professing Christians have, in effect, a sort of "birthday party for Christ" each year as they celebrate Christmas. However, when we read what Scripture tells us about the young Jesus Christ, we find no precedent for such celebration.

Instead, what do we find? When they saw the young Jesus—*months after His birth*—the wise men from the East "fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11). This was a momentous event, but it was **not** a birthday party—these were prominent men coming to visit the King. The custom of bringing a gift when coming before a king is still in practice today.

Marking Milestones

How should we view the milestones in our lives, as we make progress toward the Kingdom of God? The Bible reveals that God places far more importance on the development of spiritual character and our eventual spiritual birth into His Kingdom than on observing the beginning of our physical life (Ecclesiastes 7:1; Revelation 21:7; Romans 2:7; John 12:24–25). Accordingly, God does not want His people to become involved in worldly practices that lead to the destruction of character. Of course, God makes it plain that Christians are

not to take part in "lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries" (1 Peter 4:3). But even when we believe we are avoiding such "extremes," birthday festivities are often focused on an element of greed—the desire for gifts and attention—as well as on vanity, selfishness and a spirit of competition. Such attitudes are certainly inappropriate for Christians in any situation. We know from Scripture that covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

Yet, we *can* mark important milestones in our lives in a godly manner if we focus on the larger picture.

Keeping the Big Picture

The right perspective on this issue has been explained in the past by Dr. Roderick C. Meredith. He mentioned in his July 21, 2008 sermon, titled "Building Faith and Courage," that he had just turned 78 years of age. Significantly, he added, "but without a birthday party." On the other hand, he also explained that "Mr. Armstrong gave his mother a dozen red roses on her birthdays, occasionally, and sometimes took her out for a nice dinner at the restaurant simply to honor her on such an occasion. It was **not** a 'birthday party' with candles, exchanging of presents and so forth. It was simply noting that God had given her another year of life and encouraging her and honoring her in that way. Often, we have stated that our own people may have a special meal prepared by the mother in the home for a child on his or her birthday and express thanks that our child has had another year of life" ("Focus on the Big Picture!" *Ministerial Bulletin*, January–February 2011). Certainly, it can be appropriate for parents to reminisce with their children about past joys and challenges of a child's life, as well as future plans and goals, when the child grows a year older. It's a totally different matter to have a birthday party "with candles, exchanging of presents and so forth," as Dr. Meredith explained.

Presiding Evangelist Gerald Weston has continued that teaching, as evidenced in his *Living Church News* article, "What Drives Your Decisions?" He noted, "It is evident from the scriptures that people knew how many years they lived.... However, not once do we read of a birthday party for any of God's servants.... Are we able to understand the difference between marking or recognizing the day of one's birth and celebrating it in a party atmosphere? Are we able to make wise judgments, based on the word of God? Do we follow the customs of this world, as *sheep going to the slaughter*? Or can we savor the things of God?" (September–October 2017).

In the Living Church of God, we recognize and encourage activities that are supported by Scripture and cultivate righteous character and a loving spirit within our families. We should avoid activities that contradict these values. As we come out of a sinful and self-focused world, we must each strive to develop God's mind so that we may make good decisions, as wise Christians "who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14). (LN)



From Around the World...

Feast of Tabernacles 2017

During the Feast of Tabernacles in 2017, God's people gathered at sites all over the world to learn, to grow, and to look forward together to the coming millennial rule of Jesus Christ and the saints! These Festival summaries include almost all of our Feast sites, and we hope you will enjoy reading about the experiences enjoyed by your brothers and sisters around the world during this special season.

United States

Anchorage, Alaska

Three hundred and thirty Feast-goers traveled to the largest state in the U.S., the great state of Alaska. They were greeted with mountains covered in autumn gold and an early dusting of snow! While the first week's forecast was for rain, God began His Holy Days with a marvelous rainbow that spanned Anchorage in a perfect arc! The weather from then on was magnificent.

So many of the brethren commented on the excellent spiritual messages throughout. We were certainly blessed with a spiritual banquet, making for a very thought-provoking Feast and many spiritual conversations.

The teens and families gathered for an eight-mile bike ride through glorious forests overlooking the Cook Inlet. As if on cue, a huge bull moose casually made his appearance, walking alongside the startled and amazed viewers! They finished their trek at Kincaid Park. Sunday was the Glacier Cruise, with 300 of the Feast-goers traveling through a 2.5-mile mountain tunnel to board the catamaran, *Klondike Express*. While the day started in Anchorage with drizzle and clouds, it appeared almost as if a huge umbrella protected the dazzling fjords. The sun illuminated the glaciers, and we traveled on calm seas while sea otters peeked out at us.

Family Day on Monday was an exceptional activity. The Alaskan brethren hosted a delicious meal of grilled salmon, along with hamburgers and additional salads, side dishes, desserts and beverages. Most Feast-goers attended, enjoying the fellowship, card games, Ultimate Frisbee, football and entertaining children's games. That evening, we viewed a professional film made

by a local videographer who had spent 18 years photographing the Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights. Talk about heavenly beauty! It spurred many of the younger crowd to head to the outskirts of the city to see the spectacular display firsthand.

Other highlighted activities included a 1.5-mile hike gaining 1,300 feet of elevation, giving a magnificent view of the coastline of Anchorage, with Mount Denali in the background and the reflective Cook Inlet below. That evening ended with the Family Dinner Dance, which saw energetic participation on the dance floor by people of all ages.

An exceptional Feast involves enthusiastic attitudes, participation, warm fellowship, service to others, and—most definitely—spiritual nourishment. We certainly saw these attributes at this very memorable Feast of 2017!

Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

This year's Feast in Hilton Head was inspiring and exhilarating! The Hilton Head Island Beach and Tennis Resort provided a large ballroom for services, and those who stayed on the resort had access to the largest pool on the island and to the beach, as well. God's Spirit filled the air with love, service and excitement!

We had a high attendance of 746, and many expressed that the messages were some of the best they could remember! We had Mr. Wallace Smith for the first half, in which he spoke twice. For his second sermon he read from three fictional letters from three imaginary people living in the Millennium, addressed to us at the Feast in 2017. These letters were meant to help everyone imagine what life might be like for individuals living in the Millennium and how it might compare to their memories of life before Jesus had returned to earth. After Mr. Smith left, Mr. Richard Ames arrived for the second half. We were able to hear two sermons from him, in which he gave a detailed overview about the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth and how that will take place, as well as the marriage of the Church to the coming King of kings!

Activities included a Family Day trip to the Coastal Discovery Museum, a Singles Dolphin Sunset Dinner cruise,

and a Beach and Pool Day with sandcastle building and organized games for the kids. Many said the highlight for their Feast was the “Kingdom Dinner,” which was held the night before the Last Great Day. For this dinner, those at each table discussed questions given by the presenter. First, the questions focused on getting to know more about everyone at the table, then concentrated on the lessons from the Feast, looking forward to the Millennium, and finally into the Great White Throne Judgment and beyond. This made for exciting and wonderful spiritual conversations!

The messages, the location and the blessing of God’s Spirit made this Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day most memorable!

Lake Conroe, Texas

The La Torretta Golf Resort was again the location for celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles on Lake Conroe. Brethren from across the United States were joined by brethren from Ireland, Nigeria and various locations in the Caribbean to enjoy celebrating the coming establishment of God’s Kingdom. Along with inspiring messages about the coming Kingdom, 254 brethren shared in our traditional activities, which included an evening dinner dance, honoring our seniors with a luncheon, and a very special Family Day at a beautiful park where we were blessed with the best day of weather during the entire Feast. The members shared in table games, a horseshoe tournament, basketball, volleyball, football, and a playground for the children—fostering lots of fellowship, all the while enjoying free refreshments. The Seniors Luncheon also gave us the opportunity to recognize a few of our seniors: the longest-baptized member attending Lake Conroe (baptized 60 years); the oldest member attending (90 years and three months); the longest marriage (63 years); and the most grandchildren/great-grandchildren (27). Then, the grand ending with the Last Great Day was accompanied by another day of beautiful weather—a great send-off to a memorable Feast.

Lake Geneva, Wisconsin



Beautiful fall foliage and unseasonably warm weather greeted the 210 Feast-goers keeping the Feast in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. This resort town provided a scenic landscape with

just enough amenities for all ages, but not so many distractions that it took away from the spiritual focus that makes the Feast successful. Many attending in Lake Geneva commented on the relaxing atmosphere that made fellowshiping the natural thing to do! The lobby of the Timber Ridge Lodge was abuzz every morning with happy Feast-goers meeting new people and rekindling old friendships.

Deacons, deaconesses, elders and wives enjoyed a special dinner at Timber Ridge. It was an evening full of laughter and reflections on the privilege and responsibility involved in serving God’s people. Our dinner dance was one of the highlights of the Feast for many, and included an entertaining intermission put on by the Children’s Choir and several others willing to showcase their talents. Those attending also had the opportunity to have their photos taken as special Feast mementos. After the Seniors Luncheon on Monday afternoon, there was a group activity at the Lake Geneva Clue Room downtown. This activity provided a wonderful opportunity to practice teamwork and test skills, all while having fun and building friendships! Despite the ominous forecast, God delayed the rain for those courageous members participating in the Lake Geneva Zip Line Canopy Tour Tuesday afternoon. The positive comments from participants make it easy to understand why this attraction is rated the “number one” in Lake Geneva.

Overall, the planned activities were well received and left plenty of free time to explore the area and its attractions, such as boat rides around the lake, golfing the world-class courses of Lake Geneva, or just casual walks around the unique downtown area. With all of the amenities provided by the Timber Ridge Lodge, those staying on site did not need to leave the property to enjoy recreation.

Of course, all of the activities and fellowship are secondary to the spiritual rejuvenation we receive at the Feast. All of the messages were successful in reminding us that we are pilgrims and sojourners awaiting Christ’s return and our reward. We owe tremendous thanks to everyone who directly or indirectly served to make the Feast in Lake Geneva such an amazing success!

Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri

God graciously placed His name at the beautiful Lake of the Ozarks. Some 340 of God’s family gathered to enjoy the fall colors of the Ozark Mountains. We were blessed this year to host long-time pastor and Council of Elders member Mr. Rand Millich and his wife, Gloria. Mr. Millich gave very inspiring messages, and the family Bible Study given Friday evening focused on the question “Does God Exist?”

Overwhelmingly, the Feast-goers expressed that this year’s highlights were the inspired messages and the warm, encouraging fellowship. There were wonderfully inspiring messages given by additional elders of God’s Church, including Mr. Joseph Brown, Dr. Richard Franz, Mr. William Oswald and Mr. Yancy

Taber. The common thread tying the messages together was our preparation for and responsibility in God's Kingdom.

Other highlights included a Seniors Luncheon, which featured an encouraging message given by Mr. Joseph Brown. The teens and young adults enjoyed an afternoon of bowling, which included some imaginative score-keeping methods. Those who attended the Deacons and Elders Brunch were heartened by a message from Mr. Rand Millich. The sunny skies and mild temperatures allowed God's people to enjoy the blessing of fellowship and food during a "Roof Top Patio" dinner dance and an afternoon outside during Family Day.

