

# Living Church News

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## Become a Welcoming Church: Christ's Special Command

Dear Brethren and Friends,

As I have previously reported, God is beginning to give us more growth in "brand-new" prospective members than ever before! Our ministers are now receiving hundreds of visit requests from people who *never before* heard of Mr. Armstrong or the Worldwide Church of God, and who were never involved in our former association. Also, *scores* of former WCG members are requesting visits, as that organization continues its unrelenting campaign to turn away from virtually *all* the truth Christ taught us in decades past.

So, we are *grateful to God* for this growth and for this opportunity to *welcome* and to *serve* these new visitors—and potential members!

But *how* do these people perceive us when they come into our meeting halls and interact with Church members for the first few times? Are they warmly and enthusiastically welcomed? Are they made to feel "at home"? Or do some of us scrutinize them very carefully, and even "evaluate" them by the way we look and act and talk as they mingle among us?

"First impressions" are very important!

So, we need to ask God to help *all of us* welcome these new prospective members *enthusiastically*, even though they may sometimes look or act a little "different." Remember, they are also absolute "babes" as far as the Living Church of God is concerned. They may need months or even years to fully understand and respond to some of our approaches in the way we dress, act and worship God.

I have heard and observed that *many* of the brethren do very well in welcoming new brethren. Yet some entire congregations are far more cheerful and "welcoming" than others. But I am sure that *all* of us want to help and serve these new people God is bringing into fellowship with the Living Church of God.

Sadly, reports indicate that *some* of our members tend to be stiff and cold around new attendees. They "stay apart." They do not enthusiastically go forward to *warmly welcome* these new people who are—so to speak—"dipping their hand in the water" for the first time to see what we are like. Some of our brethren are a little bashful, and stay among their current friends because of a fear of meeting new people. However, this makes the newer attendees immediately feel like "outsiders" who

may not be truly welcomed—who may not truly be loved and wanted.

How would you feel if you attended a totally different kind of church for the first time, but were met with “cold stares” by some of the members and greeted by only a very few? What would be your first impression? Would you want to come back again the next Sabbath?

Brethren, all of us need to think and to pray about this vital issue!

Christ's Special Command

Near the end of His human life, Jesus Christ gave a very special instruction to His disciples: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35).

God Himself sees whether we are keeping His commandments, and the “sign” of His Sabbaths. But to the carnal human beings around us, Sabbath-keeping may just seem “odd” and unfamiliar. People around us will notice whether or not we show outflowing love—enthusiastic warmth and concern for our fellow human beings. That is why Jesus focused our attention on that special sign: “By this all will know....” If we love one another, and new people who come in among us “see” that love being expressed toward each other—and toward them—they will much more likely feel the genuine “family spirit” and love of God that should be expressed continually among God’s people.

Brethren, in the next few years, as Christ brings in among us perhaps thousands of “brand-new people,” it is vital that we demonstrate this love to them—and to one another. And it is vital to our personal salvation, too. Remember, Jesus Christ Himself focused on this issue not only in the above verses, but throughout the gospels—and it is emphasized also in many key passages of Scripture written by His original apostles!

Jesus’ dear friend, the Apostle John, described this kind of love again and again. He wrote: “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death” (1 John 3:14). John then explained the consequence of such love: “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (v. 16). And then: “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (v. 18). So we are not only to “have” love in our heart—invisible, as it were. We are to show that love by enthusiastic warmth and service to our brethren and to our fellow human beings!

Yes, we do need to be “careful” in the kind of new people that we allow to continue to attend services in the Church. But that care is primarily the responsibility of the minister serving the congregation. If some new people genuinely cause division, that would be a problem. But if they merely come into our midst appearing “worldly”—perhaps women wearing short dresses, or young men wearing earrings—then we need to recognize that this is simply “normal” for the thou-

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# You Need To Be “AWARE”

## Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

**E**normous prophetic events are now underway on the world scene. After describing a number of these events leading up to His Second Coming, Jesus Christ instructed us: “**Watch** therefore, and **pray** always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

Many times in the New Testament, God instructs His people to **be aware**—to “watch” the unfolding of prophetic events. This watching—this **awareness**—may literally help *save our lives* on occasion as we will be able to understand *what to do*, or what *precautions to take*, unlike our worldly neighbors who often have no awareness of God—and who, in many cases, “could not care less.” Truly *understanding* the time in which we are living should *motivate us* to draw closer to God, and should *inspire us* to realize that Christ’s Kingdom really *is* coming soon. Describing some of the events of these **end-times**, the Apostle Paul was inspired to warn us: “For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness” (1 Thessalonians 5:3–6).

Indeed, brethren, we are to be “sober” and to take these matters seriously as we see the entire panorama of prophetic events finally com-

ing together. It is in that spirit that I want to inform you about a key aspect of end-time prophecy that will **enormously** affect your life over the next few years. We should all be familiar with the foundational prophecy that God gave our forefathers in ancient Israel—and which, in type, applies *directly* to the British-descended and American peoples today.

After describing the *blessings* they would have if they obeyed God, God warned Israel—and us: “But if you do **not** obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you **despise** My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint **terror** over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it” (Leviticus 26:14–16).

We have pointed out in the past that the word “terror” certainly indicates **terrorism** as one of the very first punishments coming upon our peoples *if* we continue to “despise” God’s commandments and statutes! We recently passed the fifth anniversary of “9/11” as it is called—the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States. Other attacks have occurred around the world since then, and even by the time you read this editorial, *another attack* may have taken place!

### Why?

Because in our Western nations, as a whole, we *do* indeed “despise” God’s commandments and statutes. Analysts and commentators have written many books and articles

pointing out how the people among us who are irreligious or are “liberal” in a wrong sense are “taking God out of the public square.” They are literally trying to *get rid of* all true religion—all genuine reference to the true God and His ways! But we know from Scripture that God will **intervene** and “wake His people up.” Therefore, **terrorism**, “wasting disease” (such as AIDS) and other plagues and punishments will increasingly be delivered upon our peoples over the next several years *if* we will not truly repent and turn to God.

So far, the major perpetrators of terrorism have been the leaders of *militant Islam*. Not all Muslims are like these terrorists. We should remember that *all* human beings are made in the image of God, and we should hope the best for them and love them. Nevertheless, we do need to **be aware** of what these people involved in “militant Islam” are up to—*how they think*, and what they are therefore likely to do in the near future. A genuine **understanding** of this can help us in our daily lives—in how we interact with others, in where we travel and in all we do.

The Eternal God warns us that the “king of the South”—no doubt a combination of Arab and Muslim armies—will provoke the coming Beast power in Europe. Everything now indicates that the “stage is being set” for this group of nations to come together. A growing attitude of absolute **hatred** is developing among the “Islamofascists”—as U.S. President George W. Bush calls them. They have attacked not only the U.S., but also a number of nations in Western Europe over the

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# Maintain Your Christian Focus

By Douglas S. Winnail

**I**n a world filled with trials, temptations, distractions and deceptions, Christians must nevertheless remain focused and maintain a right course. Especially if we live and work around sincere and well-meaning non-Christians, it can sometimes be easy to forget that the god of this world deliberately sets dangerous traps to deceive and destroy the unwary (2 Corinthians 2:11; 4:4; Ephesians 6:11–13; 1 Peter 5:8–9). Yet the Bible is filled with warnings about the consequences of losing our focus, and gives instructions for staying on course—if we have eyes to see and ears to hear!

## Warnings and Advice

There is an old saying that those who do not learn the lessons of history will repeat the mistakes of history. The Bible records many examples of this fundamental truth. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because their focus was diverted away from God's instructions. They listened to Satan and his subtly twisted half-truths, and followed their own human reasoning (Genesis 3). The ancient nation of Israel went into captivity because it followed misguided leaders and focused on pagan ways of worship instead of following God's commandments (1 Kings 12:25–33; 14:15–16). David got into trouble, and Solomon's heir lost the tented House of Israel, because they began to focus on the physical creation, instead of obeying their Creator and His instructions (2 Samuel 11; 12; 1 Kings 11:1–11). Scripture has recorded these examples for the admonition of Christians who live at the end of the age (1 Corinthians 10:11).

One of the major ways that Satan can pull us off course is by appealing to our intellect and our own reasoning abilities. When our focus drifts away from the word of God, we gravitate toward ideas that seem reasonable to us, and that justify what we want to do. Yet the Bible warns repeatedly that “there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Unless we stay focused on God's instructions, and heed His warning that human reasoning can lead us astray (Jeremiah 17:9), we will deceive ourselves and reap serious consequences. However, we are told that when the

eye is single [focused in one direction on one main goal], the whole body is full of light (Matthew 6:22, KJV). Staying focused in the right direction—and on the right goals—can help us avoid making big mistakes!

The parable of the sower is particularly applicable to the subject of staying focused (Matthew 13:18–23). In the parable, Jesus describes four categories of people. The first category consists of people who hear the Truth and are immediately distracted by Satan, never gaining the right focus. People in the second category accept the Truth with enthusiasm, yet because they do not take time to carefully prove what they believe, they are blown off course and stumble “when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word” (13:21). Such trials could include doctrinal controversies within the Church, ridicule or discrimination from outside the Church, or succumbing to the appeal of misguided leaders. Those in the third group become preoccupied with worldly concerns (self, family, job and health), the pursuit of money and material possessions and the attraction of worldly pleasures (acceptance, prestige, hobbies, entertainment—having fun) that divert their focus from the Truth of God. Only one of the four groups remains focused on the right goal; the rest lose their focus and drift off in other directions. In light of these strong warnings, we need to consider seven vital keys that will help us maintain a right focus.

## The Word of God

Our modern, fast-paced world of today is riddled with confusion about God, the Bible, truth, the true Church and the purpose of life. The Roman ruler Pilate ridiculed the idea of truth (John 18:38). We hear similar skeptical comments today. Yet Jesus said that the knowledge of the truth can set us free from the confusion of this world (John 8:32). The Bible asserts that God's word, His laws and His commandments are truth (Psalm 119:142, 151, 160). Scripture contains the absolute truth (John 17:17). That is why it is important to study the Bible—so we know what God has revealed in His word

(2 Timothy 2:15). We must carefully evaluate ideas before accepting them, prove what is right and hold on to what we prove, or we will lose our focus and our direction (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Only from the Bible do we learn the truth about God and His plan of salvation, the right way to worship God, the right doctrines to teach and believe, the true purpose of life, the right way to live, the right goals to focus on and what to avoid in this world. This is why it is so important to know what the Bible really says. The Bible provides a standard against which everything else can be measured. Sadly, today, human opinions (our own or somebody else's) often carry more weight than the truth God has revealed in the Bible. We cannot afford to be ignorant of the real source of truth, or let other interests interfere with regular study of God's word. If we do, we will eventually lose our focus and wander off course.

### **True God and Real Jesus**

The God of the Bible is a God of mercy and of justice (Psalm 101:1), who created human beings to give them the opportunity to choose between the right way He has revealed and the wrong and deceitful ways that Satan promotes (Deuteronomy 30:11–20). The God of Scripture revealed wondrous things in His law to His chosen people, so they could be examples to the world and a blessing to mankind (see Deuteronomy 4:1–14; Psalm 119:18; Hosea 8:12). The real God promises blessings for obedience to His laws, and punishments for disobedience (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). He specifically warns us not to add to or delete from His word—which includes not manufacturing unbiblical religious practices or coming up with our own false religious ideas (see Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18–19)—and not to borrow ideas from pagan religions (Deuteronomy 12:29–32). The God of the Bible does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), yet many who claim to believe in Him today actually reject that one true God. In place of the biblical God, many have created a god with whom they are more comfortable—a less threatening, much less demanding, permissive parent who has no required rules to follow and practices no specific form of government. This man-made and imaginary god is supposedly happy with people who worship him in any manner they choose, even if their worship includes practices taken from paganism. Like the ancient Israelites, many who today call themselves Christian have forgotten the true God, and have adopted perverted ways (Jeremiah 3:21; 2 Timothy 3:5). If we want to stay focused in a mixed-up world, we must remember what the Bible reveals about the true God.