Mt. Snow, Vermont



Two hundred and forty-five brethren came together at the Grand Summit Resort for the 2017 Feast of Tabernacles. The weather was in the mid-60's to low 70's, which was unseasonably warm for October. Additionally, the fall colors of the trees provided a beautiful backdrop for the meeting hall. The messages were very encouraging and instructional, as we heard a wide range of topics, including what it means to have a fear of God, true freedom in the Millennium, what our cities will be like, and serving and helping others have their greatest Feast ever.

Besides the spiritual food, there was plenty of physical food, and activities through the week. There was the Sock Hop, the dinner dance, the always popular Progressive Fellowship Afternoon, "Mountain Activities" where brethren were able to take a chair lift up the mountain to view the area, a tour of the Honora Winery, as well as an afternoon hearing music and tasting German food and beer at the annual Oktoberfest. Once again, Mt. Snow provided a wonderful, peaceful setting for another inspiring Feast of Tabernacles.

Northern Kentucky

"Splendid," "Awesome," and "Best Feast ever!" were just three of the comments given on festival surveys to describe the 2017 Feast of Tabernacles in Northern Kentucky. The Holiday Inn Cincinnati Airport in Erlanger was the location for daily services and many activities for this site.

Evangelist Richard Ames was the guest speaker for the first half, giving two sermons, a Bible Study, and addressing both the ordained individuals at the Leaders Mixer and the more "seasoned" folks at the Seniors Luncheon. Another *Tomorrow's World* presenter, Wallace Smith, also gave two sermons during his second-half visit. In addition, Mr. Smith, along with Assistant Festival Site Coordinator Mark Sandor, answered questions at the Noah's Ark Bible Study. This was a follow-up to one of the most anticipated activities, a visit to the Ark Encounter—a life-size re-creation of Noah's Ark. Other Bible Studies given were for teens and singles. Many expressed appreciation for the Millennium-themed messages given by Messrs. Ames, Smith, Sandor and Festival Site Coordinator Phil Sena.

One emphasis was fellowship among all ages offered through activities such as the Fun & Fellowship Night in an indoor recreation facility rented for our exclusive use, and Family Day at Kinman Farms, an actual working farm that offered a relaxing day of hay rides, a corn maze, outdoor games and food for everyone. One unique activity was Date Night—an opportunity for parents to have a night out while their children were engaged in creative activities offered by brethren. Other activities included a Kids' Bible Adventure Club for the little ones, and a semi-formal dinner dance.



Many praised the host hotel for the high-quality food offered during the various luncheons and dinners throughout the Feast and its friendly, service-oriented staff. The hotel's large atrium lobby encouraged fellowship throughout each day, adding to the close atmosphere of this site. For many, this was a very special Feast in Northern Kentucky.

Panama City Beach, Florida

Beautiful sunny days greeted Feast-goers in beautiful Panama City Beach, Florida. Services were held at the Boardwalk Beach Resort Hotel and Convention Center. Many of the brethren took advantage of the convenient opportunity to have meals together only steps away from the meeting hall. Many also enjoyed accommodations in other facilities nearby.

Prior to the start of the Feast, just over 1,000 brethren had registered to attend the Feast in Florida. Despite hurricane Nate blasting the area with high winds and a short period of

rain, the Feast continued uninterrupted. Panama City Beach presented brethren with many places to shop, eat, and fellowship together as family.

From the Opening Night message, things moved forward with inspiring, beneficial and much-needed messages.

For the Deacons and Elders Luncheon, Mr. Stroud addressed the attendees, thanking them for their service to God's people. We enjoyed soft music in the background with a special meal prepared by the venue. For our Seniors' Luncheon, we also enjoyed music while eating, and Pastor Eddie Breaux addressed the seniors, thanking them for their example to God's people. Our dinner dance evening was wonderful, and seniors, young adults, teens and children alike took to the floor and enjoyed themselves. Family Day was a huge success with over 400 brethren attending, and a cruise was put together during the Feast where just under 200 brethren enjoyed a visit to Shell Island, seeing various ocean creatures and the beauty of the waters. The singles also enjoyed a meal and fellowshiped together and met new brethren.

The Feast is a time to *rejoice and celebrate* as a family that will serve humanity in the soon-coming Kingdom of God. It will be a time when the whole world will be filled with the *knowledge* of God under the righteous government of our Living High Priest! Thank God for this joyous time to celebrate what lies just ahead when Christ returns to usher in the kind of peace man can only dream of!

San Diego, California

More than 300 of God's people had a wonderful Feast of Tabernacles on scenic Mission Bay in San Diego by the majestic Pacific Ocean. This relaxing beach site provided a truly ideal setting for the Feast and a foretaste of the wonderful world to come.

Inspiring messages focused on the importance of having a spiritual Feast, running the race of endurance toward our ultimate destiny and God's plan in dealing with the economy during the Millennium, to name a few. Brethren also had a wonderful time fellowshiping at the various activities, including a group lunch on the beach, the superb dinner cruise on San Diego Harbor, and various interesting motor coach tours, including the Bernardo Winery, Southern California's oldest.

Members were also able to visit the aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Midway*, followed by dinner in Old Town, San Diego. Family Day at San Diego's Safari Park allowed brethren to enjoy God's creative handiwork up close. The spirit of unity and cooperation we experienced at the Feast this year was truly a foretaste of "Tomorrow's World"—a time we are all looking forward to with eager anticipation!

Seaside, Oregon

Seaside provided a taste of the Millennium, with both beautiful scenery and spiritually uplifting messages that focused on

the coming millennial rule under Jesus Christ and the saints. Brethren enjoyed outstanding scenery and many opportunities for fellowship. Seaside offered a beautiful setting with forested mountains, coastal trails and sandy beaches. The weather was truly one of the highlights of the week, even though rain was forecast. There were unusual amounts of sunshine and clear views of the ocean throughout the Feast!



Mr. Jonathan Bueno kicked off the first Holy Day, encouraging the brethren to prepare for their glorious coronation in the Kingdom of God. Mr. Ron Poole gave an overview of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Guest speaker and Regional Pastor Lambert Greer talked about the economy and value system in the coming Millennium. Other uplifting messages focused on our amazing role as kings and priests and the spiritual and physical restoration the whole world will experience in the future, making this Feast a life-changing experience.

The activities began on the evening ending the first Holy Day, as brethren gathered around a fire on the beach to enjoy s'mores as they listened to the sound of the waves and the crackling fire. Brethren also enjoyed a beautiful hike with stunning views of the coast and wooded areas with lush ferns. Some of the other activities included a fun show, zip-lining and a dinner dance with live dinner music performed by the talented Marshall family. As the Last Great Day came to a close, brethren enjoyed several hours of fellowship at the historic "Camp 18" giant log cabin chalet. The private banquet room provided a cozy ambiance with unique historical décor and a large rustic rock fireplace, as the brethren said their farewells.

Tremendous examples of outgoing concern and brotherly love were seen throughout the Feast. A number of brethren commented on the wonderful messages, the warmth and unity, and the many family activities that brought everyone together. Seaside sharpened our focus and recharged our spiritual batteries as we look forward to God's soon-coming Kingdom.

Snowmass, Colorado

A little over 300 brethren spent the Feast in breathtakingly beautiful Snowmass. This charming village is nestled in a spectacular valley of the majestic Rocky Mountains. Although

it is a bustling ski village in the winter and filled with outdoor adventurers in the summer, it was quiet and peaceful during the Feast and full of bright and colorful trees with gold, orange and red leaves. Services were held at the Westin Snowmass Conference Center in Snowmass Village. Inspiring messages that focused on rejoicing before God as we prepare for our future in the Kingdom of God and beyond were enhanced with lovely special music, and we were blessed to have Mr. and Mrs. Rand Millich join us for the second half of the Feast.

Fellowship was abundant, and an attitude of service and giving prevailed throughout the Feast. Activities included a fun-filled evening of bowling and pizza, a semi-formal dinner dance, a twelve-mile teen bike ride from Snowmass to Aspen through incredible fall foliage, a family games night, Deacons and Elders Dinner, and Seniors Luncheon. In their spare time, brethren enjoyed visiting Aspen and surrounding towns, hiking in the region, and visiting the picturesque Maroon Bells Snowmass Wilderness. Members saw a variety of wildlife in the area—including elk, moose, deer, bears and foxes.

Six to eight inches of snow fell three days prior to the Feast and again on Sunday night during the Feast. This added to the beauty of the area and did not prove to be a hindrance to most. Brethren, especially our teens, let their lights shine and set a wonderful example that was noted by area businesses, and the Westin Conference Services Manager said the Living Church of God is his favorite group to have worked with. Snowmass provided a millennial setting that was a backdrop to a wonderful Feast experience!

Canada

Kimberley, British Columbia

Beautiful yellow and red autumn colours, along with a light dusting of snow in the Rocky Mountains, greeted 220 Feast-goers in Kimberley this year. The weather and location were ideal, and the warmth and love of brethren dwelling together in unity was obvious. There were many acts of kindness, which enabled everyone to have an enjoyable and memorable Feast.

All who were able participated in the activities, which included a dinner dance with entertainment by “Adi the Yodelling Woodcarver,” Family Day with games for all and a Thanksgiving Turkey Dinner. Several meals were also enjoyed together by the deacons and elders, our seniors and, on the High Days, by most of the brethren.

The spiritual guidance was also very gratifying, with clear themes about the importance of God’s law and the restoration of God’s ways. Prayers were answered concerning the speaking, as all were inspired by the sermons and sermonettes to push forward into the coming year as we move closer to the Kingdom of God. Many commented on how inspired and motivated they were by the “Behind the Work” tribute to Dr. Roderick Meredith. It certainly was a highlight of the Feast.

A few were attending their very first Feast, and several were celebrating their fiftieth. Everyone, including our guests from the United States, Trinidad and Tobago, enjoyed the opportunity to witness the blessing of five beautiful small children.

All did their part with zeal and enthusiasm to make the Feast in Kimberley successful and memorable.

Liverpool, Nova Scotia

One hundred and two happy, joyful brethren attended the Feast of Tabernacles in beautiful Nova Scotia. Days were sunny and warm, while the nighttime contained an awesome display of stars over the Atlantic Ocean. That, combined with beautiful Autumn foliage, seemed to add an extra measure of inspiration to the Feast in Liverpool. Sermons and sermonettes were millennial, with messages on a variety of subjects.

Activities included a fun night of dancing, music and song provided by the Feast of Tabernacles “scrap band,” consisting of an assortment of guitars, a fiddle and various singers. We had the opportunity to learn about emergency “first aid” from a church member who is an advanced paramedic, as well as an occasion to experience an exercise class presented by an accredited instructor.

Feast-goers took advantage of the scenery and tourism sites along the beautiful south shore of Nova Scotia, including Lunenburg, where the refurbished *Bluenose II* launched on September 30, 2013 and was on display.

Many people mentioned the feeling of love that prevailed at the site.

Niagara Falls, Ontario

Niagara Falls hosted 345 enthusiastic brethren for eight wonderful days of rejoicing before God. The site offered activities for all ages. A short drive away is the town of Niagara on the Lake, the original capital of Upper Canada—a quaint New England-style historic town out of the past, which provided a quaint, small-town setting.

This year involved many activities in addition to the first day and Last Great Day luncheons, including the Family Dance, Games Night and Bible Trivia Night. There was also a seniors bus tour along the Niagara Parkway to see the floral clock, the view at the Spanish Aero Car, and a Singles Adventure that included finding their way through a “Mystery Maze” and a walk down the Niagara gorge to the Niagara River. These were all wonderful opportunities to get to know each other and share a foretaste of the blessings that God will bring in the Millennium.

Not only did brethren have the opportunity to go visit the water park at the Americana Resort where we stayed, but also two people were baptized in the pool there and were welcomed joyfully into the fellowship of God’s family. There was truly much to be joyful about at the Feast.

The heart of the Feast was the wonderful spiritual rejuvenation that God provided. We were blessed with many messages to direct and guide us in the time ahead. The Regional Director for Eastern Canada, Mr. Winston Gosse, spoke on the first day and spent the first half of the Feast with us. We had Mr. Kinnear Penman travel in to speak and spend the last half of the Feast with us. With seven other ministers giving various messages, God provided much spiritual food at this Feast. Combined with the many activities, this gave us lots of time to grow and develop together as God's people.

People left with renewed energy to go forward to accomplish the Work that God was doing through Mr. Herbert Armstrong and Dr. Roderick Meredith and is continuing to do through Mr. Gerald Weston.

Sorel, Québec

In Sorel, we had 106 Feast-goers. Meetings were held at the Hôtel de la Rive Inn of Sorel on the shore of the beautiful St. Laurent River. Most of the members lodged there while a few stayed in cottages or condos in town.

The spiritual menu was strongly inspired and very encouraging. The "Behind the Work" video was very moving and powerfully hit home, with some shedding tears. We shared two lunches together, one on the first day of the Feast and one on the Last Great Day. We also enjoyed a very pleasurable dinner dance with well-planned, good quality music.

We had three main activities during the Feast: an afternoon of bowling, a visit to a quite special local museum, and a much-appreciated afternoon of Bible Quizzes conducted by Mr. Marc Arseneault.

Very few suffered illnesses this year; there were only three anointings for the whole nine days! We enjoyed a very serene family atmosphere. The hotel personnel and management were impressed by our members. People in town were very receptive, friendly and welcoming. God truly blessed this Feast abundantly in many ways.

South America

Armenia, Colombia



The Feast of Tabernacles in Colombia was held in the Armenia region, a site with cabins surrounded by beautiful vegetation. The attendance was 68: A few brethren came from the United

States, Bolivia, Puerto Rico, and México, while the rest were from Colombia. Some of us had difficulties traveling from our homes to the Feast site, but once we arrived, all the troubles were left behind and we had the joy of celebrating the Feast. It was a beautiful opportunity for visitors to be able to celebrate with the brethren of Colombia, and they gave abundantly of their love and appreciation.

During the Feast we had several activities. One of them was a visit to Finlandia, which turned out to be a great blessing; it seems that God took us to this place to protect us from a strong wind that came over the Feast site. This climate phenomenon left the site without electricity for a couple of days, and there were fallen trees and power lines. But, it did not bring down the spirits or the happiness of the brethren. We traveled to Finlandia in a bus adapted with interior lights and a sound system so we could dance to the rhythm of Colombian music.

We thank God for the abundant spiritual and physical food, and all the spiritual blessings received during these Holy Days. And God keeps calling children to His Family! We had one baptism during the Feast. We also thank God for giving those who came from afar the desire of their hearts: to meet the Colombian brethren.

Bonfim, Brazil

In northern Brazil, on the border with neighboring Guyana, is the sparsely populated municipality of Bonfim. There, at the Bonfim Rodeo Ground, God chose to place His name for the Feast of Tabernacles. An average of 107 individuals from Guyana, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago and the U.S. experienced miracle after miracle as our Great God protected and empowered His people to overcome many challenges and to experience what many have said is their *best Feast ever!* The highest attendance was 134 on the first Holy Day; 40 percent of the attendees were children!

The miracles began when God put it in the heart of His people in the U.S. and Trinidad to share their second tithe with their South American brethren. As a result, many at the Feast experienced a number of firsts, including the following: A dinner dance with catered meal and dessert, ice cream night, rented indoor playground for the many children present, field trip to a millennial park with a lake for swimming, watching the "Behind the Work" video, and Mr. Gerald Weston's closing message on the Last Great Day! These firsts added to a greater appreciation for the meaning of the Feast and a deeper understanding that we are all part of a greater Work than just ourselves, our families and our villages. Other activities included soccer, volleyball and dominoes. When the Feast ended, there were long hugs and tearful goodbyes.

There was an abundance of physical and spiritual food with enriching fellowship as brethren ate their meals together on-site. The main messages were delivered by Elder

Laurus Alfred from Awarewaunau and visiting minister Mr. Hugh Stewart from Atlanta, Georgia. Mr. David Grant, a Deacon from Trinidad, also gave two split sermons. The messages covered topics such as marriage and Christ's relationship to the Church, God's financial system and focusing on His promises, and our future bodies after the resurrection. The Sabbath evening Bible Study took the form of questions and answers as members and prospective members sought to better understand God's Word. Children's Day saw the blessing of three children.

There were many challenges in Bonfim, but God powerfully made His presence known. We learned many lessons, including ways to eliminate many of the problems that were encountered with the Festival grounds. By the end of the Feast, almost all said they hope to be back in Bonfim next year!

Georgetown, Guyana



The Feast of Tabernacles in Georgetown, Guyana was an excellent one. There was great fellowship with the brethren, ministers and their wives. The conversations were enlightening and uplifting, and we felt rejuvenated once more.

The brethren were very happy to host our overseas brothers and sisters, and they were delighted by our warmth.

The many activities included hymn singing, a dinner dance, a family day and a movie night. Many came to see the movie, but the hymn sing was a delight since we got to choose our favorite hymns and sing praises to our Creator. This was exhilarating!

It was a bittersweet moment when the Last Great Day arrived. We pray for that day when we will no longer have just a foretaste of the Kingdom, but will forever be with Christ and all the saints.

Central America Punta Leona, Costa Rica

When you go to the Feast in Punta Leona, Costa Rica, it is necessary to leave the main road, pass through a guard gate and drive down a winding road of brick pavers for about ten minutes through the lush, mountainous tropical rain forest that comprises the large preserve in which the resort is

located. The resort is on the Pacific Ocean, and Feast-goers stay in attractive units near the meeting hall and restaurant.

After 48 hours of uninterrupted rains caused by Tropical Storm Nate, the 85 attendees from Central America, North America and Trinidad rejoiced in the exotic millennial setting. Because of Costa Rica's southern latitude, such storms are unusual there. As the storm traveled northward, it strengthened to hurricane status and hit the Gulf Coast of the United States. Early in the Feast, many roads in Costa Rica and Nicaragua were closed due to the rains, and this prevented some brethren from arriving until the second day. All of our brethren arrived safely, and the rains did not dampen anyone's Feast enthusiasm. The weather cleared by day three, and the brethren could once again enjoy Punta Leona's beautiful nature trails and sandy beaches. The beautiful mountainous setting of the Feast was a constant reminder that God's Holy Mountain will grow to fill the whole earth!

Also at the resort, huge trees provided a shady canopy that had toucans, scarlet macaws and other parrots in their top branches. There were also monkeys cavorting in the lower branches and hummingbirds buzzing among the bright flowers that were everywhere near the ground.

The spiritual food was provided by Mr. George Schaubek in Spanish and by Mr. Dexter Wakefield in English. In addition, there was plenty of fine physical food provided by the open-air restaurant near the meeting hall.

A highlight of the Feast was the excellent special music for services. The Feast-goers enjoyed instrumental performances, an adult and children's choir, and the beautiful tones of the famous Trinidad and Tobago "steelpan" instrument.

The brethren in Costa Rica are very thankful for the members who visited us from Canada, the United States, Mexico and Trinidad and Tobago. Many expressed their desire to come back to Costa Rica for the Feast of Tabernacles 2018.

San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

2017 Feast of Tabernacles in Mexico was held in San Miguel de Allende—a colonial-era city in Mexico's central highlands that was voted "Best City in the World" by *Business Insider* and *Travel & Leisure Magazine*.

This year's Feast in the "Best City in The World" was attended by an array of very excited and enthusiastic Church members from Canada, the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, Peru and Haiti. A total of 147 gathered together to share in the spiritual meat, the activities, the dining, the fellowship, and the talents of their fellow Feast-goers.

The Spirit of God was evident throughout the week; the unity and the exercising of the fruits of the Holy Spirit was impressive and encouraging. A formal gala event (black-tie) for the brethren was organized, where all were escorted, in pairs, into the ballroom. There the decor, white table cloths,

white plates, silverware, buffet food, candy buffet, drinks, service, fellowship, dancing and dance shows all contributed to a complete success. Attendance was high for all of the events. Everyone worked together closely to ensure that others had their best Feast ever—and it was! We look forward to hosting you at next year's Feast of Tabernacles in the "Best City in the World," San Miguel de Allende.

Caribbean Lowlands, Tobago



This year, 150 of God's people met at the Magdalena Grand Beach Resort in Lowlands for the Feast. The meeting hall was spacious and somewhat chilly at times, but the fellowship and overall temperature outside was warm.

There was a healthy serving of rich spiritual food regarding preparing our hearts and minds for the Kingdom. Messages covered topics such as what it means to be counted worthy, and the peace that will come and how to increase it.

We were blessed to have special music every day and site activities included a singles mixer, Family Fun Day, Cultural Night and Festival Ball.

There were some unusual challenges during the Feast—even preventing some individuals from attending—but God saw us through each situation, and we all left noting lessons to be learned throughout the period and already looking forward to next year.

Masseillant, Haiti

The spirit of unity was shared by 60 brethren keeping the Feast of Tabernacles at the millennial setting of Masseillant, Haiti, which is located in the southwestern part of the country.

The brethren were blessed with beautiful weather throughout the entire Feast. The lush greenery and a variety of colorful tropical flowers created a lovely environment for the site. God's presence was evident, constantly providing each individual with a foretaste of God's future Kingdom through sermons and Bible studies throughout the Feast. There was also an abundance of physical food that was shared by everyone. One of the highlights of the Feast was the joy of spending time with 20 prospective members who were keeping the Feast for the first time.

The Feast activities began with a great start at the annual Family Dance, and continued with a talent show, a movie night for the youth, an annual soccer game, a hiking trip, and other excursions throughout the city of Masseillant.

Brethren faced trials during the Feast, with the sudden tragic illness and death of Elder Jove Jean-Pierre. However, the brethren also learned to put their total faith in God by keeping His commandment to rejoice during the Feast. Through sermons and Bibles Studies focused on the Millennium, brethren ended the Feast with the truth of knowing that a better world is coming, where disease and sickness will no longer exist.

Montego Bay, Jamaica

For the past nine consecutive years, God has placed His name on the north coast resort town of Montego Bay at the Holiday Inn Resort. God's people truly rejoiced this Feast, and the 345 attendees were blessed with beautiful weather. Brethren from Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States joined the Jamaican brethren to observe God's Festival. Among those gathered, we had seven attending their first Feast ever and four who were celebrating fifty or more.