The real Jesus warned that many would come in His name (claiming to be His followers) and would deceive many (Matthew 24:5). Paul warned of teachers preaching about “another Jesus” who bears no resemblance to the biblical Savior (2 Corinthians 11:3–4). The common longhaired and effeminate image of Christ, worshiped today by millions, contrasts sharply with the Bible's clear admonition for men not to wear long hair (1 Corinthians 11:14). The image of a soft and weak Jesus does not fit the young carpenter who overturned tables, sent animals and money changers scurrying out of the temple, and told priests and misguided believers that they were hypocrites and “sons of the devil” because they were teaching and acting contrary to the laws of God (Matthew 21:12–13; 23:13–17; John 8:42–44). The biblical Jesus observed the Sabbath (Luke 4:16) and the Holy Days (John 7), as did the apostles He trained (Acts 17:2; 18:4, 21; 1 Corinthians 5:8). He taught plainly: “But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17). For the Christ of the Bible, the laws of God were not burdens or outdated relics of an old covenant! Scripture states that Jesus Christ does not change (Hebrews 13:8). Like His Father, He is also concerned with mercy (Titus 3:4–5) and justice (Isaiah 9:6–7). He will soon return to this earth to establish His kingdom, reward the saints and destroy those who have corrupted the earth (Revelation 11:17–18). The return of the real Jesus will shock the world! The biblical Jesus is a striking contrast to the Jesus worshiped in most churches today! Sincere Christians cannot afford to lose their focus by accepting the “different” Jesus that has been pawned off on an unsuspecting world for centuries!

### **The True Gospel**

The true gospel message that Jesus Christ proclaimed will surprise many professing Christians who have lost their focus. The world generally assumes that Jesus came with a gentle message about love, grace and salvation for all who give their heart to the Lord and who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Yet the Bible reveals that even demons believe that Jesus is the Son of God (see Mark 5:1–8; James 2:19). Jesus, by contrast, commissioned His disciples to preach the true gospel, emphasizing the reality of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 9:35; 10:6–7). *This* was the gospel Christ preached before His crucifixion. Jesus emphasized that to be in God's kingdom, one must repent of sin and must keep the commandments of God (Mark 1:15; John 14:15).

After His resurrection, Jesus added a further dimension to the gospel message. He told the disciples that they were to be witnesses to the world that His suffering, death

and resurrection were necessary for the forgiveness of sin (Luke 24:44–49). Yet even after His resurrection, Jesus *continued to focus* on the Kingdom of God, as did His disciples (Acts 1:3, 6). The apostolic Church understood and taught about both the coming Kingdom of God and the things concerning Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12; 28:23, 31). Sadly, the “mainstream Christian” world has lost sight of the gospel of the kingdom, and has mistakenly focused

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**Jesus was cautioning against seeking acceptance and praise from the religious establishment. Yet for many today who have lost their focus, seeking acceptance by mainstream Christianity is a major goal—even though many mainstream beliefs originated in pagan religious practices condemned in Scripture (Deuteronomy 12:29–32; Matthew 15:8–9).**

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only on the life and person of Jesus Christ. Many churches have missed half of the gospel message because they have followed misguided leaders who have lost the proper focus.

Today, many professing Christians do not realize that they have been taught a “different gospel” about which Paul repeatedly warned in his epistles (2 Corinthians 11:1–4; Galatians 1:6–9). This becomes obvious when we read the gospels and notice the *true gospel* Jesus preached (Mark 1:14–15; Luke 4:43; 8:1).

### **The True Church**

Many in the world think of “the church” as a building. For others, the church is vaguely seen as a collection of people who “believe in” God and Jesus. Supposedly, millions—even billions—of people belong to this “mystical body” of Christ. Yet when we focus on what the Bible reveals about the Church, we find something quite different. Jesus said that the Church He established would continue to exist—as a real entity (Matthew 16:18). He said it would be a small, scattered and persecuted group of people (Luke 12:32; John 15:20; 16:32). Jesus said that true Christians are “not of the world” (John 17:16), but are commanded to come out of the world and be separate (2 Corinthians 6:17). Christ also said: “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). Jesus was cautioning against

seeking acceptance and praise from the religious establishment. Yet for many today who have lost their focus, seeking acceptance by mainstream Christianity is a major goal—even though many mainstream beliefs originated in pagan religious practices condemned in Scripture (Deuteronomy 12:29–32; Matthew 15:8–9).

The true Church founded by Jesus Christ and His apostles *can* be recognized—if we focus on what the Bible reveals. The Church has a biblical name, and the New Testament refers to that name—“Church of God” or “Churches of God”—a dozen times. The true Church does not foster “doctrinal diversity” but is composed of members “joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). The biblical Church of God has a hierarchical structure, through which leaders are appointed based on qualifications and the fruits of conversion in their lives; they are not elected by appeal to voters (Ephesians 4:11; Titus 1:5). The Church Jesus established kept the Sabbath and Holy Days, following His example (Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14, 44). However, just as Jeroboam changed the days of worship in ancient Israel and led the nation astray, professing Christian theologians have rejected God’s Sabbaths (Leviticus 23), adopted Sunday worship and instituted Christmas and Easter celebrations which originated in pagan antiquity (Ezekiel 20:28–32). As a result, countless millions have lost their focus, and most of the modern descendants of ancient Israel have lost their national identity (see Deuteronomy 32:16). The Bible reveals that God’s rebellious people will also lose His protection and their freedom because they have lost their focus. This will be a costly lesson.

### **The Church’s Mission**

Today there are many different ideas about the mission of the Church. This is not surprising. A different gospel leads to a different mission. The true gospel provides the Church of God with a powerful vision and sense of mission. Many sincere people assume that the mission of the Church is to meet in little groups and talk about Jesus—the “stay-at-home” or “living room” church. It might also include telling others that “God loves you... Jesus died for you... just love Jesus and you will go to heaven.” Yet Jesus commissioned His disciples to go “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” and to all the world preaching the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God, healing, raising the dead and casting out demons (Matthew 10:1–8; Mark 16:14–20). Christ’s followers were to warn Israelite nations and the world to repent of sin before the coming of the Great Tribulation that will precede the return of Jesus Christ (Matthew 24; Mark 13;

Luke 21). The disciples literally “turned the world upside down” with this message, even though they were persecuted by the religious establishment in both pagan and Jewish communities (Acts 17:6).

These disciples were not just preaching about a baby Jesus who loved everybody. They did not portray the Church as a mere spiritual hospital for lost souls. They were preaching about a real coming kingdom and the return of a powerful Christ who will shake the nations and restore the government of God to this earth (Revelation 11:15–19). Historian Edward Gibbon records that this attention-getting message of the coming kingdom of God was the “reigning sentiment of the orthodox believers” during the early centuries of the Church, but was gradually deemphasized and later considered heresy (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. 15). As members of the early Church lost their focus on the true gospel, they lost their true sense of mission, and the majority of professing Christians drifted away from both the Christian mission and Christian truth! Regrettably, this is occurring today to many who listen to misguided leaders who claim to be following Christ. Is this happening to you?


### **Our Personal Goal**

Many sincere professing Christians believe that their personal role is merely to love God, love their neighbor and utter pleasant-sounding phrases like “Praise the Lord.” However, if we focus on what the Bible reveals, we find very interesting advice. Jesus said: “Seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33). We are told to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), and to develop the very mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5–11). This means learning to live by the commandments of God—in the spirit and the letter—as Christ did (John 14:15). We are told that God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32), and that He wants us to bear fruits of that Spirit (John 15:1–8; Galatians 5:22–26). Individuals who overcome the pulls of human nature and grow spiritually will be given the opportunity to rule with Christ on earth, and teach human beings the way to true peace, joy and happiness (Revelation 5:10; Isaiah 30:20–21)—which will involve learning to live by the laws of God (Isaiah 2:2–4). The true purpose of human life is to prepare to be in the Kingdom of God, where today’s true Christians will work with Jesus Christ to change the course of history. The common idea of going to heaven, sitting on a cloud and playing a harp for eternity is unfounded speculation by those who have lost their focus. If we lose our focus, we will lose our reward (Revelation 3:10–13)!

### **The Plan of God**

Many assume that God is earnestly trying to save everyone now. This idea persists because the “mainstream Christian” world has lost sight of the plan of God. The real plan of God is pictured in the biblical Holy Days (Leviticus 23). The Passover reminds us that Jesus suffered and died so our sins can be forgiven. The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us that we must eliminate sinful thoughts and actions and begin to think and act like Jesus Christ. Pentecost reveals that God gives His Spirit to those who repent and obey His instructions, empowered by His Spirit to overcome sin (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:38; 5:32). The Bible explains that only those whom God calls will have an opportunity to understand the truth at this time (John 6:44–45), and that this number will be small (1 Corinthians 1:26–27). The truth of God is a mystery to those who are not called (Matthew 13:10–17; 1 Corinthians 2:6–16). However, such individuals—most of humanity—are not lost!

The fall Holy Days reveal that Christ will return (the Feast of Trumpets), put Satan out of commission (the Day of Atonement—Revelation 20:1–2), establish the Kingdom of God on this earth (with the resurrected saints—Revelation 20:4–6) and begin to reeducate those alive at that time (the Feast of Tabernacles). Those who died throughout the ages without hearing or understanding the Truth of God will come up in a second resurrection and have their opportunity for salvation (the Last Great Day—Revelation 20:5, 11–12). This is an encouraging message. Yet most professing Christians, just like the followers of other religions, have never heard this good news, because the religious leaders of this world have lost their focus and have no knowledge of the plan of God (Romans 1:18–25).

The challenge facing Christians today is to stay focused on the right priorities: the true God, the real Jesus, the word of God and the true Gospel. Christians must develop the knowledge and character that God can use, to accomplish the mission of His Church and bring to fruition His great plan. Scripture reveals that only a few of those called now will be chosen to receive a reward (Matthew 20:16). They will be chosen because they remain faithful to the truth they are given to understand (Revelation 17:14), and they will grow and produce the fruits that God is seeking in their lives (John 15:1–8). They will also endure through trials and persecution (Matthew 24:13) and finish the race (2 Timothy 4:1–8). The incredible rewards God promises to those He calls to become saints will only go to those who stay focused and endure to the end. Will that include you? 

# For Church Youth:

## How Do I Know *When* I Am Ready for Baptism?

By Scott Winnail

**H**ave you ever asked the question, “How do I know when I am ready for baptism?” Have you ever avoided baptism because you thought you were not ready or *perfect enough* yet? Have you ever wondered what you should look for in yourself and what you should do to prepare for baptism? If you can relate to these questions—if they sound familiar to you—this article will be helpful.

Young people reared in Church families will likely not have the same kinds of dramatic “conversion experiences” as Church members who were reared outside God’s Church and came to the Truth as adults. Most Church members who grew up “in the world” can point to very moving “callings” and to a distinct *spiritual awakening* regarding God’s Truth. Young people from Church families often have a very different experience of coming to the Truth. Most have *known* the Truth for many years—even for their whole lives. More than that, they *know* that it is the Truth of God. So how might their conversion process be different? And how can young people reared in the Church determine whether they are ready for baptism?

### Signs That You May Be Ready

First, you will begin to understand the Bible more than

you ever have before. You will see and hear the messages at Sabbath services, and experience your own personal Bible study, very differently than before. You will be much more excited about what you are learning, and you will learn on a much deeper level. Church teachings, or Church literature to which you have previously been exposed, will “make sense” in a way that it never did before (Psalm 119:97–104). You will look forward to going to services every Sabbath to hear the messages and experience spiritual fellowship. You will become *hungry* for the truth of God, in a way that you have not experienced before (Matthew 5:6).

**Second**, you will come to see that no matter how hard you try, you keep falling short of truly living God’s way (Isaiah 55:8). You may struggle with your own way of thinking, your attitude and even some of your actions. You will come to understand that you need His help to change, because your very nature and heart are contrary to God (Jeremiah 17:9). As a result, you will want Christ to live *in* you—to have the power of the Holy Spirit present in you and directly helping to influence every aspect of your life (Galatians 2:20). You will know that even with the Holy Spirit *in* you, your trials will not go away (1 Peter 4:12–13), but you will also know that with God’s Holy Spirit, you will be far more suc-

cessful in attempting to overcome sin. As you read through the Bible—God’s word—you will want many more of the fruits that come with God’s Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22–25).