The themes from the inspiring messages included subjects such as the Father's good pleasure at giving us the Kingdom, building bonds of friendship by promoting a family atmosphere, the blessings and perks that come with being called now, and an end to terrorism. God's Holy Spirit was certainly guiding the speakers as all of the messages came together in a remarkable way.

At our premier activity, the Family Cookout and Fun Day, the brethren enjoyed mouth-watering local foods, table games and some field events at the Montego Bay River Gardens. The attendance at the activity was 262, which was a 31 percent increase over last year.

Other activities at the Feast included an icebreaker for youth and singles, an evening of games, a Seniors Appreciation Luncheon, a Bible Bowl, a talent show, and a hymn sing. Thirteen persons—ranging from age 6 to over 70—performed at the talent show to the delight of the brethren. The choir presented Handel's "And the Glory of the Lord" on the first Holy Day and Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" on the Last Great Day. Both performances were well received by the brethren. The hour-long hymn sing we enjoy to begin the Last Great Day is always too short for the brethren, and this year was no exception.

Some of the visiting brethren mentioned how well things were organized. The majority commented on the warmth and friendliness of the Jamaican brethren and mentioned that the highlights of the Feast were the messages and the fellowshiping. The Feast was truly a positive and memorable experience.

Pebbles Beach, Barbados



Nestled in picturesque Carlisle Bay, minutes from Bridgetown, the Radisson Aquatica Resort was host for the Feast of Tabernacles 2017. This new venue proved to be popular with locals and international visitors alike. Designated a UNESCO (United Nations) World Heritage Site, there were numerous attractions, some located within walking distance of the hotel.

We were blessed to have three full-time pastors: Mr. James Sweat, Mr. Bill Whitaker and Festival Site Coordinator Paul Shumway. We were inspired by the wonderful sermons, and everyone was deeply moved by the “Behind the Work” DVD!

In reflecting upon the Feast, two aspects vividly come to mind: Great participation and seeing God’s hand at work in a powerful way throughout the Feast! Average attendance was 113 with a maximum of 121.

One highlight was the Catamaran Dinner Cruise. One of the most eagerly anticipated aspects of the cruise was being able to swim with majestic hawksbill sea turtles. The recent hurricanes changed the habits of these lovely creatures and made it difficult to locate them. Members prayed fervently and God sent one turtle to our boat. Remarkably, this one turtle actually went up to virtually every swimmer and allowed them to touch it! Normally, they swim away from humans. Also, while the coastland—a mere half-mile away—was pounded with rain to the point of flooding, we had clear skies overhead. God’s loving hand was evident throughout the entire Feast!

A first-time activity that proved to be a favorite was a Bible Bowl with professional lights and buzzer. Six teams of six took part answering general Bible questions and reciting a number of “meditation scriptures.” The Barbadians have been studying one meditation scripture each week as a Church project, giving them an advantage in this area. Members commented about how much they enjoyed activity and were inspired to see how well they knew their Bibles!

God blessed us with a wonderful Feast in every way. Several new individuals joined us for their very first Feast and many commented that this was their best Feast yet. The helpful, kind Radisson staff was pleased with the Church and requested that we return next year!

Playa Larga, Cuba

For the very first time, the Feast of Tabernacles was held on the sunny and beautiful island of Cuba. The Feast site was located in the Bay of Pigs area in Playa Larga, Matanzas, three hours from Havana.

The Feast was a success but began with some serious obstacles. First, the camp site that was contracted wanted to change the date of the event due to the disruptions caused by Hurricane Irma. However, they finally agreed to maintain the original scheduled date.

Second, our flight from Puerto Rico to Havana was cancelled due to the effects of Hurricane Maria, the biggest natural disaster in the history of Puerto Rico. Airlines flights were limited to a bare minimum. Finally, the airline allowed us to reschedule the flight for our timely arrival in Havana.

Third, when we were ready to start the Feast, the camp staff indicated that no religious activities were allowed in the site. Finally, by the evening of October 4, just before Opening Night, we were given the approval to go ahead as planned.

God had mercy on the 70 Feast-goers, 60 of whom enjoyed the Feast for the first time. Most of them are prospective members and diligent students of the Bible. With so many challenges to overcome, it is clear that this Feast resulted in God’s victory, supporting those who have confidence in Him. The messages and Bible Studies from Mr. Mario Hernandez, Mr. Raúl Colon and Mr. Joel Real were especially encouraging and helpful to everyone.

We will never forget the 2017 Feast in Cuba. May God help every Cuban who seeks Him wholeheartedly.

St. Luce, Martinique

The Feast of Tabernacles was held this year in St. Luce, on the island of Martinique. Festival participants from the French-speaking islands of Guadeloupe, St. Lucia and French Guyana attended the Feast in Martinique, along with visitors from Trinidad, Quebec, the United States and France. English translation services were provided with the help of eight translators who served the entire Feast. The average daily attendance was around 96.

Mr. Rick Stafford, Regional Director of the Caribbean, and his wife joined us for the second half of the Feast. Our pastor, Dr. Wilner Pierre, was unfortunately unable to be with us as planned, following the hospitalization of Mr. Jove Jean-Pierre in Haiti. Mr. Jove Jean-Pierre suffered a stroke during the night after the Opening Night service and was transported to the hospital, but his Christian race ended during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Most brethren enjoyed meals together. They also participated in activities, such as a visit to protected natural settings of coastal forest, salt marshes and mangroves unique to the southern part of the island. One of the highlights of the Feast

activities was sailing in a glass-bottom boat. Participants were able to jump off the boat and swim in the ocean, while others went scuba diving.

Brethren also had a wonderful time at the family dance and talent show. Seniors were treated to a dinner in their honor, served by the younger generation.

A traditional farewell cocktail reception was held after sundown following the Last Great Day service, and members left late in the evening, hoping to meet again next year.

Europe

Bournemouth, England



The Feast in the British Isles this year was situated at the south coast seaside resort of Bournemouth. Three hundred and fifteen brethren gathered from the UK and Ireland, with visitors from Canada, France, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States. We enjoyed pleasantly warm weather and stunning views from the cliff tops along the miles of sandy beaches.

The majestic and appropriately named Kings Hall at the Royal Bath Hotel provided the meeting place for services. Highlights for members were the messages, inspirational fellowship and the pleasant location.

Many planned activities were within walking distance of the Hotel. These included the zip line at the pier and indoor rock climbing, the Bournemouth Oceanarium visit, and an evening at the Pavilion Theatre listening to the Mantovani Orchestra, which was a highlight for many. There was also a family Ceilidh dance on Saturday evening, two children's art activities run by the young adults and a coach trip to nearby Corfe Castle, including a ride on a historic steam train.

Feast messages highlighted the coming restoration of right education and how we must prepare to rule and enlighten the world, and touched on many topics, including the prophesied "second exodus" and our future inheritance of the universe.

Wonderful special music was provided by instrumental and vocal contributors as well as the Festival and Children's Choirs. Thanks to all those who—officially and unofficially—quietly served at the Feast to make it so successful. It certainly contributed to the atmosphere of unity and outgoing concern so many experienced. Members from the UK and Ireland look forward to welcoming guests in 2018.

Carry-le-Rouet, France



Carry-le-Rouet, known for its warm Mediterranean climate and the allure of French culture, was home to 200 brethren from across the globe as they kept the Feast this year. The spectacular views of the late harvest moon on October 4 and the shimmering effects it had on the port's Mediterranean waters, lit up nearby Marseille and the surrounding distant islands. The scene was spectacular and the beauty breathtaking.

The Opening Night service was preceded by what felt like a reunion dinner. Many had been to the Feast in Carry-le-Rouet before. For some it was their first visit to France, and for others it was their first Feast ever. There was lots of excitement as everyone looked forward to the fulfilment of God's plan, and the awesome and incredible privilege of being called to serve as kings and priests with Jesus Christ.

Despite the recent attack at the Marseilles St. Charles train station, brethren were protected and felt safe, even while walking through the town. Inspiring messages delivered by local and international ministers and deacons expounded on this theme of bringing peace to a troubled world, and provided valuable spiritual lessons to stay vigilant and true to our calling.

The Festival coordination team worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make the Feast well-organized and enjoyable. Services were conducted in English and French with cross translations. Dutch translation was available, as well. This was a challenging task for our hard-working translators that was managed with grace, professionalism and attitudes of love and service.

Carry-le-Rouet was blessed to have Dr. Douglas Winnail for the first half of the Feast. Before he left, Dr. Winnail conducted a Bible Study on Church history, which highlighted the pre-Feast trip to the Lubéron area, where the Waldensians fled persecution.

There was a Talent and Camp Evening, a Senior Citizens Lunch, and a hike to discover local flora and fauna. A few local excursions included a trip to a nearby olive oil mill and a visit to an exhibition of the Mediterranean Sea adventurers, where Feast-goers learned about the different civilizations that existed around its shores. All the activities were family oriented and provided plenty of opportunity for fun and fellowship.

Despite the differences in culture, language and backgrounds, true Christian love, attitudes of service, generosity and kindness abounded at this beautiful seaside town. Feast-goers left the Feast filled with hope for the future and looked forward to Christ's return as King over all the earth

La Alberca, Spain



The first Feast of Tabernacles of the Living Church of God in Spain was exciting, inspiring and warm. The hotel surrounded by green fields and forests, evoked a sense of medieval times. The site was ideal for living the Feast in a warm environment far away from noises and the anxiety of this modern society.

Eighty brethren met at this Festival site, and we had the opportunity of visiting two of the most ancient and beautiful towns in Spain: Salamanca, having the most ancient university in the world, and Rodrigo City, surrounded by castles and ancient buildings.

Dr. Douglas Winnail was with us the second half of the Feast and contributed to the spiritual enrichment, which was very inspiring and motivating and charged our batteries to continue strong in our walk until we arrive at the Millennium.

Asia

Baguio City, Philippines

God placed His name at a new location for the Feast of Tabernacles in Baguio City. Our temporary dwelling place was placed near the foothills of Mount Cabuyao, which is one of the city's highest mountain peaks. This mountain provided a scenic panorama of the whole city from its top, rising up from the West Philippine Sea towards the Cordillera mountain ranges on a very clear day. God's creation provided our

service hall with a millennial backdrop, making it the best view to remind God's people of His creative power. Due to its relatively higher elevation from Baguio City, the new Feast site at the Green Valley Hotel provided cooler temperatures and beautiful surroundings.

Blessed with accessible facilities for Feast activities and good weather, the brethren did not need to worry about rain and travelling far to hold activities such as volleyball, duckpin bowling and basketball. Youth and singles enjoyed waking up early to enjoy a 45-minute hike through Mount Cabuyao to see the natural beauty that surrounds the Feast site, while having their breakfast above the clouds. Our seniors also braved being transported through the mountain cliffs of Mount Cabuyao to have their Seniors Luncheon, overlooking the city briefly only to be engulfed in thick clouds for the rest of the activity. Young children also enjoyed painting over smooth river stones artistic images of wild animals they would love to have in the Millennium. Energetic singles enjoyed some pizza and games as they tried to work out ways to communicate properly through drawing and strategic moves.

One of the highlighted activities was the outdoor family picnic, which was short but sweet—short because it rained halfway through the activity, but sweet enough to look forward to an even more enjoyable one next year. The Talent Night also gave us a glimpse into new skills and abilities from new and old members, as well as from both the young and not so young.

Abundant spiritual food was provided through instructive and inspiring messages from guests and local ministers, Messrs. Tanner, Osillos and Gonzales. Time was well spent by brethren fellowshiping on Sabbath evenings and “breaking-bread” at each other's “new” temporary dwellings. Recorded DVD messages from Headquarters were excellent and produced a very moving tribute to the late Dr. Roderick Meredith. This was indeed an inspiring and spiritually uplifting Feast for approximately 200 Feast-goers from around the Philippine Islands of Luzon and Visayas, as well as international guests from Australia and New Zealand.

Overall, we had a very successful Feast, which can only be attributed to the power of our great God! We thank God the Father and Jesus Christ for providing the place and capable men and women who gave themselves to God's Work and helped create another peaceful and meaningful Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day!

Batu, Indonesia

Batu is a Dutch-era tourist city in East Java, Indonesia, where the weather is warm during the day and cool in the evening. It is visited by many people seeking a cool mountain retreat away from the hot and humid surrounding areas. Thirty-three brethren—twenty-three adults, including two from Australia, and ten children—came together at the Villa Bagus complex

to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day and be spiritually fed and inspired by the wonderful plan of God. The sermons and sermonettes as well as the “Behind the Work” presentation truly stirred up the Spirit in God’s people, guiding them to become even more involved in His Work.

Besides the spiritual food, there were several social activities enjoyed by the brethren. These included a visit to the “Predator Fun Park,” where the youth were able to feed piranhas and other predatory fish, a day trip to the beach, and a visit to a local waterfall and nature park, as well as fun in the hotel swimming pool. During the Feast, the members experienced two special dinners and a talent show. We also enjoyed a locally produced film involving all of the brethren about the coming Kingdom of God. This Feast, which will live long in the memory of all in attendance, gave the brethren the opportunity to spend time together, to serve and care for each other and most of all to learn even more about the soon-coming Kingdom. Everyone involved this year is already excited about next year’s Feast.

Chiang Mai, Thailand



A beautiful resort in northern Thailand was where God chose to have His 189 people from ten countries celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

With much excitement and enthusiasm, we all settled down in preparation for the upcoming messages and activities planned for us.

With the theme “Philadelphia Pioneers: Onward to the Kingdom,” we heard messages about what our roles would be in the millennium. Mr. Jonathan McNair’s sermon about the varying teams that will be needed in helping those people who survive the destruction and devastation on the earth was especially thought-provoking.

We were also admonished throughout the Feast to think about our roles as future leaders, as well as the importance of observing and attending the Feast. Here, we learned that our yearly attendance is to allow us to develop a deeper understanding of the plan of God.

Many commented on the spiritual meat provided to the brethren via the various live sermons, DVD sermons, and sermonettes. The attendance at each Church service spoke volumes of the excitement prevalent among the brethren.

This was the first time in more than 20 years the Thai and Malaysian brethren were able to join the overseas brethren to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Karen brethren were able to see the live-streamed sermons in their own language.

There were many activities, including zip-lining, a Thai cultural show, a karaoke session, shared meals, elephant rides, rafting and ox-cart rides for all to share.

The hallmark of the Festival was plain for all to see: it was the intense and heartfelt fellowship of the brethren. There was not a day when groups of Church members were not seen together in fellowship. Overall, it was a great time for us all to spend with each other and build bonds as a family, and to be reminded of God’s ultimate plan for mankind. We pray that His Kingdom come—may God speed that day.

Davao City, Philippines

The Feast in Davao City was profoundly cherished by 86 brethren coming from congregations in Southeastern Mindanao, Palawan and Canada. I believe many would declare it as another “best Feast ever.”

The messages were interesting, fit for the season, and stirring. Mr. and Mrs. Jose Arendain came, and he spoke on keeping the Feast in the fear of God, promoting love to one another, and our future with God versus our “temporary dwellings.” Mr. Freddie Benitez also spent a couple of days here and spoke about spiritual recovery and righteous leadership.

Many brethren were moved during the “Behind the Work” video, and some shed tears during Dr. Roderick C Meredith’s farewell message.

Mr. Felipe Casing finished his Feast travels in Davao and was joyfully received by the brethren, bringing messages about our destiny and the Last Great Day. We were also privileged to have Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Bolences remain on site for the whole Feast, serving tirelessly and speaking.

It was indeed a memorable and enjoyable Feast! We appreciated the harmony and love that was apparent, and all parted on the Last Great Day—saying “goodbye” until we meet again next year at the Feast, or, as it may be for some, at the return of Jesus Christ in the coming Kingdom of God.

Kalaymyo, Myanmar



We thank God that the Karen and Chin brethren could celebrate His Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day in a millennial setting surrounded by mountains, in a village called Kyarinn (Kyar-Inn), Kalaymyo, Chin State, Myanmar.

The 18 Karen brethren, including adults and children from the Sakhangyi, Irrawaddy Delta area, commenced their journey to Myaungmya (Myaung-Mya) on the early morning of Thursday September 28, at 2:30 a.m. by boat. Then, at 5:00 a.m., they continued their journey from Myaungmya to Rangoon, and reached Rangoon by 9:00 a.m. After a short refreshment in Rangoon, they resumed their journey to Kalaymyo for another 19-hour ride on the bus.

After the long journey, they finally reached Kalaymyo on Friday morning, September 29 at 9:30 a.m. Prior to the commencement of the Feast of Tabernacles, with one accord, both Karen and Chin brethren were observing the Day of Atonement together at Mr. Thomas Tial Hoe's place. It had been over a decade since the two congregations met. After so many years, both Karen and Chin brethren shed tears of joy.

On the evening of October 4, 72 brethren congregated again at Mr. Tial Hoe's home for the Feast of Tabernacles. Hymns were sung and Mr. Tial Hoe translated the Opening Night Message by Mr. Weston to the brethren. All the transcribed messages for the Feast were translated to Burmese by Mr. Tial Hoe during the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

Special music was performed by both Karen and Chin brethren daily, and the Feast activities included visiting various places in Kalaymyo and the Chin hills.

Mr. Tial Hoe and all the Burma brethren were extremely grateful and thanked God for opening the door for this special opportunity, which enabled the brethren in Burma to come together once again to learn and worship Him with joy and gladness in a millennial setting. All look forward to the soon-coming Kingdom of God.

Madang, Papua New Guinea



Twenty-two brethren were enthralled with the first Feast held at the Madang Resort. Previously, Feasts had been held in a cosy apartment block in Port Moresby, but we thank God for guiding and blessing us with this new venue. This year the brethren experienced an even better foretaste of the coming

Kingdom of God. Madang Resort is truly a beautiful place, with blue ocean waters and lush green landscapes making this an ideal millennial setting.

Here in Papua New Guinea, a country that has undergone much change since achieving independence in 1975, God has called a tiny nucleus from which He will grow the Body of Christ.

Feast activities involved a picnic in the park, a Bible Quiz, a shopping morning and the highlight—the Holy Day lunches served in the Madang Restaurant. This was very much appreciated, especially by some of the brethren who, as subsistence farmers, have never had such an experience.

While the brethren came from different areas and with different backgrounds, God's Spirit was evident among all who attended. There was a real spirit of giving and sharing.

It was inspiring to witness the members' hunger for fellowship and their desire to develop a deeper understanding of the word of God and their part in His plan to save all of mankind.

Maranding, Philippines



This year's Festival in Maranding was attended by more than 90 cheerful brethren coming from areas of the Zamboanga Peninsula and the province of Lanao del Norte. It is well known that terrorist rebels are active in this area, but thankfully this was not true during the Feast of Tabernacles, where everyone enjoyed the foretaste of a peaceful and solemn environment. Sadly, the imposition of martial law by the Philippines government prevented any non-Filipino ministry from visiting the Island of Mindanao this year.

To make up for this situation, we had three ministers from different parts of Mindanao swapping between Feast Sites to give us various delicacies of spiritual food. Mr. Freddie Benitez started the Feast with us and delivered the opening night message when he precisely translated the message of Mr. Gerald Weston into the local vernacular, and he then stayed for a couple of days, delivering two more sermons in the vernacular. Mr. Felipe Casing arrived on the third day of the Feast, bringing with him some spiritual "cargo" in the form of strong and powerful messages. He also stayed for two days delivering his messages, also in the local language. Our final "visiting minister," Mr. Jose Arendain—our Festival Site Coordinator and local pastor—arrived for the remainder of

the Feast and the Last Great Day, and he gave some inspiring messages, as well. The messages of the three ministers had a great impact on the brethren and were the highlights of the Feast. Mr. Arendain also translated Mr. Weston's Last Great Day message.

On Saturday evening we had Family Night, where the brethren displayed their talents, particularly in dancing and singing. Kind-hearted brethren donated "delightful dozens" of gallons of ice cream with different flavors, which served as delicious attractions for everyone. On Tuesday evening the Deacons and Elders Luncheon was held at Mattheus Haven restaurant, and everybody enjoyed the food while camaraderie and good fellowship energized the entire activity. Mr. Jose Arendain encouraged the leaders to have a spirit of humility, teachability, and obedience to God's Church government, all the while displaying a heart of service for the brethren.

The eight days of this Feast catered both the spiritual and material food that fully nourished all the brethren who attended. Many were feeling nostalgic as the Feast drew to a close, remembering that on the first day of the Feast, they were hoping that the Feast would never end. Alas, we had to go home, and we all are praying for the Kingdom of God to be set up on this earth at Jesus Christ's return, so that we can fulfill our destiny and be together for eternity as sons and daughters in God's family.

Mindanao, Philippines

A total of 131 Feast-goers from the San Fernando, Kiara, Mauswagon, Don Carlos and Cagayan de Oro congregations were overwhelmed to once again meet their scattered brethren and have some wonderful fellowship here in Don Carlos, Bukidnon, to happily celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day. The family atmosphere was wonderful, due to the fact that most of the brethren were accommodated within 180 to 200 meters of the Church's Feast Hall, allowing them to easily attend services and activities, especially those scheduled at night.

The brethren were enlightened by the quality sermonettes and the sermons. We were blessed to have the Mindanao ministry rotate through Don Carlos as visiting ministers. Our first visiting minister at the start of the Feast on the opening night was Mr. Felipe Casing, who translated into the local vernacular the sermon from our Presiding Evangelist Mr. Gerald Weston. On the first day of the Feast, Mr. Casing delivered a very inspiring sermon. Mr. and Mrs. Jose C. Arendain arrived from Davao the third day of the Feast here in Don Carlos, and stayed for two days. All of his messages were very inspiring, particularly since they were delivered in our local dialect. Mr. Jose Arendain departed after the morning services bound for Maranding.