**Third**, you will come to a point in your life when you are ready to *commit* to God’s way of life. The teachings and beliefs that were so important to those who reared you will now become important to *you*—they will become *your* beliefs! You will be totally aware of the *depth* of this commitment, yet you will be ready to make that commitment anyway. You will begin to “count the cost” of committing yourself to live God’s way of life (Luke 14:28), and you will want it more than ever. You will realize that once you commit to God, there is no turning back to the world and to a worldly way of thinking and living. Ultimately, you will come to the point where you believe that following God is not *giving up* anything, but rather is *gaining* everything (Philippians 1:21).

**Fourth**, you will not only be ready to commit to God’s way of life; you will come to the point of wanting to *surrender your will* to Him, as Christ did (Luke 22:42; John 4:34; Romans 6:1–14). You will come to see that you, of and by yourself, are really nothing special (1 Corinthians 1:26–31). In fact, you will come to realize that your very nature is corrupted, and that you have begun to



develop some of the very character traits of Satan the Devil—and even some of his thought patterns (John 8:44; Galatians 5:19–21). You will want something different in place of your corrupted human nature; you will want to live a life apart from Satan and his influence—a life where you are trying with all of your being to develop more of the character traits of God and Jesus Christ (Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:22–25). You will begin to see that God’s will

begin to walk in “newness of life” (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:7). However, these moments come after a *process* of preparing or laying the foundation for baptism. As part of this process, you *need* to experience baptismal counseling with your local minister. This counseling may take several months, and you should not rush through it; rather, you should allow God to guide you through it. In fact, you can and should pray to God to help you—

Pray and fast about your commitment, and for God’s guidance, as you begin to deeply examine yourself in the light of His word.

Begin earnestly asking God to help you come to real, true, deep repentance. Repentance is from God; it is not something that we can just create within ourselves or work up out of emotion (Romans 2:4).

God’s calling and His Holy Spirit are truly incredible gifts (Acts 2:38; Hebrews 6:4). God is choos-

**If you have been thinking about these issues—if you are hungry for God’s truth, if you want to commit to *this way* of life, if you want God’s Holy Spirit and the help that it can bring to your Christian struggle, if you want God’s will to become your own—it is time for you to seek baptism!**

is what is most important, and you will begin to *want* His will to become your own will—you *will* want to think like Him (1 Corinthians 2:16). No more will you desire to live life *your way*; instead, you will want—with your whole heart and soul—to live *God’s way* (Joshua 22:5).

### What Comes Next?

If you have been thinking about these issues—if you are hungry for God’s truth, if you want to commit to *this way* of life, if you want God’s Holy Spirit and the help that it can bring to your Christian struggle, if you want God’s will to become your own—it is time for you to seek baptism!

Conversion is a *process*. After you have come to repentance, there is of course the moment of baptism when you go under the water and your sins are forgiven, and another moment when hands are laid on you and God gives you His Holy Spirit. These moments are very important; they represent the burial of your old self and old way of thinking and acting, the forgiveness of your sins, and your begetting as a “new creation” to

and the minister who is counseling you—see when you are truly spiritually ready for baptism. You and your minister both need to have confidence that you have truly repented and fully understand the commitment that you are making before God. Take your time, and make the most of it, for you will only go through it once!

So, contact your minister and start the process! As you wait for the minister to contact you, or wait for the day of your first counseling session, here are some preparatory steps you can take:

Read our booklet, *Christian Baptism: Its Real Meaning*.

Begin, or continue working through, the *Bible Study Course*.

Read and *really study* all the other booklets produced by the Church.

Ask your minister to have you placed on the mailing list for the *Living Church News*, if you do not already receive it.

Begin reading and *studying* the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter and 1, 2, & 3 John.

ing to give these gifts to a very few now—His called-out ones, His elect (John 6:44; 1 Peter 2:9–10). If you are coming to understand that you want and need to be baptized, He is calling you to be part of His elect too (1 Peter 1:2)! Do not take God’s calling for granted—act on it, and thank God for it! Remember, you do not need to be *perfect* to be baptized; you need only want to *become* perfect, and to begin living and thinking in a way that reflects this desire (Matthew 5:48). God’s Holy Spirit dwelling within us enables us to work toward perfection much more successfully, and baptism allows us to put to death our sinful self and be forgiven of our past sins. Without God’s Holy Spirit dwelling in us, and without being able to partake fully of Christ’s sacrifice, we cannot begin to become perfect. Conversion is a long process that will not end until we are changed “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:52), and baptism and the receipt of God’s Holy Spirit is a vital step in that process. If God is calling you to take that step, do not delay in responding! ☞

# Who Is Your Best Friend?

By Don Davis

**A** grumpy, rude, resentful, unloving and fault-finding individual usually has few friends. Such negative character traits are not conducive to building close relationships; when displayed, they repel family, neighbors and associates.

God's ministers often cite Proverbs 18:24—"A man who has friends must himself be friendly"—to encourage Church members to become more socially involved in congregational activities, and to develop their personalities. That proverb is useful in helping us see that a positive, open, outgoing, happy attitude will attract others, and it reminds us that being negative and introverted puts people off and prevents us from being included in their circle of friends.

God's word gives us a lot of advice about how to seek out the right kind of friends, and shows us what we need to do to attract them. "The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray" (Proverbs 12:26). If we hang around with those who have poor ethics and are devoid of godly character, we will soon find ourselves pulled down to their level. "Do not be misled, bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33, NIV). This principle applies not only spiritually, but also educationally, socially and economically. "Hear, my son, and be wise; and guide your heart in the way. Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags" (Proverbs 23:19–21).

When an immoral person enters our circle of friends, the whole group is at risk of being corrupted. When the Apostle Paul learned that the members of the Corinthian congregation were tolerating an unrepentant, sexually immoral man, he commanded them to put that person out of their fellowship (1 Corinthians 5:1–6). Perhaps they had hoped that this man, by associating with them, would improve his behavior, but Paul discerned otherwise, telling them: "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" (v. 6).

Disfellowshipment, as Paul commanded in the above verses, is a tool God expects his ministers to use wisely, to show love and concern for the sinner, and to protect the flock from those who do not want to give up the ways of the world. "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world." Paul did not mean that it is acceptable to "buddy around" with unconverted sinners in the world. However, we must deal with them in business and as neighbors, and we must always set a good

example of how a Christian lives, in our honesty, courtesy and helpfulness, being at peace with them as much as is possible. "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person" (1 Corinthians 5:9–11). We are only brothers in Christ if we have the Spirit of the Father in us.

On the other hand, God calls people with problems into His Church. Those people need good Christian role models, and positive reinforcement, to help them overcome and grow in grace and knowledge. As long as they are making a real effort to repent and improve their lives, as Christ intends—and they are not deliberately practicing the way of sin—they can be helped. This is a determination that God's ministers must make, as they counsel and teach each individual struggling with a difficult personal situation. It is not our place to condemn anyone; we are not called to judge, but with God's Spirit in us we are allowed to be "fruit inspectors"—using godly discernment, God's law, love and patience as our standard. "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:3).

All of us who want to improve in some area of our physical or spiritual lives need to associate with others who have succeeded in that area. Associating with people who have the same shortcomings as we do will often prevent us from succeeding—and may even make our problems worse. Instead, we should seek friendships with people who can teach us what we need to know about God's ways, and who have a proven track record of successful Christian living. This will inspire, encourage and reinforce our growth and overcoming. "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20).

Every one of us needs help, and we can all learn from others—if we are wise enough to watch and listen. Discerning right from wrong, in the light of God's word, we can learn from those who have gone before us (Titus 2:1–8). But what about those who do not want to change their lives for the better? To them, God says: "A scoffer does not love one who corrects him, nor will he go to the wise" (Proverbs 15:12).

God's Church has many members who are spiritually strong in the faith of Christ—and who, through long experience and endurance, have shown themselves to be good examples. Such mature Christians should never shrink back from willingly giving of themselves to help others, *when asked*. "We then who are strong ought to bear with

the scruples of the weak [overlook the failings and knowledge gaps of new brethren and the young], and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me’” (Romans 15:1–3).

Perhaps it might seem more “fun” to be with those we already know, and with whom we feel comfortable—our clique, “our kind of people”—but this is not how God has called us to act. We are to “extend the right hand of fellowship” when people come to us, as the apostles in Jerusalem did when Paul came to them to inquire whether he was preaching the ways of God appropriately (Galatians 2:1–10). By now, the older brethren in God’s Church should have gained the knowledge and wisdom to teach—by their example, not just their words—those who inquire of them, even while they are learning more themselves. “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12–14).

As we grow closer to the stature of Jesus Christ in love, spiritual discernment and conversion, we will be better able to follow His example of being a friend to those in need. Jesus could empathize with the friendless, the poor and those downtrodden by the cruelties of this evil world. Everyone needs friends who will “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion” (Romans 12:15–16).

God warns us that the people we thought were our friends will sometimes turn on us and hurt us—even those who professed to be our brothers or sisters in Christ. “For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng” (Psalm 55:12–14). The Masoretic Text puts the KJV rendering of Proverbs 18:24 in a slightly different light: “There are friends that one hath to his own hurt; but there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother”

What about that phrase—“but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother”? Humanly speaking, most of us have one or more people in our lives we consider our “best friends.” If you are married, your spouse certainly ought to be your “best friend,” and ideally your family

members should be as well. Perhaps you have a dear friend from your school days, or who shared with you the joys and sorrows of a job or a trial in your lives. We all have many acquaintances, and we should be grateful for them and encourage them, but they do not share with us the same closeness as do our true personal friends.

The very best friend is one in whom we can confide and entrust our deepest, most private thoughts, frustrations and concerns. Such a friend will always keep these conversations in the strictest confidence, and will provide the help we need, offering love and support rather than condemnation. We eagerly give our time—and even our very lives, if need be—for such a dear and close friend.

Close friendships do not happen all at once; they grow, over time, through continual communication and association. Rarely, someone will seek us out as a friend even before we are aware of their interest in us. A young shepherd named David had such a friendship with a prince of Israel: “I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women” (2 Samuel 1:26).

Do you have such a friend? Yes, you do! “We love Him because *He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19).

Jesus Christ is the very best friend we could ever hope to have. Before we knew Him, He loved us enough to give up the glory and power He possessed for eternity with the Father. Even before we were born, He was willing to sacrifice His perfect body for our healing and His righteous blood in payment for our sins. He risked everything to save us. That is real love and true friendship—outgoing, sincere, deep and undeniable. We have a blood obligation to reciprocate that love and, through His Spirit, shower it upon all mankind, by sharing the precious truth God has given us. “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:12–15).

Our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, is the perfect example of how to be a balanced, caring, loving friend to those around us. If we follow His teaching and His example, we will enjoy His friendship—and that of His firstfruits—now and forever.

We, the soon-to-be-born children of God, have the greatest opportunity and responsibility ever offered to any human beings in all history: “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5:1–2). How can we ever let down such a great friend, to whom we owe so much? ☞

# 2006 Feast of Tabernacles Reports

More than 7,100 Living Church of God brethren kept God's Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day in 30 countries and at 45 sites around the world. The following brief reports can offer only a small window into the spiritual and physical blessings reported by countless brethren who obeyed their Creator and kept His commanded Feasts with their brethren. As you reflect back on your own happy and uplifting experiences at this year's Feast, and note others' inspiring news in the reports below, remember that opening night services at next year's Feast of Tabernacles are only about 10 months away (or less, depending on when you read this), beginning after sunset on Wednesday, September 26, 2007!

## Canmore, Alberta

Nestled in the sunlit Canadian Rocky Mountains with temperatures ranging between 55 and 65 degrees Fahrenheit, 327 brethren heard excellent sermons focused on the keeping of God's law, and how it will transform the whole world, resulting in perfect judgment, justice and peace. Brethren were reminded that they will have an important teaching role in Tomorrow's World. They were encouraged to train now to become leaders.

Highlights at the Feast were the "honors dinner" celebrating the role of the seniors, singles and youth in the Church of God, the family dinner dance and talent night, and the group picnic



where fun and fellowship was had by all. The brethren enjoyed scenic outings to Banff, the hot springs, Lake Louise and surrounding countryside, viewing the majestic mountains and the abundant Rocky Mountain elk and big horn sheep.

The physical setting, the spiritual food and the warm fellowship all combined to make this one of the best Feasts ever.

—Norman Aitchison

## Orford, Quebec

God manifested His comforting presence throughout the Feast here in so many ways: healings, clear interventions to protect His children from accidents and injuries, special family-type relationships in a country setting, wonderful meals all together, and an unprecedented strong spiritual banquet via the messages!

Our great God strongly eliminated, one by one, all the obstacles that arose, so that His children were able to rest peacefully and to rejoice under His wings. So many thanks are to be offered to the Governor of the Universe and to His Son, the Supreme Chief of the Church: the Great King of kings!

—Yvon Brochu

## Western Shore, Nova Scotia

Western Shore, Nova Scotia, this year hosted a Living Church of God Feast site for the very first time.



Meeting at the Oak Island Resort, we were truly blessed as we were greeted by beautiful fall colors, moderate temperatures, and breathtaking sunrises and sunsets. The moon was at its fullest and most vibrant as it shone so brightly across the Mahone Bay of the Atlantic Ocean—some nights it was as orange as the sun, sparkling from the waters of the ocean.

Average attendance was 140. Many commented on the spiritual uplift they received from the fellowship; our small group of God's people afforded a unified and family atmosphere. Many also remarked on the spiritually fulfilling messages they

received throughout the Feast. We were blessed with visits from Mr. & Mrs. Gerald



Weston at the start of the Feast and Mr. & Mrs. Gary Ehman for the last half of the Feast. Mr. Weston got us off to a booming start with sermons titled, "Why Are We Called To Keep a Feast?" and "Prepare to Lead in Tomorrow's World." Mr. Ehman gave sermons titled "The Feast: A Plan for Man" and (on the Last Great Day) "Streams of Living Waters." Messrs. Jim Arnaldo and Frank Best fed us with the remaining messages.

Mr. and Mrs. Best hosted the seniors for a scrumptious lunch at the resort's La Vista restaurant on Sunday. Also on Sunday, the Westons led teens and young singles on a roaring two-hour sailboat tour aboard the Eastern Star around the waters of old Lunenburg. Family Day was hosted by Hatfield Farm Cowboy

Adventures. The whole group took a 15-minute horse-drawn wagon ride a mile deep into the woodlands of Hammonds Plains to Fort Clayton. Once there, we enjoyed a petting zoo, horseback riding, miniature golf and more. Mr. Arnaldo led this year's Dinner Dance, at which a complimentary picture was taken and presented to every family.



Western Shore, with its true charm and breathtaking beauty truly provided the brethren with a millennial atmosphere! Everyone was warm and friendly, as was especially shown by the ever-popular traditional "Newfie Scoff." The icing on the cake was when our children (ages 3–12) presented our senior members a Feast gift that each of them lovingly made! At the final service on the Last Great Day, we concluded with a heart-felt, timely and meaningful toast: "To the Kingdom!"

—Michael Elertson

### Copper Mountain, Colorado

The magnificent scenery at this site was as inspiring to behold as the sermons, music, fellowship and fun that brought spiritual oneness to upwards of 585 who attended this site. The warmth was awe-inspiring as brethren met new friends and fellowshiped with old ones. Even a real live bear tried to find some "porridge" in the dumpster one evening.

On the first Holy Day, site coordinator Mr. Ben Whitfield explained how faith is a very important part of the mix. Other sermon topics included equality in God's Kingdom, God's use of a soft reply to assuage bad tempers, the importance of forgiveness in the increase of God's government and peace, the need to stay focused on the reason we were called, and the need for a sense of urgency to complete the Work.

At the Service Luncheon, Mr. Meredith thanked everyone who works in any capacity at all, because no matter how small our jobs, we are serving the Lord Jesus Christ in doing His Work in this end time. He also asked for prayers for the success of the Living Leadership Course.

Throughout the Feast, we were reminded that we are different, and are in training to be kings and priests. We were admonished not only to have a happy Feast, but to help others have a happy Feast. We saw from history how no human government ever solved the problems of mankind, yet God's government will do exactly that. Evangelist Richard Ames discussed the Seven Laws of Success in conjunction with how we can be the world's best leaders, and gave a sermon on "Hope for the World." On the Last Great Day, we were reminded that all mankind will one day be taught God's glorious Truth, and that the state of the Church comes down to the character of its members. It was truly an uplifting Feast in every way.

—Ben Maddox

### Daytona Beach, Florida

For the first time in more than a decade, the roaring surf and beautiful weather of Daytona Beach, Florida welcomed God's people to the Feast of Tabernacles. Our Great God treated us to some of the most colorful sunrises some had seen in years. More than 825 Feastgoers enjoyed excellent messages, inspiring special music and enthusiastic fellowship. The blessing of 13 babies on Youth and Family Day, as well as the attendance of dozens of "first time" Feastgoers,



showed in an exciting and moving way that God is still actively building His Church today!

Evangelists Roderick C. Meredith and Richard Ames gave excellent messages pointing God's people to several important Feast themes. We were exhorted to live our lives with urgency because Christ is coming soon, to visualize the Kingdom of God, to remember that practicing God's government now is part of our training for God's Kingdom, and that we must fear our awesome God and act on His awesome calling now.

Singles and teens gathered for exciting and interactive "mixer" activities on the opening night of the Feast, with several commenting that these were the most fun and meaningful mixers that they had ever experienced.

Later, these groups participated in an exciting "team building" activity at the world famous Daytona International Speedway. Some brethren went parasailing; others went deep sea fishing and caught the catch of a lifetime. Seniors were treated to a luncheon in their honor by generous and loving donations from their fellow brethren; each senior received a beautiful cobalt-blue mug inscribed with the words, "Feast of Tabernacles 2006: Daytona Beach, Florida."

Family day activities were uniquely accented by a scavenger hunt with clues creatively derived from the pages of the Bible. At the Family Dance, several hundred people enjoyed a tasty meal accented by uplifting fellowship. The wide assortment of music, sung and played by brethren, elicited participation from everyone in the audience. What a joy it was to see the dance floor continuously packed with younger, older and every age in between!

Overall, the Feast atmosphere in Daytona Beach was of unity, love and

service. The harmony and cooperation were truly inspiring to see. Brethren, old and young alike, were strongly focused on fellowship and the Kingdom of God!

—Paul Shumway & Scott Winnail

### New Braunfels, Texas

The Living Church of God returned to the south-central Texas town of New Braunfels, where 587 brethren celebrated 2006's final Holy Days. New Braunfels is situated where the Comal and Guadalupe Rivers meet, providing the opportunity to take a leisurely float trip down either river. Many took advantage of the close proximity to San Antonio, and toured the Alamo, visited SeaWorld or Six Flags Fiesta Texas theme parks, or strolled down the world-famous San Antonio Riverwalk. Many others spent the entire time in New Braunfels, shopping for antiques or just spending time with family and friends.

The scheduled activities were designed to engage every age group with fun and learning experiences. Many Texas teens provided entertainment for the Seniors Luncheon. Singles had an opportunity to discuss issues important to them at a Singles Talk. Teens spent an afternoon participating in a series of team-building activities that challenged and entertained. A special Family Day activity included a fun show, a chili cook-off and a square dance. For those who like to "trip the light fantastic," a semi-formal Family Dinner and Dance capped the Feast activities. For many, the messages were the highlight of the Feast. Evangelist Charles Bryce was the first guest speaker, giving sermons titled "Learning the Fear of God During the Feast" and "Recapturing True Values in the Family." Evangelist



Douglas Winnail was the final guest speaker, giving sermons titled "The Biblical Approach to Health" and "Prepare Now to Teach in the Kingdom." Messrs. Rod Reynolds, Phil Sena, Wallace Smith and Larry Solomon gave the other sermons. Dr. Winnail also gave a Bible study at which he presented a slide show about the Lost Tribes of Israel. Many said they felt special benefit from attending the Feast in New Braunfels this year, and are already looking forward to Feast 2007.

—Phil Sena

### Oxnard, California

Presiding Evangelist Roderick C. Meredith set the tone for this year's Feast with his opening night video message, reminding us that

we are in training now, and encouraging us that God's soon coming government will usher in peace because His laws, statutes and judgments will be obeyed.

Mr. Rod McNair gave a message showing that work in God's Kingdom will be an enjoyable blessing, quite unlike what this present world under Satan's influence offers. Dr. Jeffrey Fall charted an "Incredible Journey" from this physical life to a spiritual life. Evangelist Charles Bryce encouraged "Recapturing True Values in the Family," by tying everything to God and His word.

Mr. Dennis Chornomaz asked and answered the question, "How Committed Is God to His Plan." Mr. Winston Gosse explained "The Reality of God's Kingdom." Mr. Mike Norris helped us to visualize "Becoming God." Other messages included "What Will Your Kingdom Be Like?" "Is God Service-Minded?"



"Exchanging Our Tents" and "A Spiritual Feast."

Beautiful tropic-like weather buffeted this seaside community of golden-sand beaches. Museums, a national park, restaurants, and art galleries headlined the various and many activities available.

Many brethren considered Family Day one of the highlights of the Feast. At the Seniors Luncheon, Dr. Fall expressed gratitude to the seniors for their service and encouraged them to continue serving God and His people by "setting the right example." At the luncheon for the ordained, Mr. Bryce covered the importance of "making the right connection" with the brethren. The Fun Show and Family Night made for an enjoyable evening. All in all, it was a wonderful Feast in a lovely setting.

—Harold Way

### Paducah, Kentucky

Beautiful warm weather with clear skies greeted 762 Feastgoers in Paducah, Kentucky, a city of 27,000 on the shore of the Ohio River, founded in 1827 by General William Clark of Lewis and Clark fame. Services were held at the Executive Inn Riverfront, overlooking the Ohio River and providing a panoramic view into southern Illinois.

Spiritual meat in due season focused on our calling and the clear theme of preparing now for God's Kingdom! From the very beginning of Mr. Meredith's opening night comments to the conclusion on the Last Great Day, the messages uplifted and inspired God's people to renew their efforts to prepare for God's Kingdom. Dr. Douglas Winnail gave two sermons that encouraged God's people to rule with the mind of God—both in

our spiritual lives and in regard to our physical health. Mr. Richard Ames followed with two insightful sermons exhorting us to visualize God's Kingdom and to put into practice twelve kingly qualities for the Kingdom. Other sermon topics included: Rejoice At God's Feast, Spiritual Kingdom—Spiritual Preparation, The Disappearing Four Horsemen and Christ's Message at the Great White Throne Judgment.



The Paducah Feast site offered a wide range of activities, from leisure walks downtown, to a more scenic trip down the Trace within the Land Between the Lakes—including visits to the Golden Pond Planetarium and the Elk and Bison Prairie. Teens enjoyed the fellowship and challenge of making strikes at the Riverport Bowling Alley. Later in the Feast, after a bountiful hot buffet breakfast, they enjoyed a meaningful Teen Bible Study. Certainly one of the big highlights of this year's Feast was the Family Dinner Dance. Four hundred seventy-nine Church members and youths savored a gourmet buffet, topped off by a Baked Alaska dessert. Then everyone danced to a wide assortment of toe-tapping music provided by Mr. Ronney Downs and family. On Friday, the seniors enjoyed a delightful luncheon featuring special entertainment by Scott Fulford, Patricia Scarborough and Richard Wilson

Indeed, Feast 2006 in Paducah was most memorable, with God's Spirit evident in all areas during the eight days of inspiring sermons, warm fellowship, acts of service and responsive brethren.

—Dan Hall

### Poconos, Pennsylvania

Many of the 375 people who attended the Feast here, in Bushkill,

Pennsylvania, stayed on the property of the Fernwood Hotel and Resorts, the venue for our services this year. The hillsides came alive with color during the Feast, as the trees began to show the full brilliance of their fall foliage. The weather was ideal, with moderate daytime temperatures throughout the Feast. The setting was truly millennial.

This year we were privileged to have two traveling speakers visiting the Poconos from Headquarters. Our first guest speaker was Mr. Davy Crockett, the Church's Director of Business Operations. He and his wife Barbara attended with us for the first few days of the Feast. On the opening day of the Feast, Mr. Crockett spoke on "The Power of God." On Monday he gave a second sermon, titled "The Marriage of the Lamb." Our second guest speaker was Dr. Douglas Winnail, Director of Church Administration. He spoke on "Developing the Mind of God" and on "Health and Proper Diet." He also addressed the deacons and elders at a DELs breakfast, where he discussed servant leadership in the Church.