Finally, Mr. and Mrs. Freddie Benitez arrived from Davao to lead us for the remaining days of the Feast of Tabernacles

and The Last Great Day. He was also able to speak in the vernacular the messages he had received from HQ for use at the Feast. He also translated Mr. Weston's Last Great Day message so that everyone fully understood.

The Festival was far more than simply "fun" and "entertaining." There were many different activities—including the Singles and Youth Night, Seniors Night, Children's Activity, Couples Night, Sports Day, Film Showing, Leaders Fellowship and Farewell Party—that saw everyone actively participating. But we were also all given a generous serving of spiritual food and of knowledge and understanding regarding God's coming Kingdom.

God's commanded Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day 2017 here in Don Carlos, Bukidnon, gave us a wealth of life-changing instruction and much encouragement that we surely want to have remain in our hearts and minds for a lifetime.

Negombo, Sri Lanka

Twenty delighted brethren representing five countries—Sri Lanka, United States, South Africa, Australia and the Philippines—kept God's Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day in a serene beachside setting at the Goldi Sands Hotel in Negombo, Sri Lanka (the Pearl of the Indian Ocean).

God provided an abundance of both physical and spiritual food. Not only were the brethren treated to delicious buffet meals, they also had the privilege of hearing inspiring and informative sermons by the local elder, Mr. Kuma De Silva.

The hotel staff was friendly and eager to attend to any requests. The accommodations were comfortable and clean. Overall, the hotel exuded a millennial atmosphere, with beautiful sunsets and the sound of the ocean making this Feast of Tabernacles a real treat.

For some, the mornings started with a walk on the beach at 6:45—daylight approaches early in Sri Lanka! Others preferred breakfast and a swim in the beautiful pool before morning services. Activities during the Feast included a hymn sing accompanied by acoustic guitar. Family Day and Family Night gave brethren team-building opportunities through a variety of creative and fun indoor activities and games. Some of the other activities included an afternoon of shopping, a Bible Quiz and a Seniors Luncheon. There was also a talent show, which was an enjoyable evening of song, dance, poetry, instrumental music and digital show that involved all of the brethren and really showed their God-given talents.

After this wonderful Feast of Tabernacles, many were teary-eyed when saying their goodbyes to the international guests. They look forward to next year where they anticipate seeing old and new faces. The Feast in Sri Lanka was like no other. With warm and friendly locals and beautiful scenery, one day it will go on for 1,000 years.

Africa

La Pointe Denis, Gabon

The Feast site in Gabon was an exceptionally small site—the more so as hoped-for attendees from Cameroon could not come. It is, however, a beautiful setting on what is effectively a trackless island beach/sand bar across the estuary, about 20 minutes by boat from Libreville. There were no shops or anything commercial, just a number of empty neighboring chalets.

The very small group of local brethren (five adults, one teen, two children and one baby) were joined by Henry and Rosemary Cooper from Ireland. One other local member travelled abroad. The little group resides in Libreville, and meets there each Sabbath. They were particularly excited that a visitor came to join their Feast after so many years without. Song leading and singing were of high standards.

The site was striking in its location and environment. All food, provisions and utensils had to be brought in by the membership on the ferry crossing. All meals were cooked on-site and were top class.

Accommodation was very rustic but fully adequate—typically African shanty style. Westerners would be challenged to adapt. The spirit of serving and co-operation was outstanding. There were few outsiders in proximity.

Lagos, Nigeria

This year, we observed the Feast of Tabernacles at Presken Villa, a part of the Presken Hotels, in Ikeja, Lagos. This was the first time the Church in Nigeria observed the Feast in this area of Lagos.

Presken Villa was chosen because of the privacy, serenity and facilities it offers. We were able to use the villa exclusively for the 23 brethren who were able to attend. The location was easily accessible to places of interest in the Lagos metropolis.

Brethren enjoyed the uplifting messages by way of sermon DVDs from Charlotte, supplemented by spiritual messages presented live. The messages were well received by the brethren, who really rejoiced before the Eternal God, practiced God's way of giving and were at peace with one another. Brethren demonstrated kindness, warmth, understanding and collaboration throughout the Feast. One couple visited from the United States and one came from Gabon, and of course we have a few brethren from Cotonou, Benin Republic, who actually are an integral part of the Church in Nigeria.

Brethren enjoyed the "Behind the Work" video, and were particularly sobered but encouraged by the DVD on the late Dr. Roderick C. Meredith.

A highlight of the Feast was an interactive seminar on "Difficult Scriptures Explained." The seminar was decided upon to acquaint the brethren with how God's Church has traditionally and scripturally explained some difficult scriptures.

We went on an excursion to the National Museum in central Lagos, which was very informative, particularly viewing the various artifacts on the culture of major tribes in Nigeria and a pictorial history of governance in Nigeria beginning from the colonial era. The traditional sing-along, usually held on the eve of the Last Great Day, was uplifting and exhilarating.

Thanks to the Living God for the joy, comfort, provision and security He gave us during this year's Feast of Tabernacles in Nigeria. He commanded us to rejoice before Him, and He made it possible!

Port Shepstone, South Africa



Along the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal lies the holiday town of Port Shepstone, where 160 brethren gathered at the Banana Beach Holiday Resort to enjoy a brief foretaste of the Millennium. Most stayed at the resort itself, which contributed to a feeling of togetherness, love and unity that was a hallmark of this Feast. The messages were meant to inspire everybody to persevere through the hard times that lie ahead before God's glorious Kingdom. The guest speaker from Atlanta, Mr. Dan Hall, arrived on Sunday to spend the last half of the Feast with the brethren who gathered from all over South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Europe.

An effort was made to include as many people as possible in the activities. The youth had lunch on the beach and then spent the afternoon playing games and rounding it off with sundaes for dessert. At the same time, the senior citizens enjoyed a three-course catered lunch with fellowshiping at the dining hall, and the singles and "in-betweeners" went for waffles at a well-known waffle house. Inclement weather caused the picnic on the beach to be postponed by a day, but in the end, all the participants showed great enthusiasm and expertise in building large sand castles, much to the delight of the littlest Feast-goers.

A dinner dance also took place where young and old showed their moves. This was preceded by a talent show, where the youngest singer was only four years old and the oldest was 78. Friday evening as the Sabbath began, a Bible Study was held, followed by an impromptu question and answer session.

Brethren remarked about the love and unity fueled by God's Spirit that brought all these diverse souls together.

As someone commented, "It was an outstanding fun-filled, spiritually and physically amazing Feast" and "I am going home with more answers than questions."

Stilbaai, South Africa



God and Christ were the gracious hosts to 158 happy brethren at the Stilbaai Feast site for the fifth year. Stilbaai is situated on one of the prettiest bays in South Africa. The millennial setting of rolling hills and green and gold wheat fields contributed to our visualizing the serenity of the coming Kingdom.

Brethren were inspired by messages on Christian faith and hope, and pointers on how to remain on track. We were greatly encouraged to face the world again after the Feast with reminders to go forward with renewed zeal, focusing on Christ in order to complete our spiritual building of God's character. Mr. Dan Hall, our visiting speaker from the United States, as well as several visitors from the U.S. and Australia, added an exciting flair to our fellowshiping and activities.

The lazy river running through the town of Stilbaai was the venue for the singles to have an exhilarating opportunity to go kayaking—albeit in some cases hilariously rowing around in circles! Team effort and returning to base against the incoming ocean tide encouraged personal self-discipline and willpower. The teens embarked on a scavenger hunt in and around the town center, which encouraged them to sharpen their awareness of their surroundings and how to approach strangers in a friendly and confident way. Children had a fun time playing games and building dams and sandcastles on a shelly beach, watching how the incoming tide caused a tsunami effect and flooded their building projects.

The young children participated in craft sessions a few times before services. They learned the Ten Commandments by heart and were guided in understanding some Bible stories while developing their artistic skills. The enthusiastic young voices of the children's choir (singing "Dreaming about the Kingdom") brought a lump to many a throat.

For the first time, a Family Fun Afternoon was held. The hall was decorated in a 1960s theme and many participants dressed accordingly. A variety of music from that era, played on an old record player—had old and young alike bouncing about on the dance floor.

This year's Feast ended on an especially high note, with three people being baptized into the family of God.

Ukerewe, Tanzania

We had a very wonderful Feast in Ukerewe, with approximately 110 brethren. The Opening Night message by Mr. Gerald Weston was read in English and translated into Swahili. All our messages were translated either to English or Swahili for the benefit of those who were present.

We were blessed with members from Burundi, Tanzania, and the Republic of Congo, as well as two visitors from the Seventh Day Church of God. We also had guest speakers from Headquarters: Regional Director Peter Nathan, Mr. Jacob Hall and Mr. Travis Cole. With them was Samuel, an elder from Kendu Bay. They joined us on Monday evening. They all gave spiritually uplifting messages, touching on the weekly and annual Sabbaths, Holy Days and the coming Kingdom.

The "Behind the Work" video was very interesting to many, as they learned more about Dr. Roderick C. Meredith and his role in the Work—of which they are now a part.

There was a Seniors Luncheon on Tuesday with 25 present, including our guest speakers. On the same day there was a Children's Presentation, which focused on God's Feasts. At Talent Night, individuals had the opportunity to express themselves through singing, poems or reciting scriptures.

On Wednesday there were two baptisms, and we had the pleasure of blessing 15 children on the morning of the Last Great Day.

Australia/South Pacific Hanmer Springs, New Zealand

One hundred and twenty excited Feast-goers "set up camp" at the millennial site of Hanmer Springs, New Zealand, for the second consecutive year. Although the weather was not perfect, the small amount of snow on the mountain tops added to the beauty of the site.

We had the privilege of hosting our Presiding Evangelist, Gerald Weston, and his wife, Carol, for the first half of the Feast, as well as Elder Zig Svalbe and his wife from Melbourne, Australia. Another 20 international guests attended, all adding a special atmosphere to this Festival. Our visitors expressed appreciation for the family atmosphere that was evident amongst the New Zealand brethren and they appreciated being so warmly embraced.

The messages were inspiring as members were exhorted to stand in awe of the power and might of God, whether it be

the heavenly stars, the microscopic cell, or the grandeur of the coming New Jerusalem. Activities included the hot pools, a 1950s-themed dinner dance, a vintage steam train ride, and mountain biking. God's Spirit was clearly evident amongst His people in Hanmer Springs and there was an abundance of love and unity present throughout the festival!

Nelson Bay, Australia



The Feast of Tabernacles in Australia was held for the second consecutive year at Nelson Bay, about three hours north of Sydney. Two-hundred and fifty registered members and visitors joyfully kept the Feast, picturing the millennial rule of Jesus Christ and the saints.

Nelson Bay is an ideal setting for this special time in God's Holy Days. It is a beautiful small beachside destination in a very millennial area of Port Stephens. God blessed us with a wonderful venue and much favor by the management and staff.

We had overseas visitors from the Netherlands and United States of America, South Africa and, for the last few days, were visited by Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Weston. Mr. Weston spoke on important and relevant topics focusing on the Coming Kingdom of God. We thank the Westons for visiting Southeast Asia, making it truly a Feast to remember and their visit was greatly appreciated by the brethren.