In addition to the inspired messages given at the Feast, there were also a number of Church-sponsored activities promoting fellowship and togetherness. One unique activity was the Progressive Fellowship Dinner. Fifteen families sponsored a three-course meal for as many as 150 Church members. Those members were divided into groups and directed to a predetermined host family's residence for appetizers. After a while, the groups disbanded and new groups were formed, to be sent to a second family's residence for entrées. The

groups reorganized a third time to enjoy dessert at yet another host family's residence. As the members progressed through each course, they had ample opportunity to meet new group members and hosts. The biggest problem we had during the evening was breaking up each active group so that preparations could be made for the next scheduled group's arrival.

Another popular activity was the Family Dinner and Dance. The dance this year had a tropical theme. There was no shortage of Hawaiian shirts and grass skirts. We had a great selection of food available throughout the evening, including a dessert station complete with a chocolate fountain for the dipping of various dessert items. Good music highlighted the evening as God's people came together to dance and fellowship. Other activities scheduled throughout the Feast ranged from a seniors' luncheon to children's craft activities. There was something for everyone to enjoy at the Feast this year. The Feast of Tabernacles at the Poconos was an inspiring success on many fronts. It

was a tremendous opportunity to keep God's Festival and to be further instructed in God's plan of salvation for all mankind.

—Jonathan McNair



### Ayr, Scotland

"Ceit milea failte!"—or, if you do not speak Gaelic: "A hundred thousand welcomes!" Fine weather and beautiful scenery greeted Feastgoers in Ayr. Services were held in the Ramada Jarvis Hotel, where many of the brethren stayed. Others were lodged in a selection of self-catering cottages, apartments or guest houses, many within walking distance of the hotel. Approximately 120

attended services, with numbers near maximum every day. This is the second time the town of Ayr has played host to the Feast of Tabernacles. The first was in 1999, and the hotel conference manager and her staff warmly welcomed us back again this time!

Brethren enjoyed excellent sermons by site coordinator Mr. Martin Fannin, Mr. Joseph Felber from Switzerland and Mr. Jerry Stewart from the United States. The choir led by



Mr. V.G. Larde and Miss Jennifer Bowman and those giving special music were very much appreciated for the quality of their performance.

A coach trip was organized to Edinburgh to see the Crown Jewels of Scotland and the Stone of Destiny. A second trip took 50 eager brethren to Culzean Castle on the Ayrshire coast south of Ayr, and later on a tour of Burns Country. Some 20 brethren also took part in a guided tour of Old Ayr Town, during which guide Donald Kay shared Ayr's interesting history—both ancient and modern. Many brethren also enjoyed a Scottish evening with a fiddler, accordionist and singers, while the more active took part in a family evening.

On the Last Great Day, many shared in a special lunch at the hotel, after which we were able to enjoy Mr. Meredith's eagerly awaited afternoon message. This was followed by fond farewells, exchanging presents



and addresses. God's Spirit was clearly evident throughout the Feast. Truly, 2006 in Ayr was a Feast to remember!

—Colin McIntyre

## Evian, France

The Kingdom of God was the theme for 215 brethren from twelve countries, who gathered in beautiful Evian, France, a small city surrounded by the towering Alps and the Jura mountains on the border of Lake Geneva. Refreshed by pure water, invigorated by clean air and inspired

by majestic scenery, the brethren rejoiced together, shared meals in peace and harmony

and encouraged one another throughout the eight days of the Festival. Fellowship was abundant; old friendships were renewed while new ones were made.

The French cuisine (including a large assortment of cheeses and wine) was only surpassed by the rich spiritual nourishment given by Mr. Dibar Apartian and the other ministers, including Mr.



Jim Meredith, for whom this was his first Feast in France. We appreciated the contributions of all the ministers, and were particularly grateful for the help provided by Mr. Jacques Secours, our minister in Montreal, who did

most of the English-to-French translations. We are also grateful for the excellent service Mr. and Mrs. Lecocq rendered; Mr. Lecocq is our

deacon in Geneva. The speakers exhorted us to remain faithful in our covenant with God and in our collective mission; to put our faith and trust in God, no matter what the circum-

stances; never to lose heart and never to let Satan or this world filled with temptations and corruption discourage us. We were taught the real meaning of being kings and priests in God's soon-coming Kingdom. We were taught practical ways to prepare toward that goal. The sermons also explained how to build happy marriages and families and how to express true love in our relationships with one another.

We held a variety of social activities, including a concert featuring jazz, eastern European and tango music; a fondue dinner with entertainment provided by a yodeler; a talent show and a dance. We also went on excursions to Yvoire, France and to Geneva and Gruyeres, Switzerland. At the Nestlé chocolate factory, we were able to sample many varieties of the cocoa delicacy! We are grateful to

God for His Church, for His Truth and for allowing us to know and appreciate the true meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles in a genuine family atmosphere.

—Dibar Apartian

## Glentana, South Africa

Once again the coastal village of Glentana provided a millennial setting for 89 of God's people keeping the Feast in South Africa, setting the stage for us to focus on why we are here, getting back to the basics, and uniting us all the more as the Feast progressed under our new Regional Director, Mr. Rod King. By all accounts, this was one of the most spiritually oriented Feasts yet, with messages building on and complementing one another. God's Spirit was also evident in the tone of conversation. The very welcome "American contingent" of nine added greatly to the enjoyment of the Feast with their special musical talents, warm friendship and enthusiasm. They really knew they had come



to “darkest Africa” when a power outage hit the area one evening! Singles enjoyed an afternoon of much fun at a local miniature golf course followed by a barbeque. An evening sing-along followed by an impromptu bonfire on the beach was another highlight for some. Other activities included a family day barbeque with activities for the children and a senior citizen’s luncheon generously sponsored by a local hotel owner. Many described this Feast as a homecoming, leaving us rejuvenated, more focused and prepared for the Work that is still ahead.

—Pieter van der Byl

### Homa Bay, Kenya

The remote town of Homa Bay in Western Kenya welcomed 165 registered attendees keeping the Feast with the Living Church of God in Kenya. All were native Kenyans, except for Mr. & Mrs. Henry Cooper who traveled from Ireland.

Drought, in this area situated close to the equator, contrasted with the wellsprings of spiritual food and drink enthusiastically taken in by the brethren. Brethren expressed deep appreciation for the sermonette material, and also for the special music, which featured performances by the children as well as presentations by congregation members from different regions of Kenya. Leisure activities included meals together on both Holy Days, a family fun day, and a dawn hike to a nearby tall hill with a commanding view of the countryside. A question and answer session provided an opportunity to explain many points of Scripture and Church procedures. Members in Kenya face many challenges, but they appreciate the service of newly ordained deacon Mr. Simon Muthama and his wife, who live in Nairobi. The ready cheerfulness and outgoing friendliness of the Kenyan brethren set a striking example.

—Henry Cooper

### Bagamoyo, Tanzania

Living Church of God brethren kept the Feast in Tanzania for the first time this year, at Bagamoyo, about 85 kilometers from the nation’s capital, Dar es Salaam. More than 30 Feastgoers gathered for eight days to learn about God’s way, and to fellowship with brethren of like mind. Mr. Richard Stafford, an elder from the U.S., spent the whole Feast in Tanzania, giving messages and teaching the brethren about God’s way of life. The Tanzanian brethren, who live in very simple and trying circumstances, greatly appreciated the DVDs, CDs, Children’s Activity Books and other materials sent to the site, and they expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to learn and to honor God. We experienced great peace and harmony during the whole time of the Feast, and we will remember it as a very crucial and wonderful time, helping us long for entrance into the promised coming Kingdom of God.

—Jerome Chembe

### Lagos, Nigeria

More than a dozen Living Church of God members gathered at Ambassador Hall in Festac Town to observe this year’s Feast of Tabernacles. There was effervescent warmth and enthusiasm among the brethren. The weather was particularly benign throughout the Feast, though it usually rains a lot in this area at this time of the year. Brethren appreciated the sermons and sermonettes on DVD, as well as some sermonettes by the men here. On the second day of the Feast, O. Akin-Ogundeji gave a special message to the youth on “Learning to be Strong in the Lord”—and the Feast was enriched by two of the youth perform-

ing special music on the first Holy Day and the Last Great Day. A Bible quiz held in the afternoon of the second day elicited fine and hearty responses from all, and gave the younger members an opportunity to test their understanding of Scripture. The fellowship was spiced with love, care, joy and camaraderie. Although brethren here often lack physical nourishment, they never lost focus of the spiritual essence and blessings of the Feast. The surfeit of spiritual nourishment energized brethren’s zeal to rededicate themselves to the things of God’s kingdom and the way of life to which He has graciously called us. One lady (who has been keeping the Feast for almost 22 years), said, after seeing Mr. Meredith’s Last Great Day



message: “Despite the physical stress involved in getting to the Feast site... this was one of the most inspiring and joyous Feasts.” Thanks to our Father in heaven, the attitude of the brethren and the

uplifting spiritual nourishment we received each day made it so!

—O. Akin-Ogundeji

### The Entrance, Australia

The sparkling blue waters of the Pacific Ocean and the Tuggerah Lakes provided the setting for about 175 Feastgoers—including guests from the U.S., Malaysia and Singapore—at The Entrance in New South Wales.

Brethren appreciated the many family-friendly activities during the Feast. On both Holy Days, we were all able to have a buffet luncheon together at Scallywags Restaurant, located just up the stairs from the meeting room. The Church Social afternoon, organized by the Melbourne congregation, was great fun with much laughter as the brethren moved through various different and chal-

lenging “game stations.” Our senior citizens enjoyed a luncheon hosted by Mr. & Mrs. Dayrell Tanner, where the level of the conversation noise indicated that all were enjoying the opportunity to meet with their peers.

The young children enjoyed fun and games at a lakeside park, where the paddle boats were a great hit. An afternoon session at the local ice skating rink was perhaps the highlight of the recreational activities for those flexible enough to participate in such strenuous pastimes. Our ten pin bowling evening was so well patronized that the management said we were the largest single booking they had ever had. Many also enjoyed the golf course adjacent to the resort where services were held. After golf, everyone had fun at the indoor heated swimming pool and rapids area.

Visiting from the U.S., Regional Pastor Lambert Greer and his wife spent the entire Feast with us. We all appreciated Mr. Greer’s fine sermons, which motivated us to look forward to the incredible Kingdom to come. His topics included, “Having Vision for the Kingdom,” “The Deep and Rich Meaning of the Feast,” “Am I My

Brother’s Keeper?” and “The Meaning of the Last Great Day.” The Greers were very gracious and serving, hosting three activities—a singles’ barbecue and Bible quiz, a seniors’ luncheon and an evening barbecue for the ordained men and their wives. On Wednesday evening we had a good old Aussie Bush Dance, where the two-piece Bushfire Bush Dance Band led us through many a dance. It was similar to what Americans know as a “square dance” but with a colonial and Australian theme.

Of course the true highlights of the Feast are always the messages that we receive from God’s ministers, and

from others assigned for sermonettes. Australasia’s Regional Director, Mr. Bruce Tyler, spoke about “The Restoration of All Things” and the identity of the final Elijah, and instructed us about our role in judging now and in the Kingdom. Mr. Dayrell Tanner spoke about our rulership in the Kingdom, and encouraged us all to set our goal in that Kingdom at a higher level than “just a doorkeeper.”

This was the first time we kept the Feast at The Entrance, and many brethren are looking forward to our returning in future years, if God places His name there again for the Feast.

—Bruce Tyler

### **Albany, Western Australia**

Forty-eight brethren from Australia and New Zealand enjoyed the Feast of Tabernacles in Albany, Western Australia, 405 kilometers southeast of Perth. Services were held at Monet’s, which incorporated hall facilities on the first level and a restaurant for Holy Day meals on the



ground floor. From the opening night the fellowship revealed a real spirit of generosity and sharing, exemplified by Christ’s commandment that we love one another.

Visiting ministers Messrs. Michael Gill and Kinnear Penman provided spiritual food for brethren hungry for the truth and for an injection of love from God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. The inspired messages focused on the vision of the return of Jesus Christ to establish His Kingdom on earth and the essential keys leading to eternal happiness.

Fellowship was abundant, and activities included a coach trip of

Albany and a cruise up the Kalgan River where sea eagles entertained us with their hunting prowess. Some of the younger brethren enjoyed go-carting and ten-pin bowling. A talent night consisting of musical, comical and other entertainment will be much remembered by all. Praise and thanks are due to Almighty God for blessing us with such a wonderful Feast.

—Craig Hill

### **Taupo, New Zealand**

Beautiful spring weather greeted more than 72 Living Church of God brethren who met at the Acacia Bay hall, which offers sweeping views of Taupo lake and township. Taupo is in the heart of the volcanic plateau of the North Island, where past volcanic activity has shaped the features of the countryside and influenced activities. Feastgoers were able to enjoy.

Lake Taupo itself is the remains of a crater which blew many hundreds of years ago. It has filled with snow-melt from still-active volcanoes and is now a lake 100 miles around, which provides many boating and fishing opportunities.

One afternoon, members toured the Wairakei area just north of Taupo, to visit one of the world’s few geothermal bore fields which provides steam used in electric power generation. Another spectacular site is the Aratiatia Rapids, where the scheduled release of water from a dam turns a dry, narrow gorge into a violent, foaming river in just a few minutes. It is a sight that thrills, even upon repeated viewing. A childrens’ afternoon was spent at a volcanic education center, which allowed hands-on activities designed to teach about the natural processes that formed the topography of the whole plateau. Seniors enjoyed a boat cruise with afternoon tea on the Waikato River. While they were awaiting the

boat's arrival, a sleet storm swept through, but fine weather arrived in time for the cruise. At the base of the Huka Falls, a unique view of the river is seen as it plunges through a narrow opening in a spectacular manner. That afternoon, teens and twenty-somethings enjoyed mini-golf, indoor rock-climbing and homemade hamburgers.

Other organized activities included a get-to-know-everyone barbeque, a hike up



Mount Tauhara and a family games evening and finger foods supper.

Mr. Irv Woelfle, visiting from the U.S., and Mr. Zig Svalbe, visiting from Melbourne, Australia, gave sermons explaining the certainty of the coming Kingdom of God, and how we must prepare now to serve under Jesus Christ as kings and priests. A singles' Bible study on the eve of the Last Great Day examined how we can better equip ourselves to be the bride of Christ at His return.

Taupo proved itself a place where God's people can meet in peace, enjoy great fellowship opportunities and experience some of the delights all humanity will experience when Christ rules supreme.

—Kinneer Penman

### Vanuatu

From around Vanuatu, 70 brethren joyfully celebrated for eight days as the Feast of Tabernacles was held in Orap Village on the island of Malekula. God blessed us all in several ways. There was good weather; generally light rain in the mornings followed by sunny days. There was a good spirit of friendship and fellowship which bound everyone together as a true family. Lunches and suppers were

shared together each day. Mutual love, unity and respect meant that everyone cooperated together and participated in the varied activities of the program. There were activities for children, youths and adults. All Feast attendees were served good spiritual food, with sermons by local elder Jerry Sam and some sermonettes by Jeannot Verlili and Christophe Tarey. Messages focused on the coming Kingdom of God, His way of life and our preparation towards the kingdom.

—Jerry Sam

### Penang, Malaysia

For the first time, Living Church of God brethren in Malaysia kept the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day at the Crown Jewel Hotel, in Penang, Malaysia. The 65 attendees arrived amid isolated rains and a blanket of haze covering the whole island state of Penang. But on the first day of the Feast, and for the six days thereafter, the bleak weather turned to bright sunshine. Two non-members commented to us about the sudden change of weather, observing that it had been raining continuously for the previous ten days or so. All the outdoor activities went ahead as scheduled without us having to resort to any contingency plans. Clearly, the God we worship does indeed control the weather.

Four overseas visitors—from Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia—came to share in the joy and gladness of the local congregation. Site coordinator Mr. Rajan Moses commented that he saw plenty of fellowship among the members of God's Church this year. Indeed,



whether at services or at nearby food outlets over breakfast, lunch, tea or dinner, there were always members to be seen conversing.

An array of activities were held, catering to the varying needs of the Church membership. Whilst the little children were overcome with joy playing with one another, the teenagers and young adults and married couples locked horns on more invigorating challenges. The two Bible quizzes and the traditional Fun Show were by far the most popular activities. The Church-organized luncheons on each Holy Day were thoroughly successful, as was the poolside barbeque with its warm ambiance, what with the shimmer of dim lights on the water, soft music caressing the ears, and an assortment of freshly-cooked meat

to go around.

At the end of it all, it was another wonderful Feast to go down in the annals of history,

offering Church members great comfort and encouragement in the company of their spiritual brethren.

—Rajan Moses

### Georgetown, Guyana

Congregating in Guyana's capital city, God's little flock here enjoyed an excellent Feast of Tabernacles. Brethren and their families were able to plan activities together and share in their material goods, bringing unity and love within their midst. An unusual weather pattern for the first few days brought rains that kept everyone indoors, but also sent the sweltering heat away. A visit to the Zoological Park on Tuesday took us outdoors for the

first time in three days. Some of the brethren played cricket. On Thursday morning, leaving the city for the day, we traveled through a tropical rain forest to reach the bauxite mining town of Linden. Passing under the luxurious green canopy of trees, climbing hills, then descending through valleys with running creeks of cool, refreshing water gives one a faint taste of what it may have been like in the Garden of Eden. On the final day of the Festival, after services, a senior citizens' luncheon was held, at which each guest received a gift. Later, many visited the light-house in the Port of Georgetown. Truly, this Feast of Tabernacles had something special for everyone.



—Fitzroy Greeman

### Tobago

From the start of the opening night service, the Sun Spree Resort was charged with the warmth and fellowship of 82 Living Church of God members, who felt the impact of Mr. Meredith's video message, which set the tone for the rest of the Feast.

Brethren enjoyed a variety of activities, including a Games Night on October 7, which featured dance, monologue, poetry, song, instrumentals and a very well-received skit about the consequences of sin. Mr. William Oswald, an elder visiting from the U.S., performed "The Auctioneer" to the delight of the audience. Family Day activities on October 8 kept adults and children alike engaged in a variety of challenging games. In the afternoon of October

9, a party for the children was held, with music and games and entertainment for the little ones. A drive to nearby Argyle Falls was the highlighted activity on October 10, giving everyone an opportunity to enjoy Tobago's scenic east coast, and take in the breathtaking view of the coconut tree-lined shoreline, lit by the warm



tropical sunshine. The dinner dance on October 12 saw a mixture of traditional attire and elegant formal wear, while a sumptuous

Caribbean dinner was served. Live instrumental music was provided by Mr. Errol Chapman on guitar, Mr. Mukesh Sankar on mandolin and Mr. Gary Regis on the steel pan. Afterward came a light-hearted karaoke session where Church members displayed their singing talents that lasted for an hour. The atmosphere throughout the Feast was warm and brotherly. Most everyone commented that this was indeed the best Feast ever.

—Fitzroy Greeman

### Ocho Rios, Jamaica

Jamaican brethren were joined by guests from Barbados, North America and Trinidad and Tobago to keep the Feast at the Sunset Jamaica Grande Resort and Spa. Amazing, beautiful messages, good fellowship and the warmth of God's people were some of the brethren's memories of this year's



Festival. Average attendance at services was 176.

Approximately half of the brethren stayed at the Sunset Jamaica Grande; the rest stayed at other facilities in close proximity to the hotel. The sermons and sermonettes—all live except for Mr. Meredith's prere-

corded messages—were powerful and inspiring, exhorting us to change, to prepare for the reality of what the Feast pictures, to place the "seeking of God's Kingdom and His righteousness" as our number one priority and to carry out our responsibilities as Christ's ambassadors. Brethren noticed one another's outgoing love, their willingness to serve, their generosity of spirit, their warmth, hospitality and spirit of family, giving us a glimpse of what it will be like when God's Kingdom is established over all the earth. Most of the activities were planned with family in mind, and included the Grand Family Social, a Family Cook-Out, a dance extravaganza and an evening of biblical presentations—using themes from the Bible in skits, poetry, song and a Bible bowl. The "singles mingles" and a seniors luncheon capped the activities.

—Lascelles Fraser

### Barbados

Barbados is located just 13 degrees north of the equator, the easternmost of the Caribbean Islands. Its history goes back to the 15th century, and the people there have a rich culture with a British flair. Ninety joyful brethren met to keep the Feast of Tabernacles at the Barbados Beach Club on the ocean at the southern end of the small island. Mr. Dexter

Wakefield was the visiting elder for the whole Feast.

The Americans who flew in received a warm reception from their Bajan brethren, and soon everyone was visiting and becoming well acquainted, making friendships that will last long after the Holy Days of 2006. The Bajans do a lot of planning each year. Everyone enjoyed the activities



such as a sailboat trip, diving with friendly sea turtles, a tour of the island, a talent show and a picnic. There was also a family day—complete with a game of cricket, the Bajans' favorite sport. Some of the Americans discovered what it means to have "a sticky wicket," but soon got the hang of a cricket bat.

The tropical waters around Barbados vary in color from a bright turquoise to cerulean blue, the colors changing with the angle of the sun. Most of the brethren could be seen from time to time, looking out over the sea and meditating on the beauty of God's creation.

—Dexter Wakefield

**Maranding and Don Carlos, Philippines**

We did not host any foreign visitors at these sites, but we appreciated foreign speakers (through CDs) as well as local at services. The Maranding site had an average attendance of 155, and the Don Carlos site had an average attendance of 151 throughout the eight days of the Festival. Messages, both live and recorded, were timely and inspiring. Activities were plentiful for young and old, single and married.



Activities were plentiful for young and old, single and married.

There was a picnic, a Youth and Children's Night, a Ladies' Night, a Bible Quiz Show, a Ten Commandments Show, a Senior Citizens Night, a Couples Night and a

Comedy Show — as well as a wide range of sports and delicious physical foods to eat. When the brethren went

home, they felt filled with spiritual food to sustain them until Feast 2007.

—Gideon Benitez

**Baguio City, Philippines**

The Baguio City Feast site in Luzon, Philippines has remained a favorite site for the Filipino brethren for many decades. Located in the cool mountains of the Cordilleras, it provides a welcome respite from the heat and the hustle-and-bustle of the metropolis. The cool climate, plus the picturesque and scenic spots all over makes the place conducive for a spiritually uplifting and physically refreshing Feast of Tabernacles.

From beginning to end, 184 Feastgoers—including some from Australia, Canada, Japan and the U.S.—enjoyed various activities, including a Dance Night, a Sports Day featuring badminton, volleyball and basketball and a games-packed Family Day. The youth and singles enjoyed a hot spring swim. The children enjoyed a film, more games, and

ice cream. Seniors enjoyed an afternoon full of nostalgia and a fabulous festival show. This year, the Quezon City brethren hosted this site's first

Acquaintance Party. Mostly adorned with crown-like headdresses, mem-

bers from nine video groups had an opportunity to meet and re-acquaint themselves with one another. All of these provided unforgettable memories—seemingly enough to last a lifetime.

But even more than the place, it was the sermons, and the warmth, fellowship and unity of the brethren, that made this Feast truly extraordinary. Especially appreciated was the presence of Mr. & Mrs. Gaylyn Bonjour, visiting from Headquarters. In one of his sermons, Mr. Bonjour explained that God is the real Host of the Feast, and that "today is a snapshot of time as we grow in God's knowledge."

As the last hymn in the afternoon of the Last Great Day, we all sang "Onward Christian Soldiers." Afterward, it was time to say goodbye to brethren and friends while looking forward to next year's Feast of Tabernacles, and to that Holy Day's glorious realization—soon!

—Merle Chua & Melissa Puzon

**Davao, Philippines**

Amid this city of nearly 1 million, God called 81 people who kept His Feast of Tabernacles at the Hannie's Inn Function Room. Most of the brethren were lodged nearby, within walking distance, staying together in one compound—truly having a good and pleasant time dwelling together in peace and harmony.

In addition to the pre-recorded messages, local ministers gave a number of sermons. Mr. Jose Arendain spoke on "The Need of Divine Government." Mr. Johnny Bolences explained "Your Rulership." Site coordinator Mr. Felipe Casing spoke on "Who May Abide in Your Tabernacle?" Mr. Gaylyn Bonjour, visiting from the U.S., spoke on "Prove All Things" and "Vessels of Mercy Carrying the Name of God."

Activities included a Seniors Day, a beach party, a dance and a sing-

along for the singles. The Church youth also had their fun, enjoying a family marathon, family tug of war, message relay, ball games and a sack race.