We experienced wonderful teaching and inspiring sermons pertaining to the Millennium, the Kingdom of God and the Last Great Day. The fellowship was warm and encouraged by the "Get to Know Your Brethren" evening. The Family Barbeque and Games afternoon is always a highlight for many. Our "Senior Seniors" (those over 80) were blessed to have the Westons join them for a special afternoon at Nelson Head lighthouse, which offered spectacular panoramic views of Port Stephens. To add to the experience, a friendly Rainbow Lorikeet landed on Mr. Weston's arm, hoping for a morsel of food.

The Feast of Tabernacles ended so quickly, but everyone went home, ready to face the challenges of the year ahead, feeling well fed and spiritually uplifted!

Orap, Vanuatu

The Feast for 2017 in Vanuatu was held at Orap Village on the Island of Malekula.

Average attendance was 130, with brethren from the main islands of Efate, Tanna, Malekula and Santo. We also had visitors from New Caledonia and Australia. Although the area has been without decent rain for some months, the setting at pastor Jerry Sam's property was millennial. A number of the brethren had literally built temporary dwellings from palm branches and other locally sourced material. The brethren had been very busy over the last few months modifying the meeting hall to accommodate the large numbers attending. This involved removing the entire rear wall of the hall and extending the length by erecting a temporary tarpaulin roof. This area accommodated an extra 40 people. The brethren in Vanuatu are very resourceful and have a "can do" attitude to most challenges.

The Feast atmosphere was enhanced by the wonderful, uplifting sermons, fellowship, food and activities for the full eight days. The activities involved a picnic and swim day at a beach in Northwest Malekula and was a lot of fun for everyone and included a lively treasure hunt organised for the young people.

We had a sports day in which the main activities were volleyball and soccer, played vigorously by young and old. The energy of the Vanuatu brethren is amazing. On Wednesday evening, we had Talent Night under the stars. With music, comedy and poetry being the main acts, there was much fun and laughter throughout the entire evening. There was also an introduction to Spokesman Club one afternoon, which resulted in some lively discussion and questions from the men.

An evening of discussion was held with the sermonette men, who did a great job at the Feast and presented some very insightful and meaningful sermonettes.

A truly wonderful and exceptional Feast was had by all.

The preceding Festival report contributions were created, compiled and edited with the enthusiastic help and support of many Feast-goers and Church personnel, including *Deborah Lincoln-Strange, Nate Thomas, Rod McNair, Oladele Akin-Ogundeji, P. Arendain, Deonarine Arjune, Michael Aviles, Freddie Benitez, Frank Best, Christo Botha, Conie Casing, Raúl Colón, Henry Cooper, Mike DeSimone, Lawdi Ferreira, Richard Franz, Lascelles Fraser, Thomas Tial Hoe, Paul Kearns, Shane Kruse, Htoowah Laybeh, Ruben Lujan Jr., Vicki Montgomery, Tanya Moodley, Rajan Moses, Simon Muthama, Peter Nathan, Arius Nusantara, Cristian Orrego, Wilner Pierre, Simon Roberts, Joseph Ryan, George Schauback, Richard Sedliacik, Phil Sena, Hugh Stewart, John Strain, Dexter Wakefield, Barry Walker, Stefan van der Watt, Damian Weekes, Ian West, and Brenda White.*

—Editorial Staff

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. Michael Larry and Miss Janet Leah, members from the Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia congregation, were united in marriage on December 12, 2016. Mr. Rajan Moses officiated at the ceremony. Family and friends, including LCG members from all over the region, rejoiced with the happy couple and enjoyed the dinner and dance following the ceremony.

Mr. Eric Boerner and Miss Emily Friz were united in marriage on Sunday, September 24, in Carthage, Texas. The bride is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel (Tammy) Friz of East Texas, and the groom is the son of Mr. and Mrs. John (Debra) Boerner of the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation, and the grandson of Mr. and Mrs. George (Alvina) Dellinger, also of the Indianapolis congregation. Mr. Dellinger conducted the wedding ceremony. The young couple resides in Indianapolis.

The Minneapolis congregation honored a beloved couple, **Mr. and Mrs. Ken (Mavis) Christensen**, after services in Minneapolis on November 11, in celebration of their 70th wedding anniversary. They were married on November 8, 1947. They have been faithful members of God's Church since 1975 and have six children, 21 grandchildren and 41 great-grandchildren.

Mr. and Mrs. Rodger (Arlene) Hagmaier celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary on November 16. Mr. and Mrs. Hagmaier were baptized in 1967 in Jackson, Michigan. They have one son, Derek, and two healthy grandchildren. He is an elder and she is a deaconess serving in the Akron, Ohio, congregation. They are thankful for God's influence in their lives and marriage.

Mr. and Mrs. Gerald (Wilma) Shoquist celebrated 62 years of marriage in 2017. They were married on July 2, 1955, and have two children and four grandchildren. Mr. and Mrs. Shoquist were baptized in December 1971. He is an elder and Mrs. Shoquist is a deaconess serving the Phoenix, Arizona, congregation.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Adam (Louise) Jennings, of the Brisbane, Australia, congregation, are pleased to announce the birth of their third child, **Micah Andrew Jennings**. Micah was born on January 19, 2017, weighing 3,500 grams and measuring 56 centimeters long. His twin brothers, Ethan and Thomas, enjoy playing with their new sibling, and both mother and baby are doing well.

Mr. and Mrs. Jason (Katie) Canary, of Auckland, New Zealand, are happy to announce the birth of their son, **Jude Jason Canary**, on March 12. Jude was born strong and healthy, and all the family is delighted to welcome him.

Mr. and Mrs. Jamie (Annesha) Edyvane, of the Melbourne, Australia, congregation, are thrilled to announce the birth

of their first child, **Timothy Joseph**, born on May 24, weighing 3,280 grams and measuring 52 centimeters long. All are well.

Mr. and Mrs. Darryl (Elva) Greene, of the Grande Prairie, Alberta, congregation, are pleased to announce the birth of their son, **Jeremiah Richard Greene**, on July 26. He weighed 8 pounds 4 ounces, and was 20 inches long. Big sister Alianna is devoted to her new brother.

Mr. and Mrs. Romel (Linaly) Grajo, from the Daet Bicol congregation in the Philippines, are happy to announce the birth of their second child, **Yenel Yeshiva C. Grajo**, born on July 28. She weighed 3.1 kilograms, and was 45 centimeters long. Grandparents Mr. and Mrs. Leandro

Cajudo of the Tacloban City congregation are also overjoyed to welcome baby Yenel into the family.

Mr. and Mrs. A.J. (Rachael) Heykoop, of the Mississauga, Ontario, congregation, are excited to announce the birth of **Josiah Wayne Heykoop**. He was born early on September 13, weighing 7 pounds 13.6 ounces and measuring 52 centimeters long. Grandparents Cor and Leona Heykoop and Wayne and Lorraine Tlumak are happy to welcome the new addition.

Mr. and Mrs. Tony (Faith) Leman, of the Hamilton, New Zealand, congregation, are pleased to announce the birth of their third child, **Gabriella Sarah Leman**, on Friday, August 11. She weighed 3.28 kilograms and measured 50 cen-

We want to hear more about the happy milestones in the lives of our brethren. If your family has had a birth, marriage or major anniversary, please ask your local pastor to send word to the *Living Church News*, PO Box 3810, Charlotte, NC 28227-8010 (or to send e-mail to lcn@lcn.org).

timeters long. Gabriella has two older siblings, Asher and Aviela, who are excited to have a new sister. Both mother and baby are doing well.

Mr. and Mrs. Justin (Kate) Murdoch, of the Invercargill, New Zealand, congregation, are delighted to welcome **Isla Jane Katrina** to their family. She was

born on Tuesday, September 5, weighing 8 pounds and measuring 51 centimeters long. Her three older brothers are very excited to have a baby sister. Mother and baby are doing well.

Mr. and Mrs. Stephen (Kelsey) Leucker of Calgary, Alberta, are pleased to announce the arrival of their second

child, a baby boy. **Jesse Bernhard Leucker** was born safely at home as planned, on Wednesday, October 18. He weighed 8 pounds 6 ounces, and was 52 centimeters long. Mother and baby are both happy and healthy, and big sister Scarlett is excited about her little brother.

In Loving Memory

Mr. Glen William Gibbs, 26, died peacefully in his sleep on March 3, at his home. He was a very compassionate person with a love for music and animals and was always willing to help out in any way he could. He was very articulate and used his gift for words to encourage others. A private family interment was conducted by his parents, John and Barb Gibbs, of the Kelowna, British Columbia, congregation. Mr. Gibbs was an only child. Besides his parents, he is survived by his grandmother, Lewela D'Eon of the Kingston, Ontario, congregation, and uncles, aunts, and cousins. He is terribly missed.

Mrs. Jean Gustafson died on July 5 at the age of 82. Even as her health failed, she had a youthful sense of humor and a twinkle in her eye. She was baptized in 2010 and set a great example of dedication over the years, wheeling her oxygen tank with her in order to attend services. Mrs. Gustafson was a much-loved member of the Tacoma, Washington, congregation and she will be greatly missed.

Mrs. Theresa Sanders, of the Tri-Cities, Washington, congregation, died on July 8 at the age of 71. She was baptized in 2011 and though she had a number of health problems, she didn't lose her spirit of adventure and enjoyment of life. She is greatly missed by those who knew her and loved her.

Mrs. Gloria Krueger died on July 9, after a full life of almost 86 years, including homesteading in Alaska, where she lived without running water or electricity for many years, and having ten children. Until the end of her life, she lived on the homestead, enjoying the beautiful views. Mrs. Krueger was baptized in 1964 and was always enthusiastic about attending services and fellowshiping with the Anchorage, Alaska, brethren. She will be greatly missed.

Mr. Adriano Borean of the Mississauga, Ontario, congregation, died on August 10 at the age of 80. He was born in Italy and immigrated to Canada in 1961. Mr. Borean first heard Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong on the radio in 1967 and was baptized in 1969. In 2012, he saw God working in the Living Church of God, and was happy to hear Dr. Meredith preaching the faith once delivered. Mr. Borean is survived by his loving wife of 53 years, Margaret, and five sons, their wives, and five grandchildren. He had a strong passion for his faith and family, as well as varied other interests such as opera, classical music, photography and gardening. He is deeply missed and will be lovingly remembered by his family and friends. Regional Pastor Winston Gosse officiated at his funeral on August 15.

Mrs. Joan Leihn, 77, died on Monday, August 21. Mrs. Leihn was baptized in 1982 and was an active member of the Brisbane, Australia, congregation. Mr. Graeme Hemphill from Sydney conducted the funeral service, and she was buried in her family plot. Mrs. Leihn was much loved and will be missed by her family and friends.

Mr. Roy Varcin, 96, a member of the Brisbane, Australia, congregation, died peacefully on September 6, after entering respite care the previous week. He was baptized in God's Church in 2004 but poor health had prevented him from attending services since 2011. Mr. Varcin lived a long and full life and is survived by two daughters and several grandchildren. Mr. Dayrell Tanner conducted the funeral service.