The presence of Mr. & Mrs. Gaylyn Bonjour, our guests from Headquarters, added enthusiasm in observing the Feast. Their friendliness and closeness with the brethren was shown by their gestures and smiles and service. The ministers and wives—three couples—had dinner together, and our guests talked about their mail-processing duties, giving the other ministers a view of this one vital aspect of the overall Work.

In the evening after the Last Great Day, after our farewell party of songs, dances and poems, the brethren were reluctant to leave for home. It is a joy to experience living under the rule of God during His festivals—how much more in reality when God’s kingdom is set up on earth?

—Jose Arendain

### Tacloban, Philippines

Sixty-five brethren of different dialects gathered together in one accord to keep the Feast of Tabernacles at the Commission on Audit Function Hall, Palo, Leyte. In addition to pre-recorded messages sent from Headquarters, brethren heard live messages from site coordinator Mr.



Felipe Casing, who spoke on “The Temple of God,” “When God’s Kingdom Is Set on Earth” and “A New World to Come.” After Mr. Casing left for Davao, Mr. Benito Parbo served as site coordinator and gave messages reminding us that “All Saints Will Rule with Christ” and outlining “God’s Master Plan of Salvation.”

Festival special activities were made especially meaningful by seniors who shared their testimonies of being called into God’s Church, inspired by their hardships to be more zealous to hold on to the faith. Children, too, added to the specialness of the Feast, as they enjoyed activities including pin bowling, a game also played by the older youths and the singles. The spirit of sportsmanship and camaraderie was shown during play. Feastgoers enjoyed a tour to San Juanico Bridge, the longest bridge throughout the Philippines archipelago—2.25 kilometers in length. Another historical site visited was MacArthur Beach Park, commemorating the Leyte landing of Gen. Douglas MacArthur during World War II. Parting at the end of the Last Great Day was somewhat sad, but we expect eternal joy in God’s Kingdom soon.

—Benito Parbo

### Huatusco, Mexico

In a mountain corner land of coffee, sugar cane and banana plantations, 93 happy souls praised God, with an excellent cool climate and unsurpassable tropical scenery.

We enjoyed excellent messages from Roderick C. Meredith, Mario

Hernández and Antonio Mora. Among the activities we had were a traditional Children’s Day, followed by a dinner

dance featuring a typical marimba band. After the dinner, members danced and the young ones played football. On the Last Great Day the Children’s Choir sang at the morning service and a Ladies’ Choir sang during the afternoon service. Thanks to God one more time for giving us the best Feast!

—Antonio Mora

### Antigua, Guatemala

The Feast here was a truly exciting occasion because of the inspiring sermons and sermonettes which maintained the attention and motivation of all the audience. Messages presented in English and Spanish gave an opportunity for several interpreters to take their first steps in this difficult discipline, which they did in an excellent manner. An outstanding detail was the sincere friendship and fellowship shown by the brethren from Puerto Rico, the U.S., Costa Rica, Honduras, and of course the Guatemalan brethren.

Two special music presentations by the Children’s Choir and the Youth Choir were a beautiful contribution from the Guatemalan congregation. On the Family Night we were able to enjoy several traditional dances with colorful costumes representative of the Guatemalan native tribes. A hike to the “Cerro de la Cruz” took us (after much good exercise) to one of the places where you can appreciate a most beautiful landscape: the city of Guatemala at the bottom and the Agua volcano crowning the scene.

Departure after the Last Great Day was sad as always. Between laughs and tears we left the place with the hope of seeing each other again. We returned home with renewed strength, inspiration and great purpose for the next year.

—Jorge Schaubeck

### Armenia, Colombia

The Feast of Tabernacles in Colombia was a truly edifying and wonderful experience, with an attendance of 88, including brethren from Mexico, the U.S., Switzerland, Venezuela, Bolivia, Spain and France. The Feast was held in the heart of coffee plantation country, in a beautiful hostel just two hours from Manizales. This Feast truly evoked the Millennium. Thanks to the emphasis

given in messages about the joy we as brethren need to have for the privilege and blessing of enjoying such a beautiful Feast, it seemed that the brethren showed special fruits of great spiritual maturity, humility and love, as they sought one another's well-being. Diligent teamwork by the many volunteers contributed to the success of the Feast, as brethren gave of themselves and their different talents in service to God. Truly our hearts were united in one rhythm as our voices were elevated in unison offering praises as a fragrant offering to our Father and Lord Almighty. May the glory be always to the Eternal and may His favor be with all and each one of us.

—Cristian Orrego

### Chosica, Peru

Thanks to the Eternal, we had a wonderful Feast season. With gratitude, the 45 brethren here felt God's intervention in this Feast as we contemplated the spiritual dimension in our lives, surrounded by all the elements of nature in a rustic place named "Las Leñas."

Mr. Mario Hernandez was here at the start of the Feast, and we were joined for the rest of the Feast by Mr. & Mrs. Edgar Guerrero from

Colombia. Brethren were here from the U.S., and within Peru from Cerro de Pasco, Lima, Arequipa and Trujillo. In addition to the inspiring messages, we enjoyed a Talent Night, a trip to the Zoo, a Family Day (with exquisite food prepared by brethren from Cerro de Pasco) and a variety of sports activities. We ended with a special dinner, thankful to our God and His Church, but saddened at having to leave the Feast. We were happy, though, to enjoy the Feast's blessings and we look forward to next year's Feast.

—Javier Quispe

### San Rafael-Mendoza, Argentina

Next to the borders of the Atuel ("plentiful") River, there is "El Complejo del Cerro," where the Eternal chose to place His name for this Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day. With an attendance of 63, mainly from Argentina and Chile, a Feast of abundance, peace, and teach-

ing took place. We also had visitors from Puerto Rico, Bolivia, Colombia, the U.S. and Mexico. During the Feast, a baptism filled us with joy. A series of inspired sermons by Mr. Armando Orrego covered fundamental topics for Christian growth and

for preparing to serve as kings and priests in the Kingdom of God. We also saw sermons of great depth by Mr. Mario Hernandez, on "Jobs in the

World Tomorrow" and "The White Throne Judgment."

We had millennial weather, and we enjoyed activities of fellowship such as an evening of games and a trip to the Atuel River Dam. Brotherly love, laughs, and hugs were present, and each cabin was transformed into a place to share harmony and prosperity. In this paradise-like environment we experienced during this unforgettable Feast, we had a taste of the world to come where "the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Eternal."

—Daniel Campos



### You Need To Be "AWARE"

(continued from page 3)

last few years. Such attacks will *greatly increase* as each year goes by. "At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through" (Daniel 11:40).

Why do these Muslim nations seem to hate the U.S. and its Western allies? What *motivates* these people, and **how** is their thinking about certain events so much different from ours? If we understand this, we may be better able to interact with our Muslim neighbors properly, and also be *more careful* of what we do and where we travel.

Over the years, I have read quite a number of articles and several books discussing, in depth, the Muslim religion and the problems associated with some of its more militant members. Recently, I have read a most in-depth and profoundly revealing book on this subject: *The Crisis of Islam*, by Bernard Lewis. Mr. Lewis is internationally recognized as one of our era's greatest historians of the Middle East. He is the Cleveland E. Dodge Professor of Near Eastern Studies, emeritus, at Princeton University. He truly *knows* what he is writing about.

In his book he describes how "a significant number of Muslims—notably but not exclusively those whom we call fundamentalists—are hostile and dangerous, not because we need an enemy but because they do."

Then, he explains: "In recent years, there have been some changes of perception and, consequently, of tactics

among Muslims. Some of them still see the West in general, and its present leader the United States in particular, as the ancient and irreconcilable enemy of Islam, the one serious obstacle to the restoration of God's faith and law at home and their ultimate universal triumph. For these there is no way but war to the death, in fulfillment of what they see as the commandments of their faith" (*ibid.*, p. 28).

Lewis continues: "For most of the fourteen centuries of recorded Muslim history, jihad was most commonly interpreted to mean armed struggle for the defense or advancement of Muslim power. In Muslim tradition, the world is divided into two houses: the House of Islam (*Dār al-Islām*), in which Muslims governments rule and Muslim law prevails, and the House of War (*Dār al-Harb*), the rest of the world, still inhabited and, more important, ruled by infidels. The presumption is that the duty of jihad will continue, interrupted only by truces, until all the world either adopts the Muslim faith or submits to Muslim rule" (*ibid.*, p. 31).

Please *think deeply* about that, brethren!

For it is the ultimate *goal* of the Muslim leaders to "conquer" the

world in the sense that **all** human beings either become Muslims, *total-ly submit* to Muslim domination or ultimately be wiped out! If you read this book carefully—and *many other books and articles which make essentially the same point*—you can begin to understand what is happening. Then you can begin to understand how increasing tens of millions of Muslims are being *won over* by the growing power of militant Islam. Then you will begin to understand even more **how** to "watch and pray"—which Jesus told us to do!

May God help *all* of us to more deeply understand and **love** the Muslim people! We should want to **reach out**—as God makes this possible—and help as many of them as God may be calling, even now. Yet it is vital that we understand thoroughly how, in *many* of the Muslim nations, trying to "convert" a Muslim to Christianity brings about an automatic **death sentence**! Yes, it is that serious—and most religious leaders realize this. So perhaps the *only* way we can reach many of these people is via the Internet. Yet we will try to help them by teaching them God's Truth—at least as a "witness" (Matthew 24:14)—through television and other means as well. We *do* need to constantly

recognize our need to *pray for* and **love** every human being made in God's image! We need to meditate on the fact that we will be helping, serving and **teaching** these people—in God's Kingdom—within a very few years!

Meanwhile, however, we need to recognize soberly that the world is, indeed, "at war"—as President Bush has stated. Unwittingly, perhaps, he has caused the U.S. to appear to be "attacking" the entire "Muslim nation"—as they call themselves—consisting of more than *one billion* human beings!

The increased **terrorist** attacks that will ensue, and the tremendous **danger** that all these and related events involve for many westerners—and certainly for us as God's ambassadors—are matters we must be aware of. We must pray about this, and then be sure we do *our part* to stay away from *unnecessary danger*. Then we will have more time in this life to serve these people and all human beings in preparing the way for Christ's coming! For, when He returns, there *really will be* "peace at last"—a time of *genuine* peace in the human heart as well as among nations, and a deep **joy** that no one will be able to take away. ☐

## **Become a Welcoming Church**

(continued from page 2)

sands of people around them and the associations they have been having perhaps all their lives! We need to show them our love and our positive example while the ministry works with them—we should not drive them away!

Brethren, as we are sincerely able, let us try to build *deep friendships* with these new people—and with one another—as we are *all* to become members of God's Family eventually in His Kingdom. God tells us: "A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). So we must **show** friendship—personal interest in the well-being of others, kindness and sincere concern—in

order to **have** friends. We must be willing to put forth the effort and *give* our time and service to other human beings in order to build a genuine friendship with them. It is important—**not** just for these new people, *but among ourselves*—that we learn to do this. Then, *and only then*, can we have the genuine "family spirit" that we all desire in God's Church.

God also tells us: "What is desired in a man is kindness, and a poor man is better than a liar" (Proverbs 19:22). The original Hebrew reads: "What is desired in a man is **loving** kindness." This aspect of sincere concern, warmth and "loving kindness" will certainly be a blessing to the one who has it, and will *vastly encourage* those to whom it is shown. May God help *all* of us to build this quality within our lives through the help of His Holy



Spirit! May God help *all* of us to show this attitude and warmth to all of the new people whom Jesus Christ is calling and whom He may bring among us. As spiritual “babes,” they genuinely **need** a special love and concern as they fellowship, perhaps for the first time, with a group of people involved in a *different* church, a *different* way of life and with *different* people than they have ever known before.

### **More LOVE and Less “JUDGING”**

Almighty God tells us that the *attitude* and *approach* He desires in us, when we fast, is to “loose the bonds of wickedness, to **undo** the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke: Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday” (Isaiah 58:6–10).

If all of us not only *give of ourselves* in doing the Work, but also “reach out” as described above to help people whom God is calling, most of these people will truly want to “bond” with us and remain with us! We should want to welcome them wholeheartedly. We should want to be those who “share our bread with the hungry.” We should want to “cover the naked” and have a *positive* approach to those around us. We must be careful to **avoid** “the pointing of the finger” and trying to “catch” our brethren—especially newer Church members—in some minor offense or problem. Rather, we need to “extend our soul to the hungry” and do all we can to show genuine “loving kindness” to all our brethren—especially to the newer members whom God brings with us.

Brethren, we need to reread the parable of the “lost sheep” which Jesus gave in Luke 15:1–32. Let us always remember His statement: “There is **joy** in the presence of the angels of God over *one sinner* who repents” (v. 10). Do we have that deep joy and feeling of gratefulness when we sense that God is calling someone “new” to come among us? Or when a brother or sister who has “strayed away” returns and comes back into God’s Church again?

The parable of the man with two sons shows the attitude we should have when this occurs. For many of our

own children, grandchildren, nephews or nieces may have indeed “strayed” from the path of God and drifted into drinking, smoking, illicit drug use, illicit sex and *all kinds of things* as they have been overcome by the temptations of the world.

Are we going to give them the “evil eye” when they finally *repent* and come back to God’s Church? Or will we have confidence in the minister whom Christ has set over each congregation, trusting that **he** will wisely welcome them while being sure that their conduct is satisfactory for someone in the process of returning? Remember that when the father in the parable of the two sons welcomed his repentant son back, he *did not berate him* in **any** way whatsoever! He simply “had compassion” on him and “fell on his neck and kissed him.” For this righteous father—obviously a “type” of God, our Father—stated: “For this my son was dead and is *alive again*; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be **merry**” (v. 24).

So please, brethren, let us *all* have a sense of **deep joy** when God brings new people among us, or when those who have strayed repent and return! Let us “reach out” to them, enthusiastically *welcoming* them into the Church. As we have opportunity, let us welcome them into our homes, or take them out to a meal or work out a situation where we can *do something with them* and help them to feel “part of the family.” For God’s Church is the begotten family of God.

As the Apostle Paul was inspired to tell us: “But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Corinthians 12:24–27). Let us be sure, indeed, that we *care* for one another in the body! And let us *recognize* the fact that we should study, pray, and *work together* in every way we can to **build** a deeper sense of “family” within God’s Church.

This care will help *all* of us grow spiritually, and it should definitely *reflect outward* toward all of those whom God may bring with us—and should help us to sincerely and enthusiastically **welcome them** among us, far more than some of us have been doing. This will help them feel like a *genuine part* of the “family” Christ is preparing—part of the *ultimate* Family that will become the Kingdom of God!



# Local Church News

## Births

David and Jennifer Ogywn, of Port Allen, Louisiana, announce the birth of *John Davis Ogywn* on July 13. He weighed 5 pounds, 15.6 ounces and was 18.5 inches long. Grandparents Ray and Katherine Joffrion and Genie Ogywn join John's older brother Jackson (age 3) in welcoming him to the family!

Sergio and Vanessa Carvajal are happy to announce the birth of their son *Sebastian Andres Carvajal*, on October 28. He weighed 6.4 pounds and was 20.4 inches long at birth.

## Weddings

*David Mohr and Nancy Delgado*, of the Milwaukee, Wisconsin congregation, were joined in marriage on May 25 in Hartland, Wisconsin. Area pastor Darrell Lovelady performed the ceremony in the company of friends and family. The newlyweds reside in Hartland.

*Durwood Murray and Ruth Nestor*, of the Charlotte, North Carolina congregation, were joined in marriage on November 5. The ceremony was performed by

Presiding Evangelist Roderick C. Meredith, at the Headquarters office (where Mrs. Murray, a long-time deaconess in God's Church, serves in the Mail Processing Department). The newlyweds will continue to reside in Charlotte.

*Reginald Tuck and Constance Bland* of the Akron, Ohio congregation were joined in matrimony on Sept. 4, 2005. The ceremony was performed by elder Rodger Hagmaier. The happy bride and groom celebrated with more than 200 family, friends and brethren.

## In Loving Memory

*Kenneth Robert MacLeod* died peacefully on June 18, after a short battle with cancer. He was 75 old. A long-time faithful minister and member of God's Church, he and his wife Margaret (whom he married in 1951) were baptized in 1964 in Perth, Western Australia. It was another two years before a congregation was established in Perth and the MacLeods eventually were able to fellowship with other brethren. In the late 1960s, Mr. MacLeod was ordained as a deacon, and ten years later he was ordained as an elder. In 1993, Mr. MacLeod became the first minister in the Australasian region to openly take a stand against the heresies of the late 80s and early 90s. He loved God's Work and the Truth. Mr. MacLeod was dearly loved by many over the years, and set a sterling example in conversion and character. He was kind, a gentleman, a diplomat, a peacemaker and an ambassador for God's Kingdom. Mr. MacLeod is survived by his wife Margaret, by daughters Christine, Marlane and Caroline, and by eight grandchildren. The funeral service was conducted at the Fremantle Cemetery on June 22 by Evangelist Bruce Tyler, Regional Pastor for Australasia.

*James F. Howell*, of Lafayette, Indiana, died of liver cancer on October 21. He was 71 years old. Baptized in 1960, he had worked as a high school math and chemistry teacher, then had become very active in several local history projects after his retirement. He is survived by two brothers and two nephews. A memorial service was conducted on October 27 by Mr. George Dellinger, an elder in the Indianapolis, Indiana congregation.

*Bill Kahle*, of Calhan, Colorado, died on October 23. He was 72 years old. Preceded in death by his wife Leta, he is survived by sons Scott and John, daughters Beth and Debbie, and many grandchildren. As a deacon, Bill served congregations in Colorado Springs and Denver; his outflowing love of God's way touched the lives of the many who knew him. Area pastor Mr. Ben Whitfield presided over a memorial service on October 27.

*Jack R. Opel*, of Licking, Missouri, died on June 11. He was 66 years old. He and his wife Brenda, who survives him, were baptized in 1967 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He is also survived by his son Craig (Therese) Opel and by two grandchildren. Regional Pastor Rand Millich conducted a memorial service on June 25 at Fox Funeral Home before the burial in Melbourne, Kentucky.

## Anniversaries

*Bill and JoAnne Schutz* of the La Crescenta, CA and Traverse City, MI congregations celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary on July 28. The Schutzes have two daughters, Cynthia (Ray Loesch) and Christina (Franz Boehm), and eight grandchildren.

*Richard and Donna Tripp* celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on October 27; the Joplin, Missouri congregation honored them with a wedding reception on November 4. Mr. Tripp is a deacon serving the Chanute, Kansas video group. The Tripps have been members of God's Church for more than 33 years.

*Vance and Wanda West*, deacon and deaconess in the Austin, Texas congregation, celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary on August 1.

## Ordinations

*Sydney Attenborough* of the Tucson, Arizona congregation was ordained as a deacon on July 15, by Regional Pastor Jeff Fall and area pastor Rodger Bardo, assisted by elders Jim Nork, Gerald Shoquist and Gary Stein. He will continue to serve the brethren in the Tucson congregation.

*Dwain Crisman* was ordained as an elder on July 1, by Evangelist Charles Bryce and elder Jerry Stewart. A long-time member and former deacon, he will continue to serve the brethren in the Dallas, Texas congregation.

*Larry Crooks* of the Abilene, Texas, congregation was ordained as a deacon on the Sabbath of June 17 by Evangelist Charles Bryce and elder Jerry Stewart. Mr. Crooks will serve the brethren in the Abilene area.

*Raymond and Bette Kidney* of the Akron, Ohio, congregation were ordained as deacon and deaconess on the Feast of Trumpets. Area pastor Eng Monson presided over the ordination ceremony, assisted by elders Charles Knowlton and Rodger

Hagmaier. Mr. and Mrs. Kidney will serve the brethren in the Akron area.

*Ruben Lujan* of the Phoenix, Arizona congregation was ordained as a deacon on July 15, by Regional Pastor Jeff Fall and area pastor Rodger Bardo, assisted by elders Jim Nork, Gerald Shoquist and Gary Stein. He will continue to serve the brethren in the Phoenix congregation.

*Valeriano Ulnagan Martin*, of the Isabela, Philippines congregation, was ordained as an elder on September 7 by Regional Pastor Rod King, assisted by Messrs. Dayrell Tanner and Basilio Osillos. Mr. Martin will serve the brethren in the Luzon area pastored by Mr. Osillos.

*Mr. & Mrs. Darrell Morrison* of the Phoenix, Arizona congregation, were ordained as deacon and deaconess on July 15, by Regional Pastor Jeff Fall and area pastor Rodger Bardo, assisted by elders Jim Nork, Gerald Shoquist and Gary Stein. They will continue to serve the brethren in the Phoenix congregation.

*Simon Muthama* of Nairobi, Kenya, was ordained as a deacon by evangelist Douglas Winnail during his recent trip to East Africa. Mr. Muthama will continue serving the congregations in Kenya.

*Jerry Sam* of the Norsup, Vanuatu congregation was ordained as an elder by Regional Pastor Bruce Tyler and area pastor Kinnear Penman on September 9. Mr. Sam will continue serving the brethren in Vanuatu.

*Dale Trenerry* of the Calgary, Alberta, congregation in Canada was ordained as an elder on the Feast of Trumpets, by Regional Pastor Gerald Weston and elder Stuart Wachowicz. Mr. Trenerry will continue serving the brethren in Calgary.

*Randy Wayne* of the Cincinnati, Ohio congregation was ordained as a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets by area pastor Eng Monson, assisted by elders Charles Knowlton and Rodger Hagmaier. Mr. Wayne will serve the brethren in the Cincinnati area.

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](mailto:lcn@lcn.org)).

# Commentary

## Pope Benedict's "Elegant Move"

By Wallace Smith

Public comments that spark outrage in the Muslim world are nothing new. But when the comments come from the spiritual leader of more than a billion Roman Catholics, the world sits up and takes notice—as well it should.

Discussing the relationship between faith and reason at the German University of Regensburg on September 12, Pope Benedict XVI quoted a Byzantine emperor, Manuel II Paleologus, who reigned from 1391 to 1425. Benedict quoted the emperor as saying that Muhammad brought to the religion of Islam “things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith that he preached.”

Those words have caused violent uproar among many Muslims, leading to attacks on professing Christian churches—both Catholic and non-Catholic—and possibly the murder of an Italian nun in Somalia. Many Islamic nations, including Turkey, have condemned the speech and demanded a personal apology from the pope. While Benedict has addressed the outrage and his role in provoking it, he has not truly apologized for the use of the quote, but rather has expressed regret for the offense that has ensued.

Some have suggested that the pope's use of the incendiary quote was a political gaffe by an untrained academic, a mistake born out of naiveté. Is this so? Others have wisely remarked that underestimating Benedict is a mistake.

In his September 22 column, *Wall Street Journal* columnist Daniel Henninger commented on the idea that the pope's use of the quote was a mistake or accident: “Really? I'd say Benedict is right about where he hoped to be after Regensburg: The whole world saying that a serious conversation between the pope and Islam is necessary.”

Similarly, political analyst George Friedman observed: “From an intellectual and political stand-

point, therefore, Benedict's statement was an elegant move. He has strengthened his political base and perhaps legitimized a stronger response to anti-Catholic rhetoric in the Muslim world” (*Stratfor Geopolitical Intelligence Report*, September 19, 2006).

Already, one major European leader—Romano Prodi, prime minister of Italy—has come under attack from Catholics and conservatives for seeking high-level contacts with the Iranian government, which has blasted the pope (*Financial Times*, September 20, 2006). As one conservative Italian senator said, “In not defending the pope, Prodi dishonours Italy... His silence in the face of the violent campaign against the pope is scandalous” (*ibid.*).

Of Benedict's many possible reasons for firing such a volley in the rhetorical war of cultures, one can be gleaned from something else he said in his Regensburg speech—using his own words, rather than a quotation: “[T]his convergence [of biblical faith and Greek philosophy], with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, *created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe.*”

With the fears of many Europeans focusing on the great influx of Muslim immigrants into their society, Turkey's energetic effort to be an Islamic country within the European Union, and the Catholic Church's publicly stated desire to see Europe unified as a Christian entity, any thought that Benedict's words were hastily chosen should be reconsidered.

None of this should catch serious Bible students by surprise! On the contrary, the growing conflict between the western and eastern powers was prophesied many centuries ago (cf. Daniel 11:40), as was the rise of a religious power that would unify an end-time revival of the Roman Empire (Revelation 13:11–15).

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The above is adapted from one of the many commentaries, discussing vital topics facing our world, available at the [www.lcg.org](http://www.lcg.org) and [www.tomorrowworld.org](http://www.tomorrowworld.org) Web sites.