Mr. James Edward McNaughton, 81, died September 17, seven weeks after his wife's death. They had been married for 62 years. Mr. McNaughton was baptized in 1972 and always enjoyed reading the Bible. He is survived by one son, Timothy; one daughter, Wanda McNaughton; three grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; a sister and other relatives. Mr. and Mrs. McNaughton are greatly missed in

the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation. Mr. Michael DeSimone conducted his funeral.

Mr. Charles Joseph Landwehr, 93, of the Big Sandy, Texas, congregation, died September 26. His career in the military took him all around the world. In 1964, in Houston, Texas, he was baptized into God's Church and later worked at the Big Sandy campus. Mr. Landwehr is survived by his wife of 46 years, Della (Horne).

Mr. Wallace Cooksey, 87, of the Terre Haute, Indiana, congregation, died peacefully at his home on September 27. He was a pillar and faithful member of the Church of God since his baptism in 1975 and he delighted in serving God and His people. He also enjoyed square dancing and wood-working. After serving in the United States Air Force, he worked as a farm hand for 50 years, enjoying God's creation. All who knew him will miss his quiet, mild manner and sense of humor. He was preceded in death by Nancy, his loving wife of 35 years, and six siblings. He is survived by one son and daughter-in-law, three grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, and several nieces and nephews. Mr. Yancy Taber conducted his memorial service.

Mrs. Margie Mae Evans, 86, of Flint, Texas, died September 30 at her home. She was a longtime member and deaconess in God's Church, serving in the Big Sandy congregation and, for years, at Ambassador College, Big Sandy. She was well known and well loved by the local brethren and by the college students. Mrs. Evans is survived by two sons and their wives, one daughter and her husband, eight grandchildren, and 18 great-grandchildren, as well as one sister.

Mr. Everett Barnes, 81, of the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation, died peacefully at his home on October 22. He had been a faithful member of God's Church since his baptism in 1974, and was one of the early members to join with Dr. Roderick Meredith. Mr. Barnes served in the United States Marine Corps for seven years, after which he worked for the Coca-Cola company until his retirement. He is survived by his wife Margie, of 51 years, two daughters, one son, 25 grandchildren, and 18 great-grandchildren. Elder George Dellinger conducted his memorial service.

Mr. Gary Ullerick, 85, died peacefully in his home on October 28, his wife Gale by his side, as she was through their 59 years of marriage. Mr. Ullerick lived a very full life and will be remembered for his sense of humor, his compassion, his love of God, and his love for and service to the brethren. He was baptized in 1962 and dedicated his life to God. Mr. and Mrs. Ullerick were strong through difficult times in the Church and consistently kept the big picture as they served the brethren throughout

the Pacific Northwest and even to Alaska. Mr. Ullerick will be greatly missed by very many people.

Mrs. Alvina M. Dellinger, 79, of Indianapolis, died in her sleep October 29, after a lengthy period of declining health. She was baptized in 1964 and ordained a deaconess in 1979. Mrs. Dellinger was a wonderful example and servant to all of the Indianapolis brethren. She was predeceased by one son, and is survived by her husband of 58 years, George, a longtime elder in God's Church, daughter Debra Boerner and her husband John, three grandchildren, and a sister. Mrs. Dellinger is very greatly missed by her family, the brethren, and all who knew her. Mr. Lambert Greer conducted her funeral service.

Mr. Archibald Miller died peacefully on October 30 at the age of 86. He was a member of God's Church since 1985. Mr. Miller is survived by his wife, Joyce, also of the St. John's, Newfoundland, congregation, as well as by two daughters, two grandsons, and two great-grandchildren. Mr. Frank Best conducted his funeral service.

Mrs. Mollie Freeman Logue, 87, of the Thomasville, Georgia, congregation, died on December 2. Mrs. Logue's hands were always busy with needlework. She was a great cook—the larger the crowd, the better—and she loved trees, plants, and flowers. She was married to Dalvin Logue, the love of her life, for 65 years. She deeply loved all of her family and was a wonderful wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. She will be deeply missed by all the family and friends she cherished. She is survived by her husband, two sons, one daughter, seven grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren. Pastor Joseph Brown conducted her funeral service.

Mr. Roland Glenn Travis, a longtime elder serving in the Rolla, Missouri, congregation, died on October 7 of heart failure. He was 78. Mr. Travis was a wonderful example of loving, serving leadership, and he will be sorely missed by all who knew him. He was baptized in 1962. In 1974, in Pasadena, California, he married Zara Ghordjian, who survives him. Mr. Travis was ordained an elder in 2003. Besides his wife, he is survived by three daughters—Ruth Travis, Rachel Martin and husband Jonathan, and Esther Travis—and two grandchildren. He is deeply missed by family, brethren, and friends.

Mr. Jove Jean-Pierre died of cardiac arrest on October 22 at the age of 72. He was baptized into God's Church in 1972 and served the brethren in Haiti, first as a deacon for almost 40 years (ordained in 1984), and then as an elder, ordained by Dr. Wilner Pierre in April 2012. He is survived by his wife, Marie, and is greatly mourned by his family and the brethren. His funeral was on October 26.

ORDINATIONS

Mr. Brian McKenzie was ordained a deacon on the Sabbath of April 8 by Australasian Regional Director Robert Tyler and Elder Martin Montgomery. Mr. McKenzie works in the Australasian Regional Office and serves in the Adelaide, Australia, congregation.

Mr. Riann Taylor was ordained a deacon on the Sabbath of April 15 by Robert Tyler, Australasian Regional Director, and Elder Mal Jennings. Mr. Taylor serves in the Perth, Australia, congregation.

Mr. Ryan Nicholson was ordained an elder on the Sabbath of May 27 by

Australasian Regional Director Robert Tyler, Pastor Michael Gill, and Elder Martin Montgomery. Mr. Nicholson works in the Australasian Regional Office and serves in the Adelaide, Australia, congregation.

Mr. Frank Dickinson and Mr. Gary Pate were ordained elders on September 9 by Regional Pastor Jeffrey Fall, Area Pastor Brandon Fall and Elder Jonathan Bueno. Mr. Dickinson and Mr. Pate serve in the Seattle/Tacoma, Washington, congregation.

Mr. Richard Johnson and his wife Susan were ordained deacon and dea-

coness on the Feast of Trumpets by Area Pastor Ed Breaux and Elder Rob Coates. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson serve in the Pensacola, Florida, congregation.

Mr. Donald Harbison was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets by Area Pastor Ed Breaux and Elder Rob Coates. Mr. Harbison serves in the Pensacola, Florida, congregation.

Mr. James Meakin was ordained a deacon on December 2 by Regional Pastor Adam West and Pastor John Meakin. Mr. James Meakin serves in the Kettering congregation in the UK, as well as working in the UK office.

A TEACHING MOMENT continued from page 4

(“The Art of Flirting,” *psychologytoday.com*). It is likely that Potiphar’s wife employed flirtatious behavior with Joseph prior to her demand, “Lie with me” (Genesis 39:7–12). Of course, some kinds of flirting may be appropriate when single and courting, but are never with someone else’s mate.

A recent news report specifically mentioned proper and improper hugging as something that needed to be explained in sensitivity training for Congress—training to explain how to physically and verbally communicate. If our state and national leaders need this instruction, is it not appropriate for us to give similar guidelines? What we taught at LYC is that there is no need to hug every time you leave an activity, meet at lunch, or say goodnight following Evening Reflection. Side hugs or “A frame” hugs may be appropriate at times, but the full body press should be reserved for the married. Some Church members fail to understand the difference. I have

had the latter imposed upon me on more than one occasion. I think it was always done innocently enough, but to the wrong person it sends a bad signal.

It is commonly understood etiquette that the woman should be allowed to determine whether a hug is appropriate. Let her make the first move, but even here, if you sense there is more than “a holy kiss” principle being communicated, do the same thing we recommend to women who run into men who impose unwanted hugs. Put your arm out straight and firm, and offer a handshake. If that does not work, let the person know that you would prefer to shake hands only.

The sexual harassment scandals that rocked America at the end of 2017 provide a *teaching moment*. It is not good enough to speak only in vague generalities. Yes, we can go too far with what some call yardstick religion, but we must not be so vague about such things as modesty that the word is defined in a thousand different ways by as many people. There are behaviors that are unholly, but we must be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15–16). (L)

BIGGER? continued from page 2

that is, better quality—is *always* better! We must never allow the “bigger is better” mindset to guide our thinking. Nor should we think that smaller is better, because we like small. God thinks

big and so should we. God uses both sizes to fulfill His plan and purpose, but either way, staying close to God, avoiding distractions, and keeping our focus on the purpose for which we are called is what matters more than size. We must constantly test our thinking

and our actions to make sure they fit within the commissions we have been given. We must do this individually and collectively.



COMMENTARY

What Is Set Before Our Eyes

As I was watching the news this week and seeing yet another male public figure fall to accusations of sexual misconduct, I paused to wonder about where this is all leading. But more importantly, *where does it all come from?*

There's a scripture that this trend brings to mind: "I will set nothing wicked before my eyes" (Psalm 101:3). For years, what have the majority of themes for sitcoms, comedians, movies and pop culture trends placed before people's eyes? Television stations thrive on shows that are full of sexual innuendo, double entendre or even explicit sexual talk or scenes. Look at sitcoms going back to the 80s, and you will find them promoting these things time and time again. Look at the music industry today. How many songs are about having "fun" tonight and moving on tomorrow?

So, is scandal and disgraceful behavior now really surprising, or do we reap what we sow? *Sex sells*, and after decades of people selling (and buying), the results are painfully clear. Sadly, for anyone to appear shocked would seem naïve and even hypocritical, for many of the same people watching the news in shocked fascination will turn right around and pay to listen to music or watch shows that promote these same behaviors.

An *outcry* is totally justified; these types of behavior *are* absolutely unacceptable. Yet, many of those who cry out will sit in the comfort of their living room and *boost the television ratings of shows that promote these same scandalous behaviors!* Is there any real conviction to *banish* such things from before our eyes?

The culture all around is submerged in this *filth*. Women are not honored for who they are, but for what they look like.

"Sex culture" is available on every media platform. Society absorbs it, marinates in it, and then acts as if there is somehow no connection between this entertainment and real instances of lewd or perverted behavior.

Women, especially, are objectified and held up for their looks, but men are used this way as well. Advertising agencies use sexuality to sell anything—but ask yourself, why? Lust is an *inherent human weakness*, and for centuries it has been used to manipulate people and to weaken their resolve and fidelity, often for the purpose of controlling or *selling* them something. The Apostle Paul knew this when he said, "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2). The Apostle John said, "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). How well that represents society today!

What defense is there? What is the *right* way to see others? Consider this advice God inspired for husbands and wives: "So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it" (Ephesian 5:28–29). By extension, this principle can be applied to relations between men and women in general. Here, the word "love" means to respect, to take care of, and to support; the verse then puts this in the perspective of Jesus Christ *giving His life for us*. This attitude can come to permeate your behavior, and you'll see and think about men and women as *people*, rather than the sexualized objects that are set before people's eyes in so many insensitive and filthy ways.

—Marc Arseneault

The above is adapted from one of the many commentaries, discussing vital topics facing our world, available at the lcg.org and TomorrowsWorld.org Web sites